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Inflections of Technoculture.
Biodigital Media, Postcolonial Theory and Feminism

Edited by Iain Chambers and Tiziana Terranova

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Dialogue Debate Dissent

Iain Chambers and Tiziana Terranova

Introduction.
Inflections of Technoculture: Biodigital Media, Postcolonial Theory and Feminism

The notion of technoculture, which gives the title to this special issue, takes us back to the early 1990s when scholars engaged in cultural studies, postcolonial theory and feminism started looking at the implications of new communication and information technologies for the cultural politics of race, gender and class. Inspired by Donna Haraway's feminist figuration of the 'cyborg', Constance Penley and Andrew Ross introduced the volume *Technoculture* (1991) with a description of the impasses encountered by cultural and political critiques of new media technologies around that time. On the one hand, critical research was confronted with the task of countering hegemonic narratives about a "one way flow" of democracy from the West to the rest of the world as seen in Western media's enthusiastic description, for example, of the use of information and communication technologies by the Chinese democracy movement of Tiananmen Square in 1989 (a trend which has continued to these days, see Parvan in this volume). On the other side, there was also the felt need to counter the pessimism of the critical left who debated and lamented "the effects of Western technoculture in other countries" on the basis of the assumption that "we" "have already been fully colonized by the cultural logic of technological rationality and domination".[1] Against both positions, they saw technoculture as a heterogeneous cultural formation that presented complex patterns of control and resistance, subjection and subjectivation, adoption and negotiation.

Even today, not everyone has a handheld digital device that allows them to access both public cultural capital (Facebook, Twitter, et al.), or the individual credit guaranteed by a piece of encrypted plastic. The world does not follow a single (algo)rhythm. Not everyone is fully plugged in, and those who are are not equally so. While in present day sub-Saharan Africa the installation of telephone landlines has been abandoned for the technology of cellular networks, there are at the same time millions there and elsewhere in the world who have never made a phone call in their life. We can also be assured that there are many more women than men, and many more non-whites, who find themselves in this category. At the same time, it is undeniable that the digital economy has produced new modalities of governmentality operating at a planetary level, ready to be transduced into individual localities and singularities. If many of these were initially developed

[1] Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "Introduction", in Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds., *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), viii-xviii, esp. p. xi.

within the West, stimulated in the growing intersectionality between the military-industrial-research complex and the media constructions of securitocracy after 9/11, they now constitute the comprehensive policing and politics of movement on the planet. Scans, digital passports and "look into the camera" bio-political controls are producing files of enormous proportions. This is data that is so big that it requires other forms of organised data (software) for it to be read, comprehended and capitalised (both culturally and commercially). If this clearly has enormous industrial and economic impact (from the investment in the research, development and acquisition of all of that hardware and software to the accumulation and extraction of wealth in its digital inventories), it is clearly also profoundly shifting the grounds of social recognition and political action. This means, no matter how ubiquitous it has become, that the technosphere has limits, regional breakdowns and circuits of contestations. There is still a lot of static and noise out there. The proclaimed transparency and purported neutrality of the digital signifier – after all, deep down it is just patterns of 1 and 0 (Hindu numeration brought to the Occident by the Arabs) – can be muddied. The mirror of seamless communication efficiency can be cracked.

As Arjun Appadurai also argued in the mid-nineties, globalization should be conceived as a "disjunctive order, which can no longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models".[2] Appadurai's "technoscapes", for example, invite us to see technologies not as objective realities which "look the same from every angle of vision", but as "deeply perspectival constructs" inflected by the "historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" (296). As he also noted, there is a continual tension between the drive for cultural homogeneity rendering the world transparent to its will, and the multiple modes of resistance and subversion disseminated in its heterogeneous historical composition. In other words, global technoculture constitutes an ongoing problematic. It is a critical space destined to be traversed in multiple directions and translated into unplanned singularities. The seeming neutrality of its means and language – apparently taciturn technology and indifferent digits – poses profound political challenges to any present seeking to avoid its futures being colonised by existing hegemonies. These are the provisional premises that provide the initial point of departure for the diverse critical passages proposed in the essays in this issue of *Anglistica*.

The essays collected in this special issue have been written by a new generation of intellectuals who are re-actualizing and rethinking the complex relation between technology and culture in what Stuart Hall would have called the "current conjuncture". Most of these scholars have studied or come into contact with the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies and the PhD in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and also participated to a series of joint events organized with the Department of Media and Communications of Goldsmiths" College, University of

[2] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7.2 (1990), 295–310, pp 295-296.

London between 2009 and 2013.[3] It is in this context that Maria Fernández's early call for a "postcolonial media theory" has been taken up and creatively developed in a research culture that has encouraged and sustained critical work at the intersection of feminism, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, visual culture and new media.[4] Such work has been nourished and inspired by the writings of thinkers who have also engaged over the years with this critical intersection: from the now classic texts by Donna Haraway, Stuart Hall, Arjun Appadurai, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Iain Chambers, Paul Gilroy and Edward Said to more recent writings by Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Lisa Nakamura, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Kodwo Eshun, Michele White, Paul Preciado, Ash and Sanjay Sharma, Patricia T. Clough, Arun Saldhana, Julian Henriques, Laura U. Marks, Lisa Blackman, Luciana Parisi, Alondra Nelson, Amit S. Rai, Eyal Weizman, and Adi Knutsmann among others.

We can go back here to the image of "technoscape" as perspectival construct which implies a point of view, such as that proposed by Appadurai. The concept of technoscapes can be seen as a strategic tool to counter what Antonio Negri calls "transcendentalism" that is "philosophies of history" and "conceptions of society" which "do not accept locating determinations of reality within the network and within the clash of subjective powers" or "which believe that they can evaluate or manipulate society from an external, transcendental and authoritarian point of view".[5] As in Donna Haraway's situated knowledges, looking at the relationship between technology and culture from the point of view of new media artists, writers, critics, videomakers, photographers, DJs, novelists and collectives engaged in thinking racism, sex and gender, globalization and new forms of colonialisms, migration, the diaspora, border struggles, capitalism, multiculturalism, produces what we call specific "inflections" of technoculture. This opens up the question for reimagining what we call "biodigital media": media that are both biopolitical in Foucault's sense, that is new technologies for the government of populations, but also media that, as in cyberpunk's early intuition, "stick to the skin, respond to the touch", which latch onto and deploy the mnemonic and sensorial potentials of the body and its automatisms.[6] If technoculture is a topological surface enveloping the planet, made as much by technologies as cultural practices, affects and meanings, then we might redefine what Penley and Ross called "cultural negotiations" as "inflections" of a global technoculture.[7] Technoscapes are not only perceived but actually constructed by creative and critical questioning and re-deployment of new media technologies which produce "inflections".

In his neo-Leibnizian treatment of the "territorial image", Bernard Cache defined "points of inflection" as "singular points" which, when related to the "extrema" ("the maximum and minimum on a given curve") can be said "to figure as in-between".[8] The points of inflections, the singularities of global technoculture, are not located at the maximum of subjection (the compliant and docile automatisms produced by the codes, programmes and interfaces of the likes of Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon) or at its minimum (the overt revolts

[4] María Fernández, "Postcolonial Media Theory", *Art Journal*, 58.3 (Autumn, 1999), 58-73.

[5] Antonio Negri, "A New Foucault', in *Empire and Beyond*, trans. by Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 227-228.

[6] The concept of "biodigital machines' is elaborated in a similar way by Luciana Parisi in *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Bio-Technology and the Mutations of Desire* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004) and taken up again by Jussi Parikka in *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technologies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). On the relationship between biopolitics and digital media see Tiziana Terranova, "Another Life: The Nature of Political Economy in Foucault's Genealogy of Biopolitics", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26.6 (2009), 234-265; see also Bruce Sterling, "Introduction to *Mirrorshades*", in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (New York: Ace Books, 1988); and on media as "tertiary retentions". See Bernard Stiegler, "Within the Limits of Capitalism, Economizing Means Taking Care", *Ars Industrialis*, 2008, http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/2922.

[7] See Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, eds.,. "Topologies of Culture", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 29.4-5 (July-September 2012).

[8] Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), 16.

against corporate domination of the Internet as enacted by heroic hackers such as Julian Assange or Chelsea Manning or by Anonymous). Unlike "extrema", points of inflection can be seen as "the points of a plateau from where the contour lines diverge": they are "points of imbalance" or "decline", which "confer an indeterminacy to the rest of the curve".[9] As "intrinsic singularities", points of inflection "precede the vector" – such as the vectorial movement of new media technologies from the West to the Rest, but also the vectorial convergence of the vectors in the production of points of view – thus representing in Gilles Deleuze's words "a totality of possibilities, as well as an openness, a receptiveness, or an anticipation".[10]

[9] Ibid., 18.

[10] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 14-15 and 20.

The questions posed by the essays collected in thise special issue are innovative in as much as they approach technoculture from these "in-betweens", understood as "sites of cosmogenesis and invention". Can we see a "postcolonial cybersemiotics" at work in Indian, North African and Middle Eastern women dancers, videodancers and choreographers in a way that enables the construction of new conceptions of identity and the diaspora, the body and the archive by means of a unique relation between movement, memory and digital technologies (Portanova; Piccirillo)? How do photographic, cinematic and digital techniques participate in the production of race and what happens when cultural techniques which belong to the Black Atlantic such as the re-mix are applied to the photographic and filmic archive of race and migration (Ferrara; Quadraro)? In which ways have North African and Middle Eastern societies (Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey) and media (Al Jazeera) dealt with the ambivalence of social media in the midst and aftermath of revolutionary upheaval (Parvan; Yetiskin; Sarnelli)? What visions do we find in feminist Afrofuturist science fiction for a post-human, anti-racist and queer evolutionism countering the imaginary of neo-Darwinism and socio-biology (Caporaso)? Can some videogames afford a disorienting kind of embodiment that upsets rather than confirms binary codings of gender (De Riso)? How does contemporary new media art with its neo-materialist ontology stage and counter the depletion of the social and natural world by postcolonial capitalism (Colavecchio)? What are the stakes of the technocultural remodulation of the US/Mexican border and how are activists and artists re-deploying mobile technologies of geolocalization in order to remember the victims and question the process of border subjectivation (Terracciano)?

This special issue opens with an essay by Beatrice Ferrara, "'A Mirror's Permutation of a Nation': Technology and the Cultural Politics of Race in DJ Spooky's *Re-birth of a Nation*". Here Ferrara offers a critical reading of D.W. Griffith"s The Birth of Nation (1915) on its 100th anniversary by engaging with "the re-take performed by the African-American DJ and conceptual artist Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky". Miller's *Re-Birth of a Nation* was at first performed live in international gallery spaces (2004-2008) and then edited and released as a DVD in 2008. What characterizes Ferrara's take on the relation between Griffith's racist

modernist masterpiece and Miller's digital re-mix is her insistence on the implication of the technical, the aesthetic and the political in accounting for racialized processes of subjectivation. Her intersection of postcolonial studies and media theory exceeds any mere ideological reading of Griffith's film, choosing instead to see the relation between "technical" and "ethical" levels as a *chaosmotic* one, as Felix Guattari would have it, involving human and non-human forces.[11] Ferrara's essay is thus a careful investigation of the role of cinematic and digital techniques in the production of race, which also proposes a methodology for postcolonial media studies. Her focus on "technology and the cultural politics of race" is a genuine addition to a collective endeavour that has seen the important contributions of scholars such as Kodwo Eshun, Alondra Nelson, Julian Henriques, Arun Saldhana, Amit S. Rai and Lisa Nakamura among others.

Griffith's origin story of the birth of the USA out of the merging of two territories (the white North and the white South) is thus seen as founded in what Gilles Deleuze defined as Griffith's "audacious technical innovation": "organic montage". By working on parallel series of "characters and incidents" that are chained together through a series of binarisms, Griffith created for Ferrara a classic modernist perceptual shock in his audiences – still unused to editing, montage and alternate narration. This perceptual shock, which Jonathan Crary sees as characteristics of the modern production of "attentive subjects", turns the fragmentary and chaotic experience of life in the post-Civil War US into a coherent narrative – a form of "hegemony" working through a "master narrative".[12] This hegemonic story operates not just at the level of signification, but is achieved largely at a 'technical level', as a set of 'cultural techniques' ("modelled after our (body)mind processes") for producing an origin myth (the birth of the nation). The result of these techno-aesthetic procedures is the production of a unitary narrative and an "itinerary of silencing and erasure of other narrations". DJ Spooky's interventions on Griffith's film, on the other hand, deploy the strategy of applying black DJ culture "cut'n'mix" techniques to modernist art cinema. Like Griffith, DJ Spooky too works on fragments, but this time not in order to lock down perception but to make Griffith's voice "stutter and turn into an [unresolved and unfinished] cacophony of potential alternative narrations". The two (cultural) techniques employed by DJ Spooky include the "insertion" of alternative images produced by black artists, and the "juxtaposition" of visual digital effects. This repetition of modernity (with a difference) codes a new cultural operating system where African-American remix techniques oppose and reengineer Griffith's modernist montage – thus countering his disavowal of the death of the American ideals. Befittingly, Ferrara concludes by calling for extension of further work on the larger histories of African American experimentalism as neglected genealogies of media theory.

Michaela Quadraro's essay "Ghosting the Postcolonial Archive: Digital Technologies and Diasporic Visualities in Contemporary Black British Art" also

[11] Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U. P., 1995).

[12] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Boston, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999).

engages with the archive of race, but this time from the perspective of the formation of a British (and European) Black cultural identity. This involves a poetic discussion of recent works by two artists who, according to Stuart Hall's periodization in the key essay "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three Moments in Post-War History" (2006), can be considered as part of the second wave of Black British artists born in the 1960s. The works in question are Keith Piper's digital video *Ghosting the Archive* (2005) and Sonia Boyce's exhibition "Scat" (2013). Quadraro deploys postcolonial and race theory, from Arjun Appadurai's and Achille Mbembe's theorization of the archive to Stuart Hall's approach to cultural identity and Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of the digital image, to conceive of art practices as an integral part of "the general cultural and political formation of multicultural society". By engaging directly with the importance of visuality and visual culture in the formation of cultural identities, Quadraro draws on feminist philosopher Elisabeth Grosz to argue for the "intensely political nature of art" in elaborating "alternative possibilities" and provoking "a perceptual anticipation of the future". As in Ferrara's essay, we are also confronted here with the elaboration of technologies and techniques that unsettle the archive, question "forms and canons" and explore the relation "between identity and difference, geographical locations and dislocations". Digital technologies express the principle by which as much as one can hope to record the past, there will always be "missed passages", making all attempts at mnemonic preservation also acts of forgetting.

In the digital video *Ghosting the Archive* (2005), for example, Keith Piper re-works the Dyche Collection: a large photographic archive of the work of Ernest Dyche (1877-1973) who was a commercial portrait photographer operating in the inner area of Birmingham settled by communities of migrants from the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean from the 1950s onwards. As it has been noticed, these images often became agents of a "reverse immigration" when they were sent back to relatives living in the Caribbean, India and Pakistan. Piper does not treat the Dyche collection, a "found object" which he discovered in the Birmingham City Archive during a period of residence at the Birmingham Central Library, as an innocent artefact. On the contrary, he uses these nameless and dateless series of portraits as the occasion for "the exploration of alternative histories that contain and exceed the frame". In particular, the fact the images found were negatives is treated in Piper's digital transposition as a technique that "obscures race through a reversal of the colour of the skin from dark to light, and from black to white." Re-working the analogue negatives through the digital technique of morphing, Piper allows the negatives to emerge from obscurity, thus expressing the materiality of race: not a "mere reproduction", but a force "that had to be drawn, pulled or extracted" to become perceivable. The other work considered in the essay, such as Sonya Boyce's exhibition "Scat" (2013), include three major pieces: *For You Only You* (2007); *The Devotional Wallpaper* (2008) and *Oh Adelaide* (2010). What connects the three pieces is an interest in the voice and in the

archive as art practice. *For You Only You* is a deliberate orchestration of nonsense that juxtaposes wildly different styles of wordless vocalization, and stages "a form of resistance against the power of language". *My Devotional Collection* is an archive of CDs, cassettes and vinyl records of Black British female singers collected by the artist since 1999. *Oh Adelaide* reworks instead the archive footage of "American-born jazz singer and entertainer Adelaide Hall (1901-1993)". This time it is the archive of modern and contemporary popular culture that becomes the occasion for an exercise in the visual and technical diasporic imagination, contributing to the production of what Quadraro calls contemporary "European Black subjectivities in formation".

Stamatia Portanova's "A Postcolonial Cybersemiotics: Tradition and Modernity in Shobana Jeyasingh's Chaosmopolitan Choreographies" considers the techniques deployed by the British Indian choreographer in relation to questions of tradition and modernity, origins and diaspora. Jeyasingh's work is, in fact, characterized by a mixture and a tension between dance techniques inherited from the Indian classical style of dance (Bharata Nayam) and contemporary dance steps inspired by popular music and urban street culture. In her reading of the performances staged by Jeyasingh, Portanova inflects three points of view or perspectives: the postcolonial and its emphasis on "cultural adaptation" and "hybridity"; Peircean semiotics which complicates the binary relation between sign and meaning by introducing the question of "sensation"; and the cybernetic concern with "the adaptive and connective capacities of communication systems". In particular, Portanova deploys Peirce's semiotics to argue against the notion that choreography can be simply seen as a language (through an analogy with Christian Metz's structuralist take on cinema) used to tell the story of postcolonial India. In her critique of the linguistic framework, Portanova argues against the sudden leap from "sensorial perception of the movement to the attribution of a meaning to its constitutive elements" which forecloses any engagement with the multiplicity and openness of "sens/ation". Peirce's semiotics allows for a conception of signs "acting as topological figures of continuous active connection" which makes possible for us to see Jeyasingh's choreographies as producing not only meanings, but also cybernetic encounters. As she puts it, she "does not just transmit significations, but produces inflections".

Portanova thus deploys three schemas or "trichotomies" introduced by Peirce's semiotics: as given by the "intrinsic nature of signs" (sinsigns, qualisigns, legisigns); by the relation between signs and objects (icons, indices, symbols); and by the relation between sign and interpretant (rheme, dicisign and argument). This elaborate schema yields a reading of Jeyasingh's "postcolonial cybersemiotics" that poses the "origin" (such as Indian classical dance style) as "an immanent field of emergence", not "a past to be exactly re-traced" but a "vague potential" and "jumping off point". Jeyasingh's relation to India thus becomes inflected by "a swirl, a clinamen, a deviation" – that is a "postcolonial curvature" of an original

past. The relation between signs and objects as modulated by likeness (icons) connection (indices) and capture (symbols) gives us Jeyasingh's cybernetic relation to India: her "identitarian dance" does not refer to a pure origin, but to an India constituted by "fluidity of borders and shared beliefs", interacting with a "manifold of local and regional traditions". It poses India as a case of "immanent pluralism", a series of "elastic and malleable territories" and a "geopolitical multiplicity". Finally, Portanova considers the ways in which Jeyasingh's work articulates the relation between vague terms such as "contemporary" and "Indian", highlighting the ambivalent feelings of Indian audiences to her work which is perceived as being not Indian enough and hence too Western. Rather than attempting to go back to a simple, pre-colonial reality, Jeyasingh's choreographies take us to a "hypergeographical space" which resonate with Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space": a "choreographic thirdness" which opens the "classical body" to a chaosmotic space defining Jeyasingh as a "nomad of kinaesthetic thought". It is thus the urban contemporaneity that defines her best "beyond Indian (or Western) classicisms", where the distance between India and the West becomes the space "between two gestures, two ways of moving" producing a "wave" or "non-linear contact".

In her essay "A Mediterranean Matri-Archive: Choreographic Fragments of Emerging Corporealities", Annalisa Piccirillo considers the concept of a "Mediterranean Matri-Archive" which connects Iain Chambers's notion of the Mediterranean as "liquid archive" to the feminist figuration of the "Matri-Archive" as "a space of creation, knowledge, cognition, invention and survival" for women. The Matri-Archive is an imagined, perspectival, situated, embodied technoscape that carefully selects and connects diverse experimentations with body movements which cross the liquid frontier separating Europe from its "others". By looking at three video-dance performances by the French-Algerian dancer Nacera Belaza (*Le Cri*), the Turkish choreographer Geyvan McMillen (*Mahrem*) and the Syrian video-dance of Nisrine Boukhari (*Le Veil*), Piccirillo expands on Chambers' proposal for the Mediterranean as a "methodological resource-zone for alternative critico-aesthetical investigations". Thus "the critical correlation of dance aesthetics and archival praxis" in the Mediterranean today is articulated with a critique of the archive which poses the possibility of another archival strategy connecting the analogue and the digital, the organic and the mediated. The techniques of dance and their encounter with digitalisation allow for the re-mobilization of Mediterranean women's bodies as mnemonic *dispositifs* of recollection. This promotes the invention of new kinds of movement against the foreclosure on mobility imposed by the European Union's migration policies. The matri-archive looks for a "practice of memorial care, a choreography that reclaims the right to mobility" against the weight of the spectral presence of the dead migrant bodies which haunt the Mediterranean sea. The "liquidity of the Mediterranean live-stage" as an archive of bodily movements and fragments of gestures acquires through

digital video technology the capacity to be "re-actualized, dislocated and differed in a specific global digital milieu". In their video-danced performances, the three artists raise the question of how "the new aesthetics of contemporary dance manage the juxtaposition of flesh and the virtual" while reconfiguring the embodied female memory of other Mediterranean crossings – crossings of bodily movements and sounds. Thus, Nacera Belaza's dancing bodies are media that receive, host, and bear "all possible beats" – from Larmi Bestham's Arabic chants to Maria Callas' voice, from Nina Simone's to Amy Winehouse's. The "migration into virtuality" is not conceived as disembodiment but as something that allows for the emergence of "a potential, embodied and new relational force". In Geyvan McMillen's danced strategy of "collecting female stories", the body-archive acts out corporeal strategies that activate "unexpected relations between organic and mechanical bodies, the digital and the analogue". In Nasrine Boukhari's mixed-media and installation performative work *Le Veil,* the "im-materiality of digital screens" feeds into and from the "consistency or 'matter' of a dancing corporeality emerging and touching on, the surface of a veil". If, as Laura U. Marks claims, the virtual epistemology of the digital age is a "haptic visuality" where touch informs vision,[13] then the liquid-digital milieu of the Mediterranean Matri-Archive allows us to envision a potential for the sharing of body movements, fragments, and memories which allows another memory of the Mediterranean to emerge in potential postcolonial feminist figurations.

In "Coded Borderscapes: Locative Media, Memory and Migration in ManifestAR's *Border Memorial*", Roberto Terracciano engages with the Augmented Reality art of ManifestAR – a group formed by John Craig Freeman and Mark Skwarek. Their artwork *Border Memorial* (2013) uses locative media and augmented reality technologies in order to document and re-actualize "the memory of migrants who died in the act of crossing, showing the relation between the US/Mexican border and locative media technologies". *Border Memorial* uses "mobile phone localization features" to superimpose "visual data into the geographical location", thus performing a "postcolonial critique" of the "reconfiguration and complexification of borders". Terracciano thus draws our attention to the "augmented qualities of contemporary borders as assemblages in which economies, technologies, politics, architectures and cultures conjoin," constructing a "borderscape" as "intricate network of portable segregation" mobilizing software as a "space of struggle and negotiation". As borders are being reconfigured as "spaces generated by code", they mobilize an "augmented architecture" in "concrescent network technologies". ManifestAR's art thus allows for an engagement with the deep embeddedness of code "within the ontogenesis of contemporary spaces" and particularly borders. For Terracciano, borders are "coded spaces", that is, as Rob Kitchin put it, they are "relational and emergent spaces in which software frames the infolding but does not determine it" and operate through what Gilbert Simondon called "transduction" (ontogenetic

[13] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2000).

modulation) rather than translation.

ManifestAR deploys "information visualisation fuelled with data about the number and location of the deaths of the Mexican migrants in order to redesign a geography of mourning in a tactical memorial as a form of visibility and resistance". It thus visualises "the scope of the loss of life by marking each location where human remains have been recovered with a virtual object or augmentation" such as virtual skeleton effigies of *calacas,* commonly used in the Mexican *Day of the Dead* festival. The "perception of digital objects on the physical ground" generates "a sense of angst and loss affecting the body" at the crossing of virtual geography and physical surface in a "necrographic data map" that mixes "bits and bones" as visualised by smart phone users. Coming after earlier AR artworks such as *ProtestAR* (2012) which deployed AR to permit virtual protest to take place in Zuccotti Park, the site of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and *The Us/Iraqi War Memorial* (2011)*,* "a map of three-dimensional coffins covered with stripped and starred flags ... and carved with Arabic words", *Border Memorial* enacts a "perversion of code" that is a akin to a "blasphemy" (in the sense proposed by Donna Haraway and Homi Bhabha). This "digital reworking of the geography of Mexico and the United States" deploys a use of memory as "a tactic of resistance *and* presence" and what Terracciano calls *implacement* (following Jason Farman and Edward Casey) as "a means for transduction of the physical-digital infrastructure". The artwork thus achieves the overall effect of turning the American "homeland" into a "suspicious place".

Roberta Colavecchio's essay "Eco-Art Machines: A Chaosmotic Perspective on Postcolonial Capitalism" weaves together Sandro Mezzadra's and Miguel Mellino's suggestive concept of postcolonial capitalism with the neo-materialist feminist philosophy of Rosi Braidotti and Elisabeth Grosz in close alliance with Felix Guattari's ecological and chaosmotic approach. Colavecchio draws on the multimedia artworks or "contraptions" constructed by London-based new media art collectives Mongrel and YoHa. Mongrel defines itself as "a mixed bunch of people, machines and intelligences working to celebrate the methods of London street culture" officially founded in 1997 by Graham Harwood, Marvin Jarman, and Richard Pierre-Davis – while YoHa is a spin-off of Mongrel founded by Matsuko Yokokoji and Graham Harwood. Mongrel and YoHa's work combines street culture and digital media in order to challenge "race, class, gender and sexuality in and through new media technologies". In particular, the essay examines three installations by YoHa. The first, *Aluminium* (YoHa and Raqs Media Collective 2007), is a "futuristic search engine performing fragments of hidden histories" which re-frame the lost history of aluminium and "the ecology of futurist, fascist, colonial power" connected to it by algorithmically "re-writing and re-framing" documentaries and other promotional films in a "mesmerizing liquid sequence". The second installation, *Coal-Fired Computers: 300.000 Computers, 318.000 Black Lungs* (YoHa 2010), "powers a computer with two and a half tons of coal",

programs it to look on the Internet for data of miners around the world who have contracted a lung disease and feeds it back to "a pair of black lungs attached to the contraption". The contraption thus foregrounds the persistence of coal and mining as a source of energy for clean digital machines in contemporary postcolonial capitalism. The third installation, *Tantalum Memorial* (Mongrel 2008), is "a towering rack of cables and switches showing and performing the hidden cost of our mobile phones" such as the 600.000 yearly casualties due to the "Coltan Wars" in Congo fought over the extraction of the mineral necessary to build "metal tantalum" – an essential component of mobile phones and other technological devices. Colavecchio crucially deploys the notion of "residual aesthetics" to account for the cultural and political interventions accomplished by Mongrel and YoHa where the residue is not only the excess produced by any activity of production, but also potentially and chaosmotically the trigger for new processes of individuation. This opens the way for a multiplicity of strategies that acknowledge the dispersed agencies of non-human actants such as machines and minerals.

By engaging with the artworks, Colavecchio espouses "a machinic perspective on ecology and capitalism which considers how this interplay is inseparable from the history of colonization as extraction and accumulation of natural-cultural forces". Colavecchio thus takes up the challenge of the concept of "postcolonial capitalism" introduced by theorists influenced by post-workerist Marxism. For these authors, "postcolonial capitalism" acknowledges the centrality of colonialism in the formation of capitalism which has produced "a complex and unstable cultural condition, a space of continuous contention between capital and its conjunctural *others"*. Crucial to her argument is the notion, derived from thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Elisabeth Grosz, that "art is a composition of chaos or composed chaos". Eco-art machines thus constitute "a spatio-temporal reinvention of the world" that restores "transversal connections across mental, social and environmental ecologies". What is at stake is the foregrounding of the "neo-colonial inflection of high-tech production" which makes the "chaotic variabilities, complexities and exceptions" of capitalism "perceptible" while also creating new affective bonds.

Ebru Yetiskin's essay "Paratactic Media and Social Networks: Emerging Forms of Resistance to Algorithmic Power in Artistic Practices" takes issue with the new "invisible layers of algorithmic governance" which operate through social media platforms and other forms of data harvesting and digital labor. The concept of "paratactic media" is developed in order to address new types of artistic interventions that expose the logic of algorithmic governance in order to contest authoritarian regimes of power. Yetiskin introduces us to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which establish new forms of spatio-technical governance through protocols and algorithms. Yetiskin constructs her argument around the notion that "invisibility" has again become an issue in the superficial transparency of social media environments. In doing so, she also forces us to

confront the "growing role of the State in Internet governance" and the dance of coordination and competition, collaboration and friction which characterises the relation between the national state and the new "para-state" form of giant online corporations. The result is a form of "algorithmic governance" defined as the joint governance of social networks by governments *and* corporations".

Yetiskin draws on the example of the 2013 Gezi Park Protests in Turkey, to show what happened once media censorship in mainstream media pushed segments of the population to "migrate" to social media platforms. This migration, for Yetiskin, was tolerated by the Turkish government because it allowed for new partnerships in "data trade" with telecommunication operators where a surplus of data is extracted from populations in exchange for money. Thus participation in street protests and resistance movements caused an increase in the numbers of social media users which, by means of what she calls their "data labor", also provided the "known data" processed by "software programs for mass surveillance" run by "digital mercenaries". Thus, paradoxically, protests are turned into sources of "data labor" that produce "data capital" while also enabling new levels of "state surveillance", thereby becoming subject to the hybrid power of a "government-corporations" network. Social media platforms have also become the theatre of new types of "psychological operations" such as the timing of a confrontational statement to cause Twitter controversies which distract public opinion while authoritarian or corrupt pieces of legislation are pushed through Parliament. Yetiskin suggests that authoritarian nation states deploy a "depletion" strategy of activist attentional resources by engaging in the continuous production of noise.

In this context, tactical media, one of the earliest forms of activism practiced on the Internet, needs to be revisited and "paratactic media", a form of artistic practice, can be seen as a response to the neutralization of "tactical media". This response involves "renewing and modifying" the tools of tactical media within the emerging context of algorithmic governance. Yetiskin's essay resonates with references to "invisible layers" and "hidden processes" which need to be uncovered (such as the "back-ends" of software platforms that operate beyond the reach of "front-end" interface users). She maintains, however, that these invisible rules can only become visible by paradoxically playing on "friction, noise, cacophony, foolishness, depletion and waste". Her three examples of Baram Gülesen' *Live to Pixel* (2013), Paolo Cirio's *Loophole for All* (2013), and the "Networks of Dispossession" project respond to a situation of repression aided by algorithmic governance by reworking the strategies of tactical media to expose the medium's hidden processes. In so doing, they show the implication of the "physical" with the virtual" and "produce background information on the medium as such". Yetiskin concludes by referring to a practice of "precarious resistance and open-sourced processual knowledge production" as also integral to paratactic media. She thus seems to suggest that these artistic practices allow not only for a

critique of algorithmic governance but also for new "autonomous modes of bottom-up action by creative intervention of artistic practice".

In "Al Jazeera's *The Stream:* Digital and Diasporic Geographies Beyond the West", Viola Sarnelli looks at a television show launched and created by the satellite TV network Al Jazeera English (AJE) in 2011. For Sarnelli, "The Stream" can be read as part of an effort "to counter the hegemony of US and European voices in transnational communications", while also contributing "to the creation of a mediated 'diasporic' space – between television and online networks, beyond the space of the nation and the US-Euro dominated world". "The Stream" blends a number of "different media formats" which that had characterized "AJE's coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions a few months earlier". The title of the show refers to the convergence between the "stream" of social media and the "televisual flow" as being "at the core of the programme content and aesthetics". The discussion takes place between the presenter and one or two guests in the studio and participation through Skype, Google+, Twitter and Facebook. The integration of social media is also evident in the ways in which "quantities such as numbers of likes, shares, and tweets ... provide a measure of the success of the single topics discussed and an indication of how important its online community is to The Stream". This "intertwining between satellite news and social media" enacts a mode of convergence which reinforces Al Jazeera's "founding narrative of "giving voice" to a collective subject mostly identified as "the people". In "The Stream", this collective subject is specified as the "diasporic community" composed of second and third generations Arab immigrants in the West and a wider international public. As such, for Sarnelli, "The Stream" expresses and embodies "a multimedia modernity exceeding the West". This multimedia modernity enacts a clash between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. At the core of this project she finds diasporic subjectivities that are presented as "fully recognised social actors in a complex modernity" who experience both "a collective, communal dimension" as well as "a more individual, existential mode" – a mixture of "commonality and singularity". For Sarnelli, "The Stream", like AJE overall, tries to constitute a space which is intrinsically "diasporic" by combining three main components: "the online community following the show, diaspora as a "common condition" of displacement and the specificity of several diasporic communities". Diasporic communities are thus "both part of the discussions promoted by The Stream, and a substantial component of the 'online community' following and fuelling the show".

Sarnelli is interested in the ways in which the multimedia convergence enacted by The Stream reconfigures our understanding of "cybergeography" by mobilizing a sense of community within a geographical space which is "eccentric with relation to the dominant centres of media power" thus participating in the formation of alternative "diasporic public spheres". This is reflected especially in the choice of topics usually marginalized by Western media channels "such as [for example] the

destiny of the Tamil minority in Sri-Lanka, the Oromos in Ethiopia or freedom of speech in Vietnam". For Sarnelli, this allows AJE to go beyond the idea of "diasporic media" by multiplying the diaspora, which is constructed as "a hybrid, multicultural identity, not connected to any specific community of viewers" – as given for example by the knowledge of English as "a lingua franca" in a "perpetual hetero-lingual address". Thus, The Stream can be seen to contribute to the construction of a "post-diasporic scenario, where diasporas and migrations are treated as a given fact". It is just not a question of connecting "diasporas" and "homelands", but promoting "exchanges between individuals that are part of different, overlapping communities (online, geographic, ethnic, religious, etc.)": "multiple diaspora communities" thus correspond to "multiple homelands". For Sarnelli, The Stream contributes "to the creation of a mediated 'diasporic' space – between television and online networks, beyond the space of the nation and the US-Euro dominated world".

Oana Parvan's "Beyond the 'Arab Spring': New Media, Art and Counter-Information in Post-Revolutionary North Africa" looks for new modalities of representation of the so-called "Arab Spring" in the artistic practices of Tunisian and Egyptian techno-collectives such as Ahk Al Kahf Kahf (Tunisia) and Mosireen (Egypt). Parvan contests the "techno-optimistic interpretation" of the mass uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt which led to the ousting of Al-Zibidine Ben Ali and Muhammad Hosni El Sayed Mubarak – an interpretation which emphasised the role of social media, thus reducing the 2011 uprisings to "another revolution of the Other". The notion of the "Arab Spring", Parvan points out, "is based on Western precedents" ("such as the 1848 'Spring of Peoples' or the 1968 anti-Sovietic 'Spring of Prague'") and produces a reading of an "Arab awakening to Democracy" which homogenizes the Middle East and North Africa. Here technology, as in Penley and Ross' example of Tianamen, is constructed as a Western "democratic facilitator". As Egyptian critics have pointed out, the 'Arab Spring' is a simplified account of a "youth-led, social media centred revolution against local dictatorship" which could later be dubbed as "failed". Lumping together "the contradictory and often conflictual interests of 'yuppies' and the unemployed", such a narrative is contested to affirm the ongoing unfolding of the revolution as a becoming that opposes "social inequality and state violence beyond the mere ousting of a dictator". Parvan acknowledges that the demise of Internet censorship policy by Al-Zibidine Ben Ali on the 14th of January 2011 triggered "an explosion of citizen journalism exposing the brutality of the state" and creating "imaginations for resistance", but she also stresses the importance of trade unionism, the work of political opposition parties, and other more informal networks of organization larger than the connected middle classes. Parvan's account of post-revolutionary new media and art in Tunisia and Egypt takes us through a number of ways in which digital technologies, theatre, and street art have come to operate as means to carry on the revolutionary becoming of 2011: the work of digital collectives such as the Tunisian Inkifada,

which created connections between investigative journalism and new media; the theatre of the *Corps Citoyen's* collective, especially their performance "Mouvma – Us Who Are Still 25", deploying videos as a means to expose "the unseen affective landscape produced by the revolutionary experience", such as "the solitary dimension of anxiety and depression connected to frustrated revolutionary expectations" at the border "between collective struggle" and "solitary suffering"; and especially the practices of the techno-collective Mosireen and Ahl Al Kahf. Mosireen – "an [Egyptian] independent video collective that believes in the visual medium as a site of action rather than a representational tool" – has produced around 250 short documentaries since October 2011, constructing "an open archive of the Egyptian revolution". Their "representational revolution" is "street-based" but it also involves "new media platforms, screenings, performances, debates and workshops". In Tunis, Ahl Al Kahf ("the people of the cavern") whose members have both artistic and trade unionist backgrounds, identifies itself as "a multitude of terrorist networks that fulfil and spread aesthetic terrorism". Inspired by Mohamed Choukri, Edward Said, Antonio Negri and Gilles Deleuze, they conceive the revolution not as a "punctual event" but as an "unfolding duration inspired by the massive struggles of the past". Parvan's essay thus not only articulates a critique of dominant Occidental representations of the "Arab Spring" as a (failed) (social media) revolution, but also exposes us to the ways in which the "revolutionary becoming" of 2011 continues to unfold in cultural practices which mix streets and networks, screens and walls.

In "Gaming Gender: Virtual Embodiment as Synaesthetic Experience", Giuseppe De Riso engages with feminist film theory in order to posit the possibility of conceiving videogames as media which potentially exceed the scopic and gendered regimes of representation to be found in cinema. De Riso then explores a question which contemporary digital media culture seems to pose again with a certain dramatic insistence: the question not only of the visual representation of the female body, but also its relation with the female voice – as when artificial intelligence software (such as Apple Personal Digital Assistant Siri) are given female voices. De Riso considers an example of an anomalous videogame which questions this relation: *Portal* (Valve Corporation, 2007). This "digital audio-visual experience" poses an uncanny relation between a "disembodied" female voice, the point of view of a silent avatar which can only catch glimpses of itself in motion as a woman's body, and a strange "whatever-space" characterized by topological connectivity rather than perspectival representation. De Riso thus asks two questions: in the first place, he recasts feminist critiques of visual pleasure by asking how videogames challenge this model; and then asks how a videogame such as Portal changes dominant regimes of visual power. Standing between Scarlett Johansson's voice interpreting Spike Jonez's Operating System Samantha in *Her* (2013) and the violent misogynist backlash against women game designer in the *Gamergate*'s uproar, digital media culture seems to foreground the female voice as

eliciting both romantic love and sexualized aggression.

De Riso, then, mobilizes the "affective turn" of the early 2000s to discuss the shift away from representation and language as the main notions shaping cultural analysis for the last decades of the twentieth century. His analysis draws on feminist film scholarship (Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed) and affect theory (Eve Kosofsky Sedwick and Adam Frank, as well as Patricia Ticineto Clough and Brian Massumi) to argue for the synaesthetic character of vision. In *Portal,* the player is led to identify from the beginning with the first person point of view of an invisible and silent avatar (an avatar who sees itself and cannot speak) even when endowed with mobility. The action takes place in a "research project" run by a mysterious company (Aperture Science) and it involves the avatar overcoming a series of "test-chambers" through the use of a "futuristic gun" able to "cut" images and in so doing "bringing distant surfaces together". The deployment of such a gun is what allows the avatar to eventually catch glimpses of its own body and discover that "it has the likeness of a woman". The avatar is also addressed by what sounds like a "synthetic female voice" which appears to be "disembodied" but is ultimately discovered to belong to a computer "whose appearance reminds that of an embryo in a fetal position, placed in a funnel-like cavity or recess". The voice also belongs to the "huge body or envelope" of a building "made of steel and cable". The encounter between the disembodied voice and the silent avatar unfolds in a "post-visual figure of the environment", a topological "impossible architecture" requiring a "visceral participation". In order to address this peculiar situation, De Riso also mobilizes Pierre Schaeffer and Michel Chion's "acousmatic film theory", where by "acousmatic" is meant "a sound which is heard but which forecloses any visual perception of the cause or source of its production". This voice produces an "uncanny state of fear or tension" and is perceived as linked to an "entity or event of almost magical or supernatural power". It is thus akin to the "maternal voice as sonorous envelope" which surrounds, sustains and cherishes the child, but also makes it feel "entrapped, imprisoned and powerless". For Kaja Silverman, this originary relation accounts for the unease regarding our relation to the female voice: thus for her a female voice which can be heard but not seen "subverts the regime of gender specularity". For De Riso, a videogame such as Portal goes beyond such subversion in its enactment of a player embodied in a "voiceless female body" who is seen without being able to see one who sounds "like a woman". For De Riso, *Portal* enacts a strategy which does not just invert gender stereotypes but enacts an "acousmatic listening" which creates "new conditions for watching".

Finally, Federica Caporaso's essay "Alien Evolution(s): Race, Cyber-Sex and Genetic Engineering in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy" considers the ways in which Butler's "futuristic world gives posthumanism an anti-racist founding myth" which operates from "the standpoint of an anti-racist evolutionary science". The

trilogy of three novels *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989) is a classic of Afrofuturist science fiction which "narrates the formation of an utterly new species resulting from the mixing of humanity with an extraterrestrial race called Onkali endowed with a superior knowledge of biotechnology and genetic engineering and a natural nomadic drive". Butler inflects a classic science fictional post-apocalyptic scenario (a war has destroyed the planet and decimated the human population) to pose a "becoming other" of humankind as mediated and regulated by an alien race of natural genetic engineers such as the Oankali's third gender or Ooloi. Lilith is the African American woman who is chosen to become the mother of a new posthuman, hybrid race. Her abduction by the Oankali's spaceship, as Caporaso points out, resonates with the historical experience of the deportation of African slaves to America thus inducing in Lilith a feeling of loss of control over her body. Lilith will eventually form her own mixed human and alien family which will include two Oankalis (male and female), one Ooloi and several hybrid children or "constructs" who will repopulate the Earth after the definitive extinction of the "genetically flawed" human species. If the Oankaki are "the architects of a post-racial post-humanity, the Ooloi can be defined as the genetic engineers who shape bodies as naturally as human beings breathe". The Ooloi "modify all the traditional modalities of sexual coupling" by acting as "treasured stranger(s), bridge(s), life trader(s), weaver(s) and magnet(s)" who "connect several bodies to one another so as to let genetic material and pleasure flow through assemblages of up to five bodies that can communicate among themselves" – thus constructing what Cathy Peppers calls a kind of "embodied version of the Internet".

Caporaso considers the "maternal and fleshy" architecture of the alien spaceship as the representation of a "womb-like environment" where "a new act of creation is possible, a rethinking of the self". The spaceship is made of living flesh which the Oankali can manipulate at will as "a stage for post-humanity to create its performances". The ship is a territory for posthumanity to make its first steps, while receiving from the aliens the "gift of an unprecedented (cyber)sexual *jouissance*". In Butler's trilogy, the posthuman body is portrayed as "an open organism in which flesh merges with technology" allowing for "an infinity of possibilities". The creation of new modalities of sex passes through the anti-Eve, Lilith, whose body becomes a "borderland" where "contamination among species occurs not only through the ordinary, heterosexual relationship, but through the recombination of DNA, bacteria, and also social and cultural elements". Caporaso here refers to Luciana Parisi's notion of "abstract sex" as an expansion of "the feminist politics of desire". The encounter with the alien opens the human body to connection with others in an "interstitial space in which humans and aliens can 'meet' in the form of sensations, memories and information by creating loops of feelings". The Ooloi's cyborgian, posthuman sexuality enacts a kind of "queer cybernetics". Such queer cybernetics is played out in the relationship between humans, Oankali and Ooloi, but especially in the "constructs" – the hybrid race of

the children of humans and Oankalis. As Caporaso puts it, the constructs are *mestizas,* they embody the frontier, situating themselves "in the interstitial spaces between boundaries such as male and female, human and animal, heterosexual and queer in favour of a heterogeneous, stronger species" – the mixture of races which for Gloria Anzaldúa constitutes not inferior beings but a "hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool". Thus Butler's posthuman genetic engineers deploy sexual selection for the purposes of an enhancement of sexual pleasure and the construction of a "queered feminine modality of sex".

The special issue closes with two review essays. Stamatia Portanova's review of Laura U. Marks' contribution to a non-Western-centric genealogy of new media in *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media* brings out the implications of the geopolitics of digital media, while Tiziana Terranova's review of Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* considers the multiple genealogies of the posthuman condition and their implications for her project of refounding the humanities around a "radical posthumanism".

The essays collected in this special issue clearly argue that between the smooth surfaces and shiny screens of this digital technoscape and the altogether rougher ground of the histories that brought us to where we are today here clearly exist fractures, fissures and frictions as well as new inflections of technoculture. There remain different ways to plug in and surf the circuits, even the possibility to hack and subvert their public semantics. The endless networks and algorithms apparently working for us without rest, can be disturbed by questions of power, access and accountability. Traced within the proliferating histories of the media and communication technologies, their powers can be registered and tapped to be rewound into new critical scenarios.

Beatrice Ferrara

"A Mirror Permutation of the Nation".
Technology and the Cultural Politics of Race in DJ Spooky's *Re-birth of a Nation*

Abstract: On its 100th anniversary, D.W. Griffith's silent drama *The Birth of Nation* (1915) is still attracting critical attention, both as a masterpiece of cinematic technique and as an infamous racially biased account of the birth of US society. This article presents a critical reading of *The Birth of Nation* through its re-take performed by the African-American DJ and conceptual artist Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky between 2004 and 2008 in his audio-video practice *Re-birth of Nation*. Drawing from Cultural Studies and Media Theory, this article investigates the intersection between technique, practices of visual memorialization and racialization, and the politics of perception in both artworks. In the first part of the article, I present a critical analysis of *The Birth of a Nation* as a 'hegemonic narration', in which avant-garde aesthetical innovation is put at the service of a racialized account of history. In the second part of the article, I turn my attention to *Re-birth of a Nation*, by considering how experimental practices and the techniques of DJ culture may help transform 'History' (official history) into a series of (unauthorised) histories.

Keywords: The Birth of a Nation, Re-birth of a Nation, *D.W. Griffith*, *Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky*, *montage*, *remix*

> "Have you seen a ghost?"
> "I didn't see anything but I thought I felt something"
> "That is the ghost."
> (Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*)

Re-birth of a Nation by Paul D. Miller (aka DJ Spooky) is a critical re-take on the 1915 US colossal movie *The Birth of a Nation* by David W. Griffith, initiated as a live remix experiment conducted between 2004 and 2008 in international gallery spaces, and only later edited as a film for a 2008 DVD release. A not-so-new artwork now (considering the over-accelerated rhythms of cultural production and critical reception and reporting), *Re-birth of Nation* is however still worthy a further mention on a significant anniversary: in 2015, Griffith's silent drama *The Birth of a Nation*, on which DJ Spooky's remix is based, turns in fact 100.

This recurrence is the occasion for a renewed, wider interest towards the 1915 movie, which has been over the decades equally lauded as an unprecedented technically innovative masterpiece and criticised as the one of the most infamous expressions of colour-line divided American society (allegedly reported as having been a recruiting tool for Ku Klux Klan's members).[1] The oscillation between the acknowledgement of the extraordinary technological significance of Griffith's movie and the critical articulation of the enormous burden that is (righteously so)

attached to it in terms of politics of representation, has granted the 1915 colossal an impressively (albeit complicated) long after-life. Endowed with a quasi-*revenant* status, *The Birth of a Nation* regularly re-appears as a compelling object of study within several strains of critical scholarship – from film theory to critical reception studies, cultural studies and race theory, and so on – or as the object of non-scholarly public debates.[2] In this context, the 2015 centennial anniversary is only the last occasion on the list to allow for a reflection on the inextricable relation between the technical and the ethical levels in Griffith's film, and its role in the formation of the modern racialized regime of representation.

With these concepts as its background, the first part of this article unfolds a critical reading of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* as a 'hegemonic narration'. I will highlight how avant-garde aesthetical innovation and the cultural dimension of the historical process of racialized biopolitical subjectivation of black Americans converge in the movie's deployment of "organic montage" (a term I draw from Gilles Deleuze).[3] This technique allows for the emergence of a specific 'master narrative', which founds and maintains its claims to 'authority' and 'authenticity' on the exclusion and marginalization of 'other' experiences by way of an aesthetic operation, whose suggestive power lies beyond a reductive ideological reading.

In the second part of the article I will turn my attention to DJ Spooky's *Re-birth of a Nation*, which I will consider as a "re-narration" of Griffith's narration on the birth of 'the (American) Nation'. I will advance a few considerations on remix culture and its transcultural relevance in contemporary art, by considering how experimental practices may help transform 'History' (official history) into a series of (unauthorised) histories. I will not merely focus on the 'meaning(s)' attached to DJ Spooky's artwork, but also to its material dimension, i.e. that of a digital audio-visual practice, which plays on the ways in which we *perceive* difference.

Throughout its unfolding, in discussing the relation between technology and the cultural politics of race, this article will constantly try to turn to a parallel genealogy of cultural critique than the strictly scholarly one. In fact, while obviously relying on a set of scholarly argumentations, I will at the same time focus on art-working as a modality of critique, expanding on DJ Spooky's use of remix techniques as a form of theory-making in itself (*remix culture* or *remix theory*).[4] The article will suggest that DJ Spooky's artistic research – in engaging with Griffith's 1915 movie – provides interesting insights on the materiality of race in media culture, inviting a reflection on the ways in which *difference is perceived* in the digital age.

The Birth of a Nation: The Cinematic Construction of a Hegemonic Narration

The US president Woodrow Wilson has been legendary credited with the exclamation "It's like writing history with lightning!", which he would have let out

[2] It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a survey of the enormous corpus of critical literature and public interest developed around Griffith's film. Recently, Melvin Stoke has provided a deep reading of the film's reception and its cultural and political impacts in the extensive study *D.W. Griffith's* The Birth of a Nation*: A History of the "Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford U. P., 2007). A comprehensive reflection on both the artistic achievements of the film and its racist stance (and, per extension, on its fortunes within film scholarship, in which the film has been subjected to apologist readings as well as fierce condemnation) has been carried out, amongst the others, by Daniel Bernardi. See "The Birth of a Nation: Integrating Race into the Narrator System", in Jeffrey Geiger and R. L. Rutsky, eds., *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 82-96.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (London, Athlone Press, 1986), 11.

[4] I am well aware of the absence of a univocal, pacified definition of "remix culture" and "remix theory" – since the concepts have been widely used over the past decade in contexts significantly varying from one another. Although I will not embark on a discussion of "remix culture" and "remix theory" in themselves in this context, it is important to make clear that my main reference point on the topic for this article is the study *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling* by Eduardo Navas (Wien: Springer Verlag, 2007).

when watching the first screening of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* back in 1915.[5] Be it true or not, it was exactly with the quickness and impact of a lightning that Griffith's cinematic narration of the 'birth of the Nation' hit the US. For the many Americans who watched this unprecedented colossal Hollywood production, the knockout was massive: through the eyes straight to the brain, to memory, to History.

In 1915, the US were just recovering from the Civil War – a historical event in which many different geographical, economic, political and cultural elements had converged to generate an explosive situation: the South vs. the North, war chronicles being repeated and distorted from both sides of the Ocean, the interests of land- and slave-owners, the rise of industry, the cruel history of slavery, the imagination of and projections on an African 'motherland', the white routes of trade, abolitionism, the secret routes of the black Underground Railroad escaping routes leading to freedom, the disappointments of life as 'freemen', politics, corruption, money, the KKK, the struggle for black voting rights...[6] In the attempt to provide a unitary narration of such a complex, fragmentary situation – in which conflicting viewpoints co-existed – Griffith's artistic intuition was to invent a new cinematographic narrative technique, which would exploit fragmentation as a way towards unitary story-telling: i.e. montage (editing). By filming, cutting, and reassembling together several pieces of separated strains of continuous narration, *The Birth of Nation* would thus provide a unitary narration of the birth of the US, through the alternate narration of the diverse life incidents of two competing families. One from the North and one from the South, the two families would eventually come to merge at the end of the filmic narration, thanks to a double, criss-crossed marriage.

The technique of editing (montage and alternate narration), which is now totally familiar to 2015 film spectators and therefore almost totally unacknowledged, felt indeed absolutely overwhelming to the 1915 public of *The Birth of a Nation*, and the affective, emotional and physical impact of the film – and its consequent success – were unprecedented. Gilles Deleuze famously highlighted this aspect in his philosophical reading of Griffith's cinema, for which he proposed the name of "parallel editing" or, alternatively, "organic montage".[7] According to the French philosopher, Griffith's editing technique proceeds – i.e. generates movement and action, which means the narrative plot of the film – through series of parallelisms. Characters and incidents are chained to each other within binary relations, which are in turn juxtaposed according to their internal differences (blacks and whites, wealthy classes and the poor, and so on), thus creating a specific organic rhythm. Series never really meet, while they flow together, producing a rhythm that results in a coherent narration resting on Manichean differences.[8]

In *The Birth of a Nation*, "organic montage" contributes to the articulation of a hegemonic narration, a master narrative, whose political implications descend from an aesthetic impingement on human perception. In the movie, the complexity of

[5] This anecdote is also quoted in DJ Spooky's trailer of *Re-birth of a Nation*.

[6] For this historical background, my reference is Oliviero Bergamini, *Storia degli Stati Uniti* (Bari-Roma, Laterza).

[7] For the sake of completeness, it should be clarified that the concept of "organic montage" is used by Deleuze with reference to two major Griffith's films, i.e. *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* (1916), a subsequent film that the American film-maker directed as a way to engage with the controversies raised by *The Birth of a Nation*.

[8] In is important to underline here that for Deleuze the technique of montage is not instrumentally subordinated to narration. On the contrary, according to Deleuze, narration is immanently generated through montage.

narration (the stories of two families) is made cohesive thanks to the alternate cut-and-reprise of several narrative threads, spinning around a main narrative over-arching plot (war), and thus adhering to a single central nucleus: a origin myth, bright, illuminating and powerful as a flash of lighting exploding in a pitch black night sky. According to such a myth, the US would be born from the 'coming together' of two separate territories, thanks to the intervention of bold white knights, the Klan members, who knew how to 'keep blacks at bay' – those same blacks that, according to this historical mythology – had been 'the single cause of war'. By scrupulously arranging every single frame as a self-sufficient, complete section, Griffith deployed numerous close-up shots aimed at capturing the actors' facial expressions in all their intensity. The film also featured entertaining shows-within-the-show, such as dances, for the total engagement of the spectator. Everything was cut and sewn together all over again, through a process that was *modelled after* our (body)mind-processes, in which we perceive, select, cut, synthetize, linearize, associate, merge…

Brilliantly constructed, this specific all too white narration could easily become an effective propaganda tool, an ideologically charged memory act, a mono-linguistic account of American history. A moving (in the sense of both 'touching' and 'in motion') technical and aesthetic study of the ways in which we collectively memorize, *The Birth of a Nation* claimed a realistic approach to history and its density by way of a highly innovative, super elaborated technique. Simultaneously, its awe-inspiring innovative narrative style configured an "itinerary of silencing", i.e. an act of 'erasure' of other potential narrations of American history – those same narrations that are resurrected as digital ghosts in DJ Spookys' *Re-birth of a Nation*.[9]

[9] The expression "itinerary of silencing" is drawn from Gayatri C. Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasim (London-New York: Routledge, 1990), 31.

Re-birth of a Nation: Remixing History

> Jazz time versus Hollywood time … on the mind-screens of contemporary America.
> (Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky, *Material Memories*)

Cutting back from 1915 to 2008, when DJ Spooky's *Re-birth of a Nation* is released as a DVD, the link between image and hegemony, and more widely between perception and the bio/noo-politics of communication, is still very strong – as the trailer of *Re-birth of a Nation* makes clear, suggesting DJ Spooky's artwork's critical positioning and conjunctural dimension. The trailer opens with a precise framing of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, in which the link between US cultural hegemony and the construction of a dominant historical narrative is discussed. It ends instead with an introduction to DJ Spooky's *Re-birth* 're-take' on Griffith, in which it is explained how the artwork applies DJ culture cut 'n' mix techniques to modernist Hollywood cinema. In between the opening and closing sections of the trailer, the African-American artist inserts some visual references to his 'historical present', i.e.

footage from the US military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This makes immediately clear that the main aim of *Re-birth of a Nation* is to open up the US historical, national, racial archive of the past (through a versioning of Griffith's film) in order to force it to confront the present. What the 2008 artwork suggests is the persistence of forms of 'othering' and 'mastering' of every non-hegemonic presence throughout US popular visual culture at large (i.e. cinema and the news).

Moving towards the future, DJ Spooky's art-practice as a DJ and visual artist meets Griffith's film-making practice at the crossroad between historical narrative and cultural narration. *Re-birth of Nation* takes as its starting points Griffith's ingenious insights on how (hi)stories are constructed and his intuitions on the ways in which memory selects, stores and retrieves information. However, these insights and intuitions are updated to the global digital present of a world that is highly and densely connected, and they are used as a lever for a critical speculation on the transcultural dimension of information dynamics. In DJ Spooky's own words, "the DJ metaphor is about thinking around the concept of collage and its place in the everyday world of information, computational modelling, and conceptual art. All of them offer exits from the tired realms of Euro-centric philosophy".[10]

[10] Paul D. Miller (aka DJ Spooky), http://www.djspooky.com/articles/deleuze_and_guattari.php, accessed 14 October 2014.

Acknowledging that the aesthetic deployment of fluxes, fragments and fractures pre-exists the digital turn, DJ Spooky individuates some recalls between Griffith's techniques and contemporary DJ culture. In both cases, narrative fragments are selected and mixed with each other to generate further narrations, engender thoughts and actions, evoke new meanings, and suggest new perceptual possibilities. Nevertheless, DJ Spooky's practice differs from Griffith's practices on a significant aspect: "Griffith was essentially a propagandist for state repression – he created 'cut-up' cinema as a tool to portray multiple situations – but ... he used it to lock down perception.... [F]or a dj ... origin, and destination blur: they become loops, cycles, patterns. The way to explore them is through the filter of woven meaning".[11]

[11] Ibid.

In *Re-birth of Nation*, as the trailer suggests, "truth" and "knowledge" are questioned, while DJ Spooky intervenes on codes. Digitally converted, Griffith's silent drama is first rendered sonorous. Simultaneously, existing images are altered and other visual elements are inserted. Contrary to Griffith, for whom the role of technique was to make the artwork 'feel' as much 'real'/'natural' as possible, DJ Spooky does not hide away the fact that he is intervening on what is shown on screen. Re-editing the editing, DJ Spooky makes Griffith's authoritative voice stutter and turn into a cacophony of potential alternative narrations, which are ultimately left unresolved and unfinished.

The 'original' movie is condensed in a much shorter version, which lasts less than half the time of the 1915 film. DJ Spooky uses a variety of digital interventions to his ends, which can be ideally divided into two main typologies: the insertion of series of juxtaposed images created or selected by the artist, and the superimposition of a series of visual effects provided to DJ Spooky by Gary

Breslin and Adam Lewin of the New York design/production studio panOptic. The inserted images include stills created by DJ Spooky starting from Griffith's shots, to which the artists applies effects such as reversed colouring (b/w) or mirror reflection (resulting less in a doubling than in a deformation and leaking of the image's contours). Alternatively, DJ Spooky mixes counter-images *tout court*, i.e. images sampled from recent works by black artists, which are inserted in the 1915 film to counter its most stereotyping representations. panOptic's superimposed effects consist instead mostly of animated geometrical shapes or diagram-resembling graphics. These can either appear on screen moving transversally and rhythmically from side to side, or can contour specific details of a single 1915 shot (a character, a single detail of a figure, and so on) in order to emphasise it for the viewers by attracting their attention towards it and thus fragmenting the visual continuum. Sound is also a very central element of *Re-birth of Nation*. Rather eerie-sounding and dark, the minimal yet very layered music of the remix merges classical forms (performed by the San Francisco-based string quartet Kronos Quarted) with hip hop and blues (the latter evoking a black presence which is otherwise absent on screen, as the only black characters in the 1915 are in fact whites in blackface).[12]

DJ Spooky's excavation of *The Birth of Nation* is thus firstly a *technical* operation. By converting Griffith's movie to digital and applying to it the cut 'n' mix techniques globally popularised by the cultures of the African diaspora, DJ Spooky performs both a practical reflection on the changes occurring in media culture over time, and a poetical-political enactment of new media culture's potentialities.[13] The outcomes of this intervention are two-fold. On the one side – and in line with a (by now very classical) Marshall McLuhan's intuition – DJ Spooky seems to suggest that it is only through the emergence of a 'new' medium that antecedent media become 'understandable'.[14] *Re-birth of a Nation* is in fact a 'homage' paid to a medium undergoing a critical phase – i.e. modernist cinema, as 'invented' by Griffith – through a re-enactment performed in the space opened up by a 'following' medium – i.e. digital video-art.[15] On the other side, DJ Spooky's intervention interrogates the relation between 'audio' and 'video' nowadays, investigating the ways in which they co-exist being both made of binary code.

Beyond being a technical operation, DJ Spooky's excavation is also an *ethical* operation, whose wider implications lie at the intersection between media theory and postcolonial studies. As this article suggests, the transformations Griffith's film undergoes when re-enacted by DJ Spooky are relevant to a wider cultural politics aimed at deconstructing identity-as-fixed. In *Re-birth of Nation*, Griffith's 1915 film is featured as both a magnificent modernist artwork, and as a cornerstone in the consolidation of a racialised politics of (historical) representation in relation to the formation of the 'American Nation' (the US), in which the presences of all of those who qualify as 'non-White' and 'non-hegemonic' have been structurally repressed. The 'remix' (the 'Re-birth') engages with Griffith's masterpiece to allow this

[12] In August 2015, DJ Spooky and Kronos Quartet relased a 100th anniversary score with the label Cantaloupe Music, which can be streamed here https://cantaloupemusic.bandcamp.com/album/re-birth-of-a-nation, accessed 5 October 2015.

[13] On the diasporic genealogy of cut 'n' mix techniques, see Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London, Methuen, 1987).

[14] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1994).

[15] I am not suggesting here that media follow each other in a chronological, linear fashion. On the contrary, I am alluding to a situation of marked by a rhythm of continuity/discontinuity, akin to the one described by the concept of the "post-cinematic" in Steven Shaviro, *Post-cinematic Affect* (Ropley: Zer0 Books, 2010).

removal to be 'felt': Griffith's avant-garde modernism is repeated *with a difference*.[16] As DJ Spooky himself explains: "It's all a lot more complex than that dualism. This is the new 'operating system' I envisage when I remixed *Birth of a Nation* – the collapse of Wagner, the collapse of the Western scripts of linear progress, the renewal of a world where repetition is a kind of homage to the future by respecting the past".[17]

It is however necessary to specify here that the *technical* and the *ethical* sides of DJ Spooky's artistic intervention are not considered here as separated and distinct from each other. At the same time, I am not suggesting here a simple conflation of the two sides: the use of interactive and heterogeneous 'new' media technologies in contemporary art-practices does not straightforwardly guarantee wider, plural, more ethical outcomes. In fact, the relation between technics and ethics is regulated by chaotic dynamics, in which both human and non-human forces concur. Well before the (important and inescapable) affective turn of the early 21th Century, this was already a key intuition of the linguistic and representational paradigm in media theory. Indeed, of all the insights provided by Birmingham Cultural Studies, one at least still proves to be very effective and useful for the contemporary times, i.e. that techno-cultural outcomes are to be evaluated in their everyday, situated, conjunctural, singular performances. As Stuart Hall put it:

> Identity is not as transparent and unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process.... [T]his view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term "cultural identity" lays claim.[18]

This is especially crucial since questions of (cultural) identity are still very much present in the digital age, where the material dimension of the social is inescapably to be accounted for in every theoretical discourse on technology.[19] In *Re-birth of a Nation*, the 'removed presences' of (past, present) History come back to complicate historical narration and memorialization embodied as *techniques*. They exist – and resist – being evoked by the use of remixing. As DJ Spooky writes:

> The idea of the "remix" is pretty trendy these days – as usual people tend to "script" over the multi-cultural links: the economics of "re-purposing", "outsourcing" and above all, of living in an "experience economy" – these are things that fuel African American culture, and its active dissemination in all of the diaspora of Afro-Modernity. ... Black culture has been the world's "subconscious" for most of the last several centuries - it has been the operating system of a culture that refuses to realize that its ideals have died long ago. The threads of the fabric of contemporary 21st century culture, the media landscape of filaments, systems, fiber optic cables, satellite transmissions, and so on - these are all rhizomatic. They are relational architectures – the[y] move in

[16] A first critical take on *The Birth of Nation* had already been realized by Guy Debord using the asthetical-political strategy of *détournement*. See Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "Mode d'emploi du détournement", *Les lèvres nues*, n. 8 (May), 1956.

[17] http://www.djspooky.com/articles/deleuze_and_guattari.php, accessed 13 October 2014.

[18] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation", in Houston A. Backer Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, eds., *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (London-Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 210.

[19] See Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis, MN: MIT, 2008).

[20] http://www.djspooky.com/articles/deleuze_and_guattari.php, accessed 14 October 2014.

synchronization. The meshwork needs to be polyphonic. The gears move in different cadences, but they create movement. They need to be pulled apart so that we can break the loops holding the past and present together so that the future can leak through.[20]

By manipulating some constitutive elements of Griffith's film, *Re-birth of Nation* activates some latent reflection that were lying within the film. The "re-birth" the title of the artwork alludes to could then be read as an excavation of a dead, closed archive in order to bring some new, future perspectives to the fore.[21] DJ Spooky's poetical practice is thus a transcultural investigation of global technology, which operates on perception through the repetition of the canon of Western audio-visual texts, in order to investigate their hidden, racialized dimensions.

In fact, DJ Spooky's intervention *on* Griffith does not aim to 'amend' faulty narrations, and the African-American artist does in fact intervene barely to alter the ghastly content of the 1915 film. More subtly, by manipulating the surface of the screen where Griffith's movie is projected, DJ Spooky acts on the articulation between the *techno-matter of the filmic* in itself, and the *complex regimes* organising the ways in which 'we' make experience of the world (of which the filmic is a mode). The artist turns the screen into a complex 'space' on the verge of abstraction, where hints and clues are disseminated. A sort of spirit board evoking ghosts from the past: other figures that had been removed from historical narration in Griffith's account, whose present testimony to history remains however unclear, non-univocal – ultimately, a ghostly matter.

[21] I use the word "archive" here as a hint to a recent 'turn' in research and art towards different forms of archives – a terrain which is still very open and problematic (see for ex. Jamie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* [London: Routledge, 2014]; and Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October*, 110, 3-22). Although the argument would require a specific, more extended reflection – that goes beyond the scope of this article – I would like to specify that I am aware of the fact that I am relying on an extended concept of the "archive" here, i.e. not referring to a 'lost' text (since Griffith's film is not a lost artefact from the past). I use the term here in a non-linear temporal fashion, referring to a text in which several potential narrations co-exist, only a part of which is in full visibility.

Conclusions

Reflecting on the power of abstraction, DJ Spooky himself claims that

> Abstraction is the ultimate weapon.... It defies limits, and posits "the subject" as an imploded category – one that is, and always has been, basically a construct. What other constructs - the nation state, the idea of the "self" etc. – are linked to this category that is slowly being pulled apart by the centrifugal forces of digital media?[22]

[22] http://www.djspooky.com/articles/deleuze_and_guattari.php, accessed 3 October 2015.

Whereas the artist highlights the (undeniable) specificity of digital media to the wider cultural repercussions of his practice on concepts such as identity and the nation, it is however my contention that his take on remix culture in *Re-birth of a Nation* places his practice within a longer genealogy of African-American techno-experimentalism. As claimed by Alexander G. Weheliye in his *Phonographies* in relation to sound, black artists have since long used technologies to overhaul key notions of modernity such as identity, subjectivity, temporality, and so on.[23] A similar process is at play also in DJ Spooky's use of audio-visual remix, in which the repressed of (film) history returns as a series of experimental "techniques":

[23] Alexander G. Wehwliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham NC: Duke, 2005).

"What you do as a DJ is ... speaking with the voices of the dead, playing with that sense of presence and absence. If the mix doesn't evoke something, it doesn't work".[24] Simultaneously, while strongly placed within this genealogy – and while being expression of the ongoing contemporary 'archival' and 'remix' turns in research-by-art – *Re-birth of a Nation* is also very much different from other expressions of remix culture, exactly insofar as it faces a mostly uneasy knot, in which techno-experimentalism and racist formation are entwined.

Taking as its focus the relation between D.W. Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation* and DJ Spooky's contemporary re-mix *Re-birth of a Nation*, this article has in fact focused precisely on the above-mentioned "knot". The analysis here presented has benefited from an already existing and still expanding corpus of media theory investigating the organisation of perception in the modern cinematic and the contemporary post-cinematic eras, and from the body of work developed within post-colonial theory in relation to the practices of visual narration and memorialisation and the process of racialisation. The brief reference to the necessity to consider DJ Spooky's artwork as part of a wider genealogy of black media practices has also allowed me to advance two crucial (and more general) propositions. First, the importance of increasingly considering (and creating) non-linear, ecological approaches to media practices – beyond any techno-historical categorisation (the analogue/digital and form/content binarisms being just two of many disempowering impasses). Secondly, the centrality of expanding on the presence of several, parallel and often neglected genealogies of media theory and practices, all concurring together (non-necessarily in a pacified way) to create contemporary 'media ecologies'.

To finally round off my argumentation, I will briefly return more closely to DJ Spooky's *Re-birth of Nation*, to propose that a post-colonial approach to media theory and practice may be a possible way to tackle both the powers and potentials of technology, as far as post-colonial media theory configures a deconstructive gesture. As suggested by Silvana Carotenuto, DJ Spooky's technological practice has indeed a deconstructive dimension to itself, as it unfolds the ethical dimension of "forgiveness". In her words:

> The present may 'forgive' the horrors of the past. 'Forgiveness' takes place by intensifying the 'technical' material, which allowed for horror itself to take place (by showing the subtle, internal and uncontrollable workings it implied). Intensification – which means the singular acquisition of a practice and a technique face to face with horror, with evil, with the monstrous – opens the way to a cure operating through perception: to the act of taking care of the world's destiny. In this way, horror is forgiven, the burden of the past is dematerialized through technical transformation, and art – as an engaged testimony to the world – can contribute to create those social, political and cultural conditions that might prevent horror from repeating in the time to-come.[25]

[24] DJ Spooky, cit. in Erik Davis, *Remixing the Matrix*, 2003 (http://www.egs.edu/faculty/dj-spooky-paul-miller/articles/remixing-the-matrix-an-interview-with-paul-d-miller/). The trope of *the ghost/the dead* in relation to slavery, memory and African-American media culture and modernism is everywhere in my article, as the red thread unfolding across my argument. I am aware however that the political potentiality of this trope should deserve a closer and more precise exploration, especially given its relevance to African-American literary, artistic and scholarly production.

[25] Silvana Carotenuto, "Tra perdono, tecnologia e futuro: l'interculturalità contemporanea. Risposta a Beatrice Ferrara", in Rossella Bonito Oliva, ed., *Identità in dialogo*, 107; my translation.

Under this light, *Re-birth of Nation* appears finally not simply as the umpteenth visual culture product, but more as a curatorial act – with 'curatorship' here referring to both the process of *editing* and the process of *healing* (Lat. *curare*).

Michaela Quadraro

Ghosting the Postcolonial Archive.
Digital Technologies and Diasporic Visualities in Contemporary Black British Art

Abstract: The essay focuses on the critical articulation of a black diaspora in Europe, through the investigation of two works of contemporary British artists: Keith Piper's digital video *Ghosting the Archive* (2005) and Sonia Boyce's exhibition "Scat" (2013). In his installation Piper intervenes materially in the gaps between the rigid limits of conventional and systematised archives: he opens the boxes of Birmingham Central Library and develops a work that reactivates a concatenation of forgotten experiences of migration. In her exhibition "Scat" Boyce shows three pieces that refer to the unconventional improvisation in jazz and develop a critical dispersal of history: what her works have in common is an interest in the voice, in terms of authority and resistance, and in the reconfiguration of the archive as an aspiration for the future, rather than a mere preservation of the past. Challenging the consecrated reverence of institutionalised archival practices, Piper and Boyce elaborate alternatives devotional collections that are not relegated to a distant and unquestionable past. Enhanced by the digital forms of mediation and technology, their art projects open to the multiple movements of cultural identity and constantly remind us of the actual conditions of mutation, emergence and circulation of diasporic formations.

Keywords: *art*, *race*, *digital archive*, *memory*

Introduction

This paper explores contemporary art practices opening the investigation of questions of racial difference and racialized space, and the critical articulation of a black diaspora in Europe. In particular, the focus is on the works of Keith Piper and Sonia Boyce, two black British artists who interrupt the presumed continuity of conventional and systematised archives and develop the question of the archive in Arjun Appadurai's terms of a material transformation and of a tangible work on the future, rather than a mere preservation of an unquestionable past.[1] Archives can be re-manipulated and re-opened through digital technology or, we could say, brought back to life. For Achille Mbembe, every archive, in its architectural dimension, its organisation and divisions, is always something of a cemetery, of a place where fragments of lives are preserved but also placed in a tomb, in other words concealed and set apart from the visible.

Archives rest on the burying of remains, on a sepulchre where, in Mbembe's work, the historian and the archivist manipulate fragments in "an intimate relationship with a world alive only by virtue of an initial event that is represented by the act of dying".[2] Since no existing archive has the possibility to preserve an entire history, we are always confronted by a selection, an assemblage of pieces that

[1] Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration", in Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder, eds., *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2003).

[2] Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits", in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 2002), 25.

are put together in an illusion of coherence.

Piper and Boyce challenge the undisputed authority and the consecrated reverence of the archive, through the creative elaboration of an alternative sense of the sacred, of a devotional collection that is not relegated to a distant and undeniable past. Indeed, art practices can be considered as part of the general cultural and political formation of multicultural societies; they open to the manifold transits of cultural identity and act as a concrete reminder of the conditions of mutation, emergence and circulation of diasporic formations.

Transcultural Visual Imaginaries

This essay draws on Stuart Hall's account that describes black not as a fixed genetic mark, but as a signifier of a historical and dynamic difference, always located and articulated with other elements, always capable of producing its unsettling consequences.[3] Actually, if we observe Europe through a postcolonial lens, it becomes clear that decolonized peoples who have made their home here act as a perpetual reminder of the ways in which the once metropolitan and imperial centres have been shaped by the narrations of their global peripheries. The traces of the historical legacy of colonialism become the basis for a concrete work in the present moment. Migratory movements of bodies and imaginaries have thus contributed to the constitution of a trans-national and diasporic world – characterised by passages, interstices and in-between spaces – and to the displacement of cultural identities. It is precisely for these reasons that the postcolonial horizon critically interrupts the historiographical narration of Western culture. As Mbembe has recently argued, the focus is not on the critique of the West per se, but on the consequences produced by colonial conceptions of reason and humanism.[4]

Furthermore, in choosing the visual arts as a privileged point on these issues, the emphasis is on the idea that art practices can be considered as part of the cultural and political formation of multicultural societies. As Elizabeth Grosz proposes, art is the site of imagination, it addresses problems and provokes, not so much the elaboration of images in which the subject might recognise itself, but real changes and reciprocal exchanges of elements.[5] It is for this reason that art cannot be a frivolous ornamentation: it is a vital form of impact that does not merely concentrate on the observation of an object, but on the resonances, the transitions and the silences. In this sense, "art is intensely political": it elaborates alternative possibilities and provokes a perceptual anticipation of the future (79).

Within the complex cartography of global modernity, the encounter with art proposes an ethical-aesthetical cut, a critical reflection on the intertwining cultural, geographical, historical and economic contexts of the contemporary world. Art practices that emerge from experiences of migration and hybridity are not so much to be interpreted as the objects of a political and social analysis; rather, the

[3] Stuart Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-War History", *History Workshop Journal,* 61 (Spring 2006), 1-24.

[4] Achille Mbembe, "What Is Postcolonial Thinking?", *Eurozine*, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-01-09-mbembe-en.html, accessed 20 September 2014.

[5] Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2008). All further references in text.

languages of those works are discussed to question forms and canons, and to explore the relation between identity and difference, geographical locations and dislocations.

Engaging the visual as an interdisciplinary and fluid interpretative frame, it is possible to debate and contest social interactions of racialized identities, gender and class. Within this context, visuality – as a cultural practice – refers to the registers in which both the image and its meanings operate. An essential inspiration for these intuitions is represented by Frantz Fanon, whose work activates psychoanalysis in the investigation of colonialism and the visual construction of racialized subjectivities: actually, it is through the other's gaze that Fanon unveils "the fact of blackness".[6]

At the end of the Nineties, visual culture came to be defined as a transversal field of inquiry that crosses art, cinema and media studies. The interactions between the viewer-as-subject and the viewed object are turned, in Nicholas Mirzoeff's intuitions, into visual events that provoke the creation and the circulation of images.[7] Visuality is thus developed as a problematic place, where it is possible to re-think the consolidation of power as a visualised model on a global scale and the place of visual subjects within that system, in other words people defined as the agents of sight and as the objects of particular discourses of visuality. Through ambivalences and interstices, the issue of power in the field of visual culture concerns the question of representation.[8] In particular, this interconnection leads to the very specificity of the images that confront the new and emerging conditions of multicultural societies.

Visuality crucially articulates the complex relationship between cultural identity and national belonging. This is particularly clear if we highlight the importance of photography for migrant communities: on the individual level this is translated into the act of collecting diaries, letters, personal belongings or, more recently, digital repositories; on the social level the urge to preserve public records or historical documents is embodied in the official spaces of museums, city archives and libraries. However, what happens when conserving practices of archiving and collecting come to be unsettled by minor narratives generated within the shared social, cultural and political complexity of the contemporary world?

Image thus plays a crucial role not only in terms of documentation and memory, but also in terms of providing a counter-history – an alternative narration – that challenges stereotypes and negative assumptions.[9] In this sense documentaries, videos, photography, with their languages of/on the border, play a crucial role in the creation of unconventional archives and multiple performances of black European subjects in formation. This perspective critically visualises unconventional appropriations of storage places and collections, and forces us to identify other buildings, other dwellings, where a compelling challenge takes place, the task of 'circulating memory', as the British artist Isaac Julien would suggest.[10]

In his essay "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-war

[6] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1986 [1952]).

[7] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London-New York: Routledge, 1999).

[8] Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage and Open University, 1997).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Isaac Julien, "Creolizing Vision", in Okwui Enwezor et al., eds., *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta 11 Platform 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003).

[11] Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain", 17.

[12] David A. Bailey et al., eds., *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (London & Durham: Duke U. P., 2005).

[13] Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain", 17.

[14] Manthia Diawara, "Black British Cinema: Spectatorship and Identity Formation in *Territories*", in Houston A. Baker Jr, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, eds., *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 295.

History" (2006), Hall identifies different moments in the genealogy of the black diaspora visual arts in post-war Britain. In particular, the focus of this paper is on the generation that Hall describes as the second wave of those black British artists, who were born in the 1960s and started exhibiting their works two decades later. Artists such as Keith Piper, Sonia Boyce, Eddie Chambers and Donald Rodney, among others, emerged in a new political horizon that had 'race' – instead of anti-colonialism – as the determining process for their highly politicised visual imaginaries. In the early 1980s this tendency overlapped with the idea of a Black Arts Movement (BAM), promoted by Chambers, Piper, Marlene Smith and others, that was established on a 'black aesthetic' and the idea of an Afro-centred black identity.[11]

The BAM began with painting and then shifted to an interest in film and video, opening the door to an overflowing of independent exhibitions.[12] This movement, indeed, contributed to a critical perspective that displaced Western models and opened a transcultural approach on cultural practice. This was also the prelude to an extraordinary explosion of work by artists such as Zineb Sedira and Sutapa Biswas, and of creative productions characterised by the challenge to documentary realism and the foregrounding of the black body as the key racial signifier.[13]

For example, in the films *Territories*, directed by Isaac Julien in 1984, and *Handsworth Songs*, directed by John Akomfrah in 1986, the civil disturbances of those years in London and Birmingham are only a point of departure. The starting point is not so much the event of the Notting Hill Carnival and its riots, rather the fragmentary state of the narration that places the spectator in a position of agency. As Manthia Diawara stresses, Julien and his Collective Sankofa depict "the intersections, the contradictory and the intermediary spaces between blackness and Englishness, Britishness and Caribbeanness, and among race, class, and sexuality".[14] In a similar way to *Territories*, Akomfrah's film was produced during the so-called 'workshop movement', that provided a space for intervening and thinking critically about the means of representation and the images of race and difference. Through the fragmentary collage of archival material, original images, and oneiric scenes, both films dislocate the symbolic system of the mainstream master narrative, interrupt the objective account of the reality and liberate the expressive and material dimension of the image.

In this moment, we also find a preoccupation with the body, in particular with the intentional staging of the black body. The film *Looking for Langston*, directed by Julien in 1989, indeed, is an example of a counter-strategy that does not choose to add positive images to the negative depiction of dominant representations. Instead of reiterating the constitution of the meaning by the binaries, this film locates itself within the ambivalences of representation itself, trying to contest it from within. Hence, instead of avoiding the black body, that has been so involved in the complexities of power and subordination, this body – black, male and homosexual – becomes the main site of the struggle. Working within and through the eye of

representation, stereotypes are made to work against themselves to contest the dominant gendered and sexual definitions of racial difference.

The black British artists of the second wave experienced the historical conjuncture of those years, characterised by a violent racialized exclusion and a marginalisation from society's mainstream, burdened with stereotyped discourses about questions of identity and belonging.[15] Identity, in particular, constituted a productive horizon for artists, not as an essential, fixed entity, but rather as the process of producing constantly a new black subject that was inside, and not outside, representation, because culture identities go through constant transformations and are subject to an endless play of different conjunctures.[16] Thus, the concrete strategies proposed by visual arts are extremely critical and interrupt the univocal Western political discourse through an unavoidable exploration of the multiple meanings of migratory dislocations.

The works of these artists operate in the interstices between cultures and in the political, historical, and theoretic conjuncture of the diasporic experience. The emergent space and interpretive frame of the diaspora is rooted not only in earlier imperial settlements and older structures of power, but also in the experience of vulnerable minorities and the conditions of refugee camps, detention centres, and invisible economies of the advanced world. Moreover, as Hall suggests, the idea of the diaspora questions the notions of a cultural origin, of roots, and authenticity. "It unpicks the claims made for the unities of culturally homogeneous, racially purified national cultures and identities".[17] Diaspora is where the politics of gender, class, and race form together a new, powerful and unstable articulation that does not provide easy answers, but raises "new questions, which proliferate across older frames of thought, social engagement and political activity" (ibid.).

Relocating the Fragments of the Archive

Keith Piper is a multi-media British artist, curator, researcher and academic, born in 1960 to Caribbean parents, whose work develops the condition of living in the interstices and calls into question notions of a cultural authenticity and a fixed national identity.[18] The world in which his work emerged was a Britain that, observed through a postcolonial lens, was displaced by the migratory movements of subjects whose parents had come from formerly colonised countries and made their home in the once imperial centres of the metropolis.

It is Birmingham, the city where Piper was brought up, that comes to be re-framed in the motif of the journey, in the incessant movements between departure and return, separation and belonging, that contribute to the constitution of transnational and diasporic global spaces. It is Birmingham Central Library, the place chosen by Piper for a residency, that allows him to develop his interest in institutionalised collections, in particular in the narratives of the archive, its physical architecture and categorising mechanisms. In 2005, he produced the digital

[15] See Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[16] Hall, ed., *Representation.*

[17] Stuart Hall, "Avtar Brah's Cartographies: Moment, Method, Meaning", *Feminist Review*, 100 (2012), 30.

[18] Keith Piper, *Relocating the Remains* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1997).

installation *Ghosting the Archive*, as part of a bigger Arts Council project called *Necessary Journeys*. He physically opened the boxes of Birmingham City Archive and developed a new work practice that reacts to the material he found, reactivating the traces of the stories that lie in the collection. In particular, he unpacked the boxes housed in the so-called Dyche Collection, that consists of more than ten thousand images, mostly unidentified, both proof prints and negatives, from the studios of Ernest Dyche (1887-1973), a commercial portrait photographer who operated in the suburbs of the inner area of Birmingham and became very popular within the communities of migrants arriving from the Indian subcontinent, African countries and Caribbean islands from the 1950s to 1970s.[19] Until its closure, the Dyche Studio provided a significant repository of British history during a complicated phase of the creation of black Britain. In particular, it produced countless portraits of members of those communities that were circulated both in the United Kingdom and in the former colonies: images that Piper found without names or other identifying elements.

As Gen Doy points out, these images took part in what could be called a "reverse immigration": they were indeed sent back to the Caribbean, India or Pakistan, to family members, friends or for marriage arrangements and also "lightened", if necessary, in order to move toward an ideal whiteness.[20] Many of the pictures convey messages about the migrants' success in Britain and show black people as glamorous and good-looking, wearing either elegant outfits or work uniforms, as if the continuous discriminations, registered by the black residents of Birmingham in those years, were absent from the immutable and fixed set of the studio. Furthermore, these photos were personal and at the same time collective memories that counterbalanced the traditional depiction of migrants as a social problem.

The spectral negatives of Dyche Collection do not allow the viewer to look for physical attributes of blackness, original or essential meanings. Rather, they require a reconstruction work and a critical confrontation with the multiple historical experiences of racialization and cultural formation that shaped the migrant communities. The negatives are inscribed in multiple historical contexts and register both the presence and the absence of the black subject, not in terms of an innocent photographic archive, rather as the exploration of alternative histories that contain and exceed the frame. In particular, while they materialise bodies and memories, the negatives obscure race through a reversal of the colour of the skin from dark to light, from black to white.

In *Ghosting the Archive* the negative plates, held by Piper in a white-gloved hand, are reframed one after the other in the contemporary space of Birmingham City Archive by a digital camera. A shutter click presents each time a different negative plate that, bearing a ghostly presence, slowly morphs into something else: family groups, women with newly born children, men seated on the chairs provided at Dyche Studio wearing elegant outfits or work uniforms, new coats or borrowed

[19] Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham and London: Duke U. P., 2012).

[20] Gen Doy, *Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Postmodernity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 131.

ones. In other words, the whole digital image of Birmingham Central Library gradually morphs into a negative one, while the negative plate in the centre of the frame progressively changes: the light areas of the image on film become dark, while dark areas give way to the light areas of the photograph. In this way, the original subjects of the picture emerge from obscurity and have the chance to appear again within the contemporary time-space.

What comes into the light of *Ghosting the Archive* is certainly an absence out of which Dyche's clients express a singular and collective presence. Their absence refers to a past that irrupts into the present with the entire burden and consequences of its abolition. This is the scar they leave between the pre-ordained shelves of the archive: preserving in the context of archival classification is closely associated with a process of profound forgetting. These portraits are not the mere reproductions of faces and traits, but they express a force that has been drawn, pulled, or extracted. In Piper's extensive research, indeed, there is no attempt to get inside the subjects of the photos and to understand what they express, because his artistic practice does not intend to grasp or transmit fixed meanings, rather it engages in a critical relation with the materiality of race. Piper's work on the Dyche Collection demonstrates that race is not a substance that can be read transparently by the image. Rather, race matters, as Tina Campt suggests, and materialises socially as a mark of human difference and a powerful performative process that produces meaningful instances and crucial material affects.[21] The negatives that Piper re-frames in the centre of the contemporary digital picture constantly remind us of the materiality of racial and diasporic formations.

[21] Campt, *Image Matters.*

Female *Devotional* Collections

Sonia Boyce is an artist of African Caribbean descent, born in London in 1962. Her early work addresses issues of race, representation and urban spaces through pastel drawings and photographic collages that question dominant media stereotyped narrations.[22] Like Keith Piper, she belongs to the so-called second wave of diaspora visual artists, who started exhibiting their works in the 1980s, in a British post-war society that was going through massive cultural and political changes. Her early production is a highly graphic and iconographic art of lines and montages, images and slogans, cut-outs and collages, in which the black body – often distorted and polemical – becomes a cyclical motif. Very different both from the capitalist logic of accumulation and the multicultural rhetoric of integration, the feminist collage demonstrates that cutting and collecting can stimulate an on-going process of transformation and an active production of cultural memory. In particular, the dividing of the body is very frequent in the works of Boyce in which different body-parts are analysed as the means that have been historically and socially used by the patriarchal construction of identity. Moreover, in foregrounding a body that is often transgressive and unpleasant, Boyce's strategies

[22] Gilane Tawadros, *Sonia Boyce: Speaking in Tongues* (London: Kala Press, 1997).

aim at rewriting the traditional stereotyped representation of black women, inherited from slavery and adopted by colonial discourse.

Recently Boyce's work has shifted to a variety of media that combines photography, prints, text, video, sound, and installation to explore the interweaving of personal and collective histories, and issues around dislocations, migration, and diaspora. In 2013, she occupied the public spaces in Rivington Place, London, with the solo exhibition "Scat", that included the three major pieces *For you, only you* (2007), *The Devotional Wallpaper* (2008-), and *Oh Adelaide* (2010). What these works all have in common is an interest in the voice – in terms of authority and resistance – and in the archive as art practice, as putting different elements together that feed the archive with an aspiration for the future, rather than mere preservation of the past. The exhibition's title "Scat", indeed, refers to the unconventional improvisation in jazz and, here, is intimately related to the question of dispersal and playing with history, because culture identities have always histories and undergo constant transformation. Far from being crystallised in a mere preservation of history, identities demonstrate the different positioning within the narratives of the past.

In *For you, only you,* the first piece of the exhibition, Boyce orchestrates an improbable meeting between the English vocal consort Alamire – specialised in medieval and Renaissance music – and the contemporary London-based Greek sound artist Mikhail Karikis, whose voice constantly breaks the continuity of the chorus. His fractured vocalisations interrupt what the singers normally do: his intervention, impregnated with a Balkan rhythm, that is so familiar to him, is actually very unfamiliar to the singers and, therefore, reconfigures the grammar and the structure of their usual performance. For example, during the silences and the empty spaces, Karikis clears his throat once, twice, again, and again, up to the time that the crowd gets really suspicious.

As in her collages, Boyce combines different items together to highlight the question of nonsense. In *For you, only you* she deliberately orchestrates a nonsense – that is to not make sense – in particular through the voluntary choice of vocalisations that are not words and do not belong to the appropriate language. Therefore, we could say that the decision to break the rules and to express nonsense is inevitably a form of resistance against the power of language.[23] This also leads to the idea of sharing a common space, where difference is suddenly felt and perceived as an unfamiliar presence. So, *For you, only you* is a work on racial difference in many ways, in particular on the multiple shades of difference. Here, difference is not visible, rather it is heard, and it is much more unsettling because the stranger presence in the chorus – Karikis' white skin – subverts any expectations initially set by his similarity with the other singers and the director.

A rupture with the conventions is also very evident in *The Devotional Collection* that is an archive of CDs, cassettes, and vinyl records related to black British female singers that Boyce has been developing since 1999. In Rivington Place elements of

[23] Sonia Boyce, *Scat – Sonia Boyce: Sound and Collaboration*, exhibition guide, Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 5 June-27 July 2013.

this unconventional archive are presented in the context of her *Devotional Wallpaper*, a work in which Boyce creates, with an overt request of supplementary contributions to the audience, a large-scale printed list with the names of two hundreds women who have been great, but often marginal, sources of inspiration: on the wall the names of these singers resonate with each other through an infinite and vibrant grid that multiplies lines around typed letters. Her aim is neither to represent those performers nor to speak for them; rather, she intends to reopen the archive and to dismantle the divisions between an inside and an outside. Boyce avoids the trap of speaking about – of giving voice to – those underprivileged female performers of the music industry and insists on what Trinh T. Minh-ha has articulated in her film *Reassemblage* (1982) as speaking 'with' the other or 'nearby'. Boyce's research maintains a productive openness that always depends on the creative force of multiple experiences. This is also a precarious ground, where established positions and materials are unsettled by the 'now' and allow the artist to enter the 'yet-to-be-named' in the very instance of encounter.

As part of *The Devotional Collection*, we finally have the work *Oh Adelaide*, a collaboration by Boyce and sound artist Ain Bailey. This video reworks the archive footage of the American-born jazz singer and entertainer Adelaide Hall (1901-1993), who lived in London from the 1930s until her death. Here, Hall's voice – a brilliant example of the wordless jazz technique known as 'scat' – is made unrecognisable, because it is mixed with other recordings and songs from Boyce's devotional archive: photographic motionless images fix the moment and surround the disappearing face of the entertainer with circles of an extremely bright light, so as to blind the spectators' eyes. This luminescent white mass obscures and at the same time reveals details of the jazz singer: parts of her body are shown and suddenly are covered to critically engage with the coding representation of the female body and the male voyeuristic desire to isolate and possess distinct portions of this body.[24] In addition to this, the soundtrack is unfamiliar and violent: the historical archive expressed by the sibilant whispers of vinyl records is dismantled and challenged by the juxtaposition with noise, scraping, fiction and ghostly indistinct sounds. The archive as an innocent accumulation of documents is thus revealed in fragments that push us to think about the dynamics through which all traces are produced.

[24] Sophie Orlando, 'Sonia Boyce: Sound, Tension and the Sacred', in Sonia Boyce, *Scat*, exhibition guide, 7-14.

Final Remarks

The art projects explored in this essay articulate and dismantle the relation between colours, in particular between whiteness and blackness in the context of cultural identities. This is palpable in the interchange of dark and light in the negatives, foregrounded by Piper in Birmingham City Archive, and in the shining white mass that alternately hides and reveals the black body of the singer Adelaide Hall, encountered in Boyce's personal devotional archive. In the video *Ghosting the Archive*

and in the exhibition "Scat", indeed, the deliberate alternation of black and white becomes a strategy of open resistance that deviates from the norm and renders the viewed objects unrecognisable and, therefore, unclassifiable. This act distorts the realistic shape of the black body within the frame and denies the viewer the power of the gaze. Or, to put it differently, the white colour critically prevents the looking subject to possess the object and to grasp its meaning.

Amplified by the digital forms of mediation and technology, the art projects explored in this paper envision the possibility for the archives to become material sites of transformation. In Piper's work the harsh sound of the camera shutter solicits the ear and marks a new phase in which a photo turns out to be another one, where an ending becomes a new beginning. In *Ghosting the Archive* photos, like Dyche's clients, appear, disappear and re-appear with no apparent continuity, except for the uninterrupted movement of the images themselves and for the persistency of the sound of the shutter click. As Trinh T. Minh-ha argues, the digital video image is an image constantly in formation, in a process of appearing and disappearing that highlights transformations and transitions.[25] The video renders tangible the passing of time in the comings and goings of the photos, their infinite repetition and continual morphing, their vanishing into darkness and their return anew on the screen. Here, digital technology demonstrates that in every movement there are so many passages to be registered, and every obsession for preservation inevitably brings a process of forgetting with it.

The negatives of *Ghosting the Archive* resonate with the affective sensorium of the *Devotional* series, with a footage that is stretched through digital technology and rendered open to the many movements of cultural identity. The works explored here constantly remind us of the materiality of racial and diasporic formations that inhabit the real and produce affective and actual conditions of mutation, emergence and circulation. Art practices are wholly effective for challenging the persistence of race and differential racisms that emerge from the transformations of global capitalism and from the proliferation of multi-scalar borders that play a crucial role in the restructuring of working lives. Hence, the archives reconfigured by Piper and Boyce embody in a tangible way the affective relations of migration and materialise black European subjectivities in formation.

[25] Trinh T. Minh–ha, *D-Passage: The Digital Way* (Durham and London: Duke U. P., 2013).

Stamatia Portanova

A Postcolonial Cybersemiotics.
Tradition and Modernity in Shobana Jeyasingh's Chaosmopolitan Choreographies

Abstract: This article discusses the articulation of postcolonial thought through the expressive form of choreography, and its relation with a variegated geographic and cultural dimension. It analyses the works of Anglo-Indian choreographer and performer Shobana Jeyasingh, particularly focusing on her use of the Bharata Natyam Indian dance, a technique consisting of detailed hands and feet gestures performed while standing on a bent-knees position. By drawing on Charles S. Peirce's semiotics, on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy, and on the cybernetic theories of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, the article investigates how dance can be considered as a technique rather than a language: a movement technology producing sensations and meanings at the same time. By combining the classicity of Indian tradition with that of Western contemporary dance, Ruma Devi with Merce Cunningham, the purity of the dancing body with its mathematical patterns, and by incorporating video technology to the live performances, Jeyasingh's choreographies are able to suggest a cybernetic sense of sacredness, intended as a material connection between the dancing body and its (past and future) spatiotemporal enviroment(s).

Keywords: *postcolonial, choreography, Shobana Jeyasingh, semiotics, cybernetics, sacredness*

"Two dancers move across the stage in classical style, while another pair slide and push themselves over the floor as if physically gauging the lie of the land. Immediately a tension is set up ...".[1] The tension appears between two different ways of moving: a codified way and an exploratory way, the precisely defined little jumps of Bharata Natyam (a sacred classical dance of Indian origin) and the soft improvised slides of contemporary dance. In the first movement, the body covers a spatial distance through prescribed and finite displacements; in the other, it continuously occupies space by distributing itself contingently across all its points.

Tradition and modernity are the two main cultural and political senses interwoven by the discordant gestures of Shobana Jeyasingh's dances. Born in Chennai (India), Jeyasingh is a woman choreographer now living and working in London. If creativity (and specifically choreographic creativity) is usually defined as the capacity of attuning oneself to a sort of inborn kinaesthetic wisdom, Jeyasingh's rejection of this unilateral concept is in line with the postcolonial migrant's rejection of any nostalgia for her homeland. This article will try to decipher Jeyasingh's choreographic postcolonialism, and particularly its controversial representational relation to India, through the theoretical lens of Charles S. Peirce's semiotics. This peculiar methodological choice was determined by an important aspect mostly unnoticed in Peirce's theory: that is, its capacity to feel the sense of a sign as a 'sensation', before interpreting it as a

[1] Sanjoy Roy, "Multiple Choice: Profile of Shobana Jeyasingh", http://sanjoyroy.net/1997/09/multiple-choice-shobana-jeyasingh/, accessed 1 August 2015.

'meaning'. This *sensational* semiotic approach will be followed by a cybernetic vision of dance as a technical system, a set of movement techniques showing strong reciprocal relations with their (past and future, close and distant) environment(s).

The following reflections will therefore develop from the encounter of three main points of view: the postcolonial view, which could be defined as her preference for cultural 'adaptations' over 'purity'; Peircean semiotics where, in line with the postcolonial vision, the sign-meaning binary relation presupposed by structuralism is complexified by sensation as a further element of semiotic analysis; and the cybernetic perspective, a scientific framework which studies the adaptative and connective capacities of communication systems. In this 'postcolonial cyber-semiotics', it makes sense to consider dance as a movement technique that is able to make sensations emerge alongside meanings. Under this light, the two techniques coexisting in all Jeyasingh's choreographies seem to finally suggest two differing senses of 'sacredness': jumping as a way to fill the distance which separates the dancer from the infinity of God, sliding as a way to establish a continuous cybernetic connection between the body and its environment. In this ambiguity, the very notion of 'sacredness' loses its meaning of classical purity, to become a semiotic keyword that can make us *sense* the postcolonial character of Jeyasingh's dances.

The Premiss: Staging the Encounter

Three sharply dressed young men, hips jutting, fingers snapping and bodies twisted in freeze-frames, stand in a confrontational, defensive attitude.[2]

Echoing the words of Christian Metz, we can say that choreography, like cinema, can be considered as a language on two parallel levels: 1) by becoming narrative and presenting a story; 2) as a consequence, by conceiving gestures and steps as its propositions or utterances.[3] If we consider the first hypothesis, all Jeyasingh's choreographies can clearly be read as representations of contemporary Indianness, as they tell us the story of postcolonial India: choreography as another language for the Indian diaspora. The choreography of *Faultline*, for example, from which the above three young men scene was extrapolated, is inspired by the anxiety and violence proliferating in and around Asian youth gangs in London after the 2005 bombings, a thematic trigger extremely unusual for Indian classical dance but extremely common in postcolonial representations; while her latest choreography *La Bayadère. The Ninth Life* narrates the persisting fascination of the West with the myth of the Orient.[4] Racism and orientalism are in fact the two linguistic acts delimiting the figure of the 'stranger', two forms of epistemological capture extensively discussed (and undermined) by the critiques of postcolonial authors dear to Jeyasingh, such as Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha. And yet, it is important to remember that, as argued by Julia Kristeva, that of 'the stranger' is first of all the point of view of those who, even in their own land, in their own place, feel 'exiled'.[5] It is in this sense that Jeyasingh admits, "The country I represent, ... is

[2] S. Roy, "Shobana Jeyasingh: *Faultline, Bruise Blood*" http://sanjoyroy.net/2010/12/shobana-jeyasingh-faultline-bruise-blood/, accessed 1 August 2015.

[3] See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2005) 24-25.

[4] In particular, the choreography of *Bruise Blood* directly draws on Steve Reich's sonic work *Come Out*, which uses the actual words spoken by a young black Harlem man in the Sixties who was wrongly arrested during the riots and had to let his bruise blood come out to show that he had been assaulted by the police. In its turn, *Faultline* depicts the public anxiety around young Asians – particularly men – because of fears about terrorism (some of the dances had been stopped and questioned by police). Drawing on Marius Petipa's original 19th century ballet choreography, *La Bayadère* recounts the story of the first 'real temple dancers' to visit Europe.

[5] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia U. P.), 1991.

difficult to chart. It is definitely not India...".[6] The choreographer's reluctance to represent the exact coordinates of her identity and her home (constantly dislocated between India and the UK) makes of her a stranger first of all to herself, and to her own native culture. With their characters, their settings and their plots, her choreographies kinaesthetically represent this postcolonial estrangement. Nevertheless, Roy argues, "Even when the dance is 'about' something [India, racism, diaspora, the classical past], its form still remains the strongest focus: Jeyasingh seems more interested in showing how it's made than what it means".[7]

We thus get to the second way of conceiving choreography linguistically: as a linguistic technology, or a technical composition of gestural propositions. As a classical technique, Bharata Natyam presupposes a perfect positioning of the human body as the central axis of a circle in which all subsequent movements are drawn.[8] From here, turning out and bending her knees and arms, the dancer forms three perfect triangles. This geometric arrangement in the 'natya aramba' constitutes the precondition of all successive phrases. Starting from the basic position, a combination of dance units called 'adavus' (given by variations in stance, foot position, arm lines and hand patterns) forms the alphabet of the dance. Telling the story of Indian migrants in the UK through the juxtaposition of Bharata Natyam adavus and contemporary dance steps or street dance gestures, Jeyasingh's choreography legitimizes its status as a language, simultaneously configuring the position of the choreographer as that of a polyglot.

And yet, by simply defining choreography as a language (or a combination of languages), the main risk is to immediately jump, from the sensorial perception of movement to the attribution of a meaning to its constitutive elements. The danger is to limit the point of view to a semiology of what is already language, of what inevitably tells us something. In fact, if we proceeded by slow rewind, we would note that this sudden jump, the perception-meaning leap, imperceptibly happens as a passage of techniques through signs, or a 'technical sensation of signs': each gesture or step, according to its technical properties, gradually moves from the status of a perceived object to that of a linguistic signifier. In the passage, the gesture becomes a sign, it is felt as a sign before saying anything, the trace of an encounter between perception and intellect, between what excites the senses and what makes sense. In this article, the point of view of Peirce's semiotics will be adopted to follow Jeyasingh's gestural techniques as they go through this process of becoming signs. Going beyond questions of representation, historical placement and authorial voice, Peirce's semiotics will therefore constitute a potentially rich new vision more useful than the limited binarisms of structuralist semiotics and its focus on already accomplished sign-content, self-other relations. This vision will delineate a different postcolonial reading based on the openness and multiplicity of sens/ation rather than on the closed circuits of meaning (or its poststructuralist disruptions).

[6] Shobana Jeyasingh, "Imaginary Homelands. Creating a New Dance Language", in A. Carter, ed., *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 47.

[7] Roy, "Multiple Choice".

[8] "To create this image the dancer has to centre the body by pulling in the stomach and pulling up the upper torso. There is a feeling of growing taller and expanding; this forms the base line of a triangle. To create a second triangle, turn out from the hips is essential (which forms triangle 3) since without this the base line of the second triangle will not be legible. The depth of the plié is crucial if there is to be harmony between triangles 2 and 3. These three triangles form the Bharata Natyam body picture and are the ideal that the dancing body aims for and which the classical sculptures show us". S. Jeyasingh, "Getting Off the Orient Express", in A. Carter and J. O'Shea, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010) 184.

But before starting with the actual analysis of the dances, we need two initial clarifications. First, it is important not to conceive signs in a static manner, which means not to think as if behind a sign-thing there were an object-thing. According to Deleuze, by simply attributing to an object the sign which it brings forth, both perception and intelligence induce us to think that objects contain in themselves the secret of the signs they emit, so that we always return to the object in order to decipher the sign (objectivism).[9] Intelligence thinks objective contents, explicit objective meanings, while perception has the task of grasping the sensible objects behind them. Beyond this perceptual and intellectual objectivism, a sign, in Peirce's definition, is "Something which stands *to somebody* for something in some respect or capacity" (emphasis added).[10] Differently from other semiotic theories, the peculiarity of this definition is suggested by the appearing of 'somebody' that is addressed by the sign, an 'interpretant', in Peirce's words, or a 'mind' in which "an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign," is created. To think the emerging of signs, or rather the passage from a sign to an object, from a sign to a meaning, or even better from one sign to another, in other words to conceive experience as an unfolding of signs, we therefore start from the middle position of the 'interpretant'. A second important clarification is at this point required: finding a subjective compensation to the limited view of objectivism, and conceiving the interpretant as a conscious human subject, or even as a whole culture, a race or a gender, cannot be a solution: subjective interpretations and associations based on the presence of a human consciousness are no less limited than objective explanations and recognitions.[11] Rather, *every* act through which a sign mutates into another sign (either in the human, animal, or biological sphere) should be considered as a mental operation and an interpretant: for example, a dog's interpretation of the perceived image of a chair as a 'sittable' object. Furthermore, this process of becoming sign cannot but be thought as a pragmatic event: passing through the act of semiotic deciphering, every seeing becomes a doing, a mental operation that is always simultaneously and immediately transduced into an attitude or a behaviour. It is on this pragmatic basis that, for Peirce, the semiotic encounter is founded.

It has been said that, as an Indian choreographer of the diaspora, Jeyasingh shares with all her exile companions a bond with her past, her dances writing on the stage the mnemonic trace of the distant lost time of classical Indian dance. In the same way in which her gestural signs are still connected to an object (classical India), their sense is still connected to a subject (the postcolonial Indian migrant woman), as we jump from one to the other. But as Deleuze has taught us, the interpretation of signs must go beyond the objects they remind us of and beyond the personal associations they elicit in us, in order to find the ideal essence that the sign incarnates. We can define this essence (or ec-sense) of signs as the way in which they attach their materiality to a pragmatic dimension, acting as topological figures of continuous active connection, rather than as linguistic containers of an isolated and isolating meaning. As the active connector between the appearing of a chair and the act of sitting, the sign is, in

[9] See G. Deleuze, *Marcel Proust e i segni* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001) 26-37.

[10] Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, ed. by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss and Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge: Belknap, 1931-1966, vol.2), 228.

[11] See Deleuze, *Marcel Proust*.

this sense, definable as a facilitator of material encounters. Being a pragmatic semiotics, Peirce's way to think signs will make us see Jeyasingh's choreography technique as capable of producing not only meanings, but also encounters. It is exactly by virtue of their respective encountering capacities, that the artistic work of a woman choreographer of Indian origin who has been studying and working in the UK for more than 30 years, can happily encounter the words and concepts of an American philosopher of the 19th century. The outcome will be the delineation of a different semiotics of the Indian diaspora, and a way to connect the markers of gender and race to a different sense of sacredness, in what will be defined as a 'cyber semiotics of the sacred'. At the same time, Peirce's semiotic definitions will get even more pragmatic value from the encounter, by literally becoming the movements of a dance. A philosophical interest for a possible evolution of Peirce's ideas will therefore also be key in the reading of this essay.

Peirce's dance

Considering Peirce's theory as a dance, rather than a science, apparently betrays its scientific, logical and rational presuppositions, threatening them with the danger of an improper metaphorical aestheticization or, even worse, with an unorthodox philosophical adaptation. But Peirce's conception of science (and therefore of logic and semiotics, the sciences of relations and signs) in fact already shows a peculiar tone which takes it rather far away from the rigour of positivism. This conception discards the traditional scientific dualism of a material nature confronted and intellectually captured by a human subject (a dualism which underlies a Western epistemology complicit with colonialism), in favour of a vision of the world as a system of signs continuously provoking sensibility and thought, literally luring them into interpretation.[12] It is a feeling that drives experience from perception to meaning, a lure to sense which, according to Peirce, appears in the hiatus of an inexplicable shock, acting on the nerves as an inescapable 'compulsion', an 'absolute constraint to think'.[13]

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the definition of Peirce's schema as a dance, or a choreography, is being introduced here in a non-metaphorical sense: in order to ask them what they can do, we will take these notions "where their own author could not", beyond the field of semiotics, following their encounter with the gestures and steps of dancers.[14] Only at that point, they will start to form a generative text that "does not just transmit significations" but "produces inflections".[15] In this way, we will be able to observe what happens when Peirce's theory is taken not as transcendentally classificatory but as immmanently formative of embodied action: 'as if' Jeyasingh's dancers were literally embodying semiotics as a choreographic instruction.

Jeyasingh's semiotics

[12] See Carlo Sini, *Distanza un segno. Filosofia e semiotica,* Milano, CUEM, 2006.

[13] C.S. Peirce, "What is a Sign?", https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philo-sophy/works/us/peirce1.htm, accessed 1 August 2015.

[14] This non-orthodox approach is a tentative application of the radically pedagogical practice of textual reading proposed by Brian Massumi and Erin Manning in the SenseLab.
See B. Massumi, "Collective Expression. A Radical Pragmatics", in *Inflexions: A Journal of Research-Creation*, Issue n.8, http://www.inflexions.org/radicalpedagogy/main.html#Massumi, accessed 1 August 2015.

[15] C.S. Peirce, "What is a Sign?".

[16] C. Sini, "Le relazioni triadiche dei segni e le categorie faneroscopiche di Peirce", http://www.archiviocarlosini.it/materiale/Articoli/AR029.pdf, accessed 1 August 2015.

[17] C.S.Peirce, "Three Trichotomies of Signs", https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philo-sophy/works/us/peirce2.htm, accessed 1 August 2015.

[18] See A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press) 1985.

[19] G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, (Paris: Aubier-Montagne, 1969). See also Massumi. "Collective Expression".

Peirce's schema composes a grammar and a syntax of three main kinds of sign (or three semiotic relations): signs whose nature corresponds to a logical possibility (qualisigns), signs whose nature corresponds to an actual fact (sinsigns), and signs whose nature corresponds to a law (legisigns).[16] This grammar can be used as a choreographic technology, an algorithm of motions that can make us understand the different ways in which Jeyasingh's work is able to produce particular sensations of classical India.

1) The Origin Freezes

Peirce writes: "A qualisign is a quality which is a sign. It cannot actually act as a sign until it is embodied; but the embodiment has nothing to do with its character as a sign".[17] The qualisign, in other words, is not an actual empirical quality yet (such as an actual shade of colour) but what Alfred N. Whitehead would call an 'eternal object', a potential to become a particular quality, and therefore to acquire a particular meaning for someone or something (the idea of 'red', as it also appears in the proposition 'this is not red').[18] These potential qualities can be considered as the origins of all actual events, provided we conceive the origin not in the historical sense which is so much criticised by postcolonial theory, an origin which can always be remembered and known and from which an identity derives (like a particular dance form to be constantly repeated and preserved in its purity). Rather, the origin should be conceived more like an immanent field of emergence (for example a quality of movement). This is also the sense of Gilbert Simondon's notion of an 'absolute origin', an origin which persists as the intact centre of various successive phenomena.[19] For example, precision of movement is a potential quality that can actualize itself as the origin of different performative events, both classical and contemporary. Such as when, in Jeyasingh's choreography *La Bayadere*, classical Indian splayed fingers and precise feet placements remain at the centre of a frame of various contemporary steps, suggesting Bharata Natyam as the immanent origin of the dance. In fact, the word 'bayadere', Jeysingh finds out after seeing Petipa's ballet for the first time, comes from the Portuguese 'bailadeira', a term used in 19th century Europe to refer to the female 'devadasis', the temple dancers of South India who danced Bharata Natyam. This is a 2,000 years old dance practice abolished during British colonization for its marked erotic tonality, and rediscovered in the 20th century as a stage art of strong precision. Choreographing a new *Bayadère* and tracking the old Bharata Natyam steps is thus for Jeyasingh a possibility to return to her cultural origins, through a sort of abstract technicality which becomes basic to all her movements, and which remains stable throughout the course of their different evolutions. At the same time, her filial and techno-genealogical feeling is connoted by a certain detachment discernible in Jeyasingh's own description of Bharata Natyam as an almost involuntarily learnt language:

> The reason I learned Bharata Natyam was a direct result of the British presence in India. … I suppose when the psyche of a country has been bashed

around for over a hundred years, one of the things that actually happens when you want to break free is that you begin to re-evaluate and refind your own culture. Therefore, for my parents, who were typical of their generation, it was important that their daughter learned Bharata Natyam, the classical dance of India.[20]

[20] Jeyasingh,"Imaginary Homelands", 49. This citation was taken from Annalisa Piccirillo, "La *De-sacralizzazione*, in Shobana Jeyasingh", a Ph.D. dissertation chapter.

Across this distance, the origin of a very precise initial gesture ceases to be a past to be exactly re-traced, and remains as a vague potential that will give to all Jeyasingh's future choreographies a pretext, a "jumping off point".[21] Therefore, on one hand, Peirce's notion of qualisign allows us to define the way in which Bharata Natyam only appears as an 'immanent origin' or a potential in Jeyasingh's choreographies. On the other hand, the immobility we have initially noticed in Peirce's concept (the qualisign as a sign which 'cannot act until embodied') reveals itself as the static but vital nature of a virtuality, a capacity to freeze and persist (rather than disappearing) across different actualizations. Classical India, the origin of Jeyasingh's work, freezes and persists as a qualitative precision in the contemporary dance.

[21] Massumi, "Collective Expression".

2) The Body Folds

"A sinsign (…) is an actual existent thing or event which is a sign. It can only be so through its qualities; so that it involves a qualisign, or rather, several qualisigns". The sinsign is an existent, or a real fact (such as a well defined shade of red on a piece of fabric). *Dev Kahan Hai?* (Where is Dev?) is a dance choreographed by Jeyasingh in 2012. Here, the various turns and jumps performed by the dancers make their bodies deviate from the Bharata Natyam's original prescription, while other unexpected and inappropriate choreographic elements, such as group dancing, physical contact or the curving and rotation of the back, constitute the highly irreverent sinsigns through which the choreographer distances herself from the linear trajectory of classical formalism. The gesture or act through which Peirce's sinsign 'involves' its potential, an involvement which is an implication or an infolding, becomes in Jeyasingh's works a concrete physical rotation of the contemporary dancing body, which bends on and involves the potential of classical Indian precision, but with a movement that is a swirl, a clinamen, a deviation. The physical actualization of this deviating involvement reveals its cultural and political implications as a postcolonial curvature from the immutability of an originary past which can only keep intact the form of choreographic classicism.

3) The Choreographer Cuts

Finally, "A legisign is a law that is a sign. ... Every legisign signifies through an instance of its application, which may be termed a *Replica* of it". The legisign is the codification of the sign (red flag, therefore, danger). In its highly traditional code, Bharata Natyam is composed of two movement images: Nritta, the abstract movement performed following a musical rhythm, and Nritya, the narrative part of the dance, the facial expressions and intricate hand gestures

which tell stories and convey emotions. In Jeyasingh's own replica of the dance, it is only the purely formal and non-narrative aspect (Nritta) which interests her most and becomes her choreographic law, as the only 'legisign' which is able, according to her, to speak to contemporary audiences. The gesture of Peirce's legisign replicating itself, folding again and again and actualizing the code an infinite number of times, becomes transduced into the choreographer's act of splitting the original Bharata Natyam law in two parts, in order to be able to cut out replicable choreographic forms and codified steps.

While the first triad of Peirce's theory classifies the intrinsic nature of signs, the second trichotomy regards the relation between sign and object, its semantics or, in logical terms, how a 'representamen' can stand for and represent something. Or, for us, the techniques through which Jeyasingh's dance can give us sensations of contemporary India.

1) Imitation

"Firstly, there are *likenesses*, or icons; which serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them". Jeyasingh's dances are considered as iconic of Indian identity. But what is an identity? While Hall notoriously acknowledged the simultaneous 'necessity' and 'impossibility' of identities, and the suturing of psychic and discursive elements in their constitution,[22] Deleuze and Guattari's notion resonates with the same critique of subjective universality and unicity, while adding to it a further physical element from which cultural identification originates. The two philosophers conceived identity as a kind of territorial dance, a matter of bodily "poses, postures, silhouettes, steps, and voices". This identitarian dance generates and regulates collective movements according to a logic that is flexible and temporary, rather than static and rigid.[23]

An elastic and malleable (or, in their words, "inflatable and portable") territory is therefore identified, where different elements or traits of expression can, by virtue of their smoothness and connectability, be assembled (identity as a machinic assemblage of mutiplicities into a territorial, geographical and cultural organization). We see a clear example of this identitarian topology in J.K. Galbraith's definition of India as a mosaic of identities, a smooth space or a geopolitical multiplicity where the fluidity of borders and shared beliefs intersects with a manifold local or regional traditions (the dances of Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Odissi, etc...).[24] This heterogeneity is mirrored by Jeyasingh's choreographic patchworks of Bharata Natyam, Yoga and Indian martial arts, making them into icons of India's immanent pluralism.

2) Connection

"Secondly, there are *indications*, or indices; which show something about things, on account of their being physically connected to them". There is the immanent pluralism of Indian culture, but there also is the continuity of its exchanges: it is important to see how this second force, together with the first, contributes to generate a smooth feeling of culture that strongly opposes itself to all identitarian anxieties. This idea of an open and mutant nature of identity

does not correspond to the transformation, and even less to the contamination, of any presumed essential property or archetype such as Indianness, but presupposes (in line with the cybernetic vision) a series of discontinuities emerging in a field of connectedness and continuity. Examples of this can be seen in the moment when the Dionysian cultic practices of Greece met the Indian Tantric rituals, after the invasion of Alexander the Great; or when Indo-Greek theatre started to show a similarity of movements and gestures indicating a mutual kinaesthetic influence much before Alexander's advent.[25] Using Deleuze and Guattari's words, we can define this kind of cultural symbiosis as a 'becoming', an affective relation or a trans-territorial exchange of expressive traits. In the same way, we can understand how the multiplicity of gestures composing Jeyasingh's choreographies (classical and contemporary and urban and martial) is physically and affectively connected, as a further becoming, to India's many cultural encounters.

3) Capture

"Thirdly, there are *symbols*, or general signs, which have become associated with their meanings by usage". Here, it is easy to see how the traits of cultural multiplicity are restrained into the fixed characters of an identity and its symbolic representations: India as represented by the traditional music, costumes, gestures or, in general, signs that are conventionally associated to its purity, and that are still present in Jeyasingh's choreographies. The usage of symbols ensures that a culture is faithfully depicted, allowing to all the signs, objects and interpretants only as little movement or variation as possible. And it is in relation to this symbolic representational apparatus (or, as Jeyasingh defines it, this cultural 'straitjacket') that the choreographer finds herself twitching uncomfortably. The same gesture then migrates to the stage, where her dancers are often seen twitching and jerking between the steps, as if they were reacting to all those symbols that still populate the stage.[26]

A last Peircean trichotomy defines the relation between sign and interpretant, or between the sign and the mental relations it incites. Or, for us, between Jeyasingh's dance and its Indian audience. Recalling her company's only Indian tour, Jeyasingh narrates: "[Some]one comes over to ask me what kind of dance they are seeing. I have to invent a category off the top of my head. 'It is contemporary' I offer 'and Indian' because I notice his recognition, however partial".[27] 'Contemporary', and 'Indian': in Peircean terms, two *rhemes*, two 'intepretant' acts that remain in the field of potential. Neither of them being really determined or defined, the two adjectives chosen by Jeyasingh mirror, with their vagueness, the ambivalent feelings of Indian audiences in relation to her staged performances. Responses to Jeyasingh's work in India were in fact not polarised by expressions of total approval or condemnation. But in the end, they all shared the idea that the work was not-Indian, and that it did not clearly show its Indianness. The *dicisign*, or the proposition, to use Peirce's words, signalling the audience's actual response to the choreographies, was in the end:

[25] M.L. Vardpande, *Ancient Indian and Indo-Greek Theatre* (Abhinav Publications, 2014).

[26] Http://www.rescen.net/Shobana_Jeyasingh/ HmH/bangalore.html, accessed on 1 August 2015.

[27] Ibid.

'not-Indian'. In order to find an appropriate entry point and a logic to their judgment, people looked at costume, listened to the music, considered the main themes of the performances: all these markers, in the final *argument* and according to a precise identitarian syllogism, seemed too Western to them. In the context of the Indian interpretants of Jeyasingh's work, the last Peircean trichotomy of 'rheme', 'dicisign' and 'argument' becomes therefore particularly significant, especially for the affects it reveals: not Indian enough, too Western. As Meenakshi Mukherjee writes, contemporary Indian artworks are usually interpreted according to their cultural positioning in the 'global vs regional' alignment.[28] This phenomenon is labeled by the thinker as 'anxiety of Indianness': an attempt to go back to a simple, pre-colonial Indian identity, a desire to feel rooted and pure, as a reaction to post-colonial dislocation. As a feeling of anxiety about the rigid limits of one's own identity, this identitarian 'striation' clearly differentiates itself from the smooth cultural sensations iconically and indexically signalled by Jeyasingh's choreographies.

When intended as cultural feelings, anxiety and smoothness respectively correspond to the emotional and textual (or semiotic) practices Deleuze and Guattari define as 'roots' and 'rhizomes'.[29] What is rooted, Deleuze and Guattari say, is the mnemonic and genealogical structure of familial links, the links one has with their own land, their own origins. On the other hand, a sense of heterogeneity and becoming connotes a rhizomatic sense of culture. And whereas the root-text (or tree-text) marks borders, or identity's limits, rhizome-texts cross them. Choreography, as Jeyasingh describes it, is a rhizomatic practice that happens nowhere but in the dance studio and, simultaneously, in the abstract, elastic, 'hyper geographical' space of the imagination, where functions of cultural exclusion/inclusion can morph into a differential logic revealing a more variegated in-between interstice. This interstitial choreographic space resonates with Homi Bhabha's notion of 'third space' as a space woven between the 'I' and 'You' of every communicative act.[30] Here, the choreographer becomes a nomad of kinaesthetic thought or, to use Ronald Bogue's definition, a 'chaosmopolitan', the citizen of a chaosmos.[31] An example of a chaosmotic space is in fact the 'polis', the city, the urban ecology as it is crossed by continuous physical and cultural becomings (Jeyasingh herself insists on 'the urban', more than the 'Indian' or 'Western', as the only possible definition for her choreographies). The diversity of events populating the immanent plane of cities demands a different way of moving, a 'complex of thought and practice' in which creativity and habits, anarchy and norm, can coexist. An urban choreography where order emerges out of chaos. A chaos-mo-poli-graphy. "We can see this process ... exemplified in the scenes of rush-hour pavement walking or crowd cycling..., where kinetic habits and techniques are reanimated by the ingression of unexpected gestures and steps, and the apparent chaos of a disordered multiplicity finds its own way to autonomously and improvisationally choreograph itself. A collective movement that makes a collective body, through the co-tuning of its own relational field".[32] From this concept, a new vision of choreographic creation emerges, where the issue is not

[28] M. Mukherjee, "The Anxiety of Indianness", in *The Perishable Empire* (Delhi: OUP, 2000).

[29] See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3-25. For the definitions of smooth and striated spaces, see also 474-500.

[30] H. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths amd H. Tiffin, eds., *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[31] R. Bogue, "Nature, Law, and Chaosmopolitanism", in R. Braidotti and P. Pisters, eds., *Revisiting Normativity with Deleuze* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

[32] Stamatia Portanova, "Wonder, Movement and Becoming: Response to Erin Manning", in *Body and Society*, Special Issue on Rhythm, Movement, Embodiment, 171.

so much that of movement's linear trajectories and rules nor of their disruption, but rather of the relation between movement's 'virtual' and 'actual' dimensions. In Peirce's words, between his firstness and its secondness, between its potentials and its steps. This relation constitutes what Peirce would define as a choreographic 'thirdness': an opening of the classical body to the discomfort of a multiplicity of mental schemes or corporeal laws. Such as when Hema, a dancer of the Jeyasingh's company who is trained in Kalarippayattu, contemporary and Bharata Natyam, is induced to repeat the same movement again and again, in order to re-experience its way of drawing on the many movement languages that already coexist in her body. Or when, in *Romance with Footnotes*, a woman dancer adopts a classical pose from Bharata Natyam, while her partner circles her and slowly takes her out of this position, until she loses balance and has to move.

Cyber-sacredness

Jeyasingh's chaosmopoligraphies are therefore more connected to urban contemporaneity than to Indian (or Western) classicism. At the same time, they are able to entertain, as shown by our Peircean semiotic analysis, a non-nostalgic relation with their past. This non-chronological but 'aionic' and 'kairotic' temporality (a temporality of strange transversal encounters and timings) marks the qualitative rather than signifying aspect of her works: it is, as we have seen, through the quality of precision, that her dances find a connective thread with Bharata Natyam. And it is through the qualitative tension of movement that they also reproduce the right-on-time steps of city dwellers. Quality is also an important element in Peirce's semiotics. According to the philosopher, a sign can signify some thing, because the signifying sign and the signified thing share the same material qualities. But the law (intended here as linguistic and cultural convention) requires that, in order to be freely exchanged, the qualities of matter must become meaning; that is to say, they must be redeemed of their sensuousness and be given a sense. The precision of Jeyasingh's movements, for example, seems to gain a lot when transformed into a language, a series of cultural signifiers that can denote many meanings: Indianness, urban contemporaneity, diaspora... The soundtrack of her choreographies, with its use of acoustic and sonorous signs as racial and linguistic signifiers, constitutes another example of this quality-meaning passage. At this point, by making a spatio-temporal jump, we can hear the echo of Fred Moten's words, when he reminds us that, "[f]rom the outset (that is from the moment Creole is forged as a medium of communication between slave and master), the spoken imposes on the slave its particular syntax".[33] On the other hand, "[s]ince speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream. ... This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise".[34] The emerging of the voice in its noisy material quality is what characterizes Jeyasingh's use of beatbox as a musical soundtrack for her

[33] F. Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 7.

[34] Ibid.

choreographies, where the voice acquires sense and value beyond meaning/matter oppositions.[35] Furthermore, in all her works, elements such as costumes and facial expressions, hair styles, yogic shapes and eye make-up – are all deprived of their classical meaning and endowed with a new chromatic, acoustic and textural sense, while gestures become the signs of bodies that seem to silently scream the representational exuberance of their qualities.

It is in this sense that, according to Sanjoi Roy, Jeyasingh's work is a modernist choreography mainly focused on form: on the structure, the shape, and the qualities of movement and dance. In this way, her works show that the norm linking modernism (and modernity) to the white West comes from a particular standpoint where every exception to the rule is categorized as 'other'. Where is this standpoint located? As Iain Chambers tells us, "[v]iewed from London, Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, Paris and Milan, the south of the world is invariably considered in terms of lacks and absences. It is not yet modern; it has still to catch up. It remains, as Dipesh Chakrabarty would put it, an inadequate place. … Of course, as we know from Said, and through him from Gramsci, this is a geography of power. It is about being placed and systematised in a manner not of your own choosing".[36] Creating a cultural, political and economic demarcation between a North and a South (or a West and an East), the 'geography of power' is a machine of territorial and identitarian construction. The shortsightedness of this semiotic machine consists not simply in the labelling of the categories, but also in depriving those located on the wrong side, of any creative potentiality. The same shortsightedness prevails when, according to Roy, "Jeyasingh the choreographer fades into the background in favour of Jeyasingh the Indian woman in Britain who engages with questions of migrancy, diaspora, race, heritage and so on".[37] The political strength of Jeyasingh's work therefore coincides with its capacity to associate the question of racial and gender identity to the qualitative sensibility and creative potential of choreographic technique.

As an artist of the Indian diaspora in England, Jeyasingh has often been labeled as a producer of 'hybrid' works, hybridity apparently being the most significant contribution offered by diasporic artists against the semiotics of power, and against racist representations based on notions of purity and tradition. From this point of view, it would be a task, or a mission, of Jeyasingh as a diasporic choreographer, to mix Rukmini Devi with Merce Cunningham, the scores for string orchestra and electronics by Gabriel Prokofiev with Russian classical, tango and dark electronica.[38] Nevertheless, the semiotics of hybridity reveals itself as entrapped into another power mechanism: if the hybrid is an offspring of two animals or plants of different breeds, varieties, species or genera (such as Bharata Natyam and ballet), it is still so in relation to the definition of what a specific genus is. Being interested, from the very beginning of her choreographic career, in the expressive possibilities of Bharata Natyam inserted in the context of Western dance, Jeyasingh can indeed be seen as one of the main exponents of intercultural hybridity. Representing the displacements of Indian dance practices in the postcolonial epoch, early works

[35] The beatbox remix of Steve Reich's sound piece *Come Out* incorporates words first and foremost as sound; the pragmatic defiance and tenaciousness of Daniel Hamm's words are expressed through the voice and its mathematical loops.

[36] I. Chambers, "The Southern Question... Again".

[37] Roy, "Multiple Choice".

[38] Already in her first choreographic work, *Configurations*, created in 1988, it is Michael Nyman's score (which became his *String Quartet No. 2*) which is played live on stage.

such as *Configurations* (1988), *Correspondences* (1990), *Making of Maps* (1992) and *Duets with Automobiles* (1993) perform a cultural decontextualisation of Indian classicism by reorganizing its traditional language into a foreign space. As mere assemblages of gestural citations, still recognisable although displaced and fragmented, these choreographies seem still based on a principle of postmodern hybridization. The basic leg position of aramandi and the arm position of nartiarambe, together with the movements of the neck alternatively oscillating from right to left (adami), the feet movements, and many other adavus, are juxtaposed to contemporary dance gestures, but without any real sensible integration. The two levels limit themselves to coexist, with their identitarian margins still very visible.[39]

It is only after the 90s, that Jeyasingh starts to collaborate with dancers with a mixed formation in contemporary dance practices, Indian dance styles and martial arts. And it is at this point that dance techniques cease to be simply composed by her into hybrids, and become the elements of a new cybernetic semiotics, or a semiotics of qualitative encounters. In order to understand Jeyasingh's cyber-semiotics, we need first to add something to our Peircean semiotic approach, and to redefine the body not as a fixed identity but as a sensori-motor network of intensities connected to two major dimensions: one socio-culturally determined (meaning), the other physically contingent, made of existential singularities and events (quality). From this point of view, 'sense', or the 'becoming sign' of movement, appears more related to a bodily sensibility than to a linguistic logic: from the body as an anatomical entity utilized as a tool of signification, to corporeality as a sensible and fragile entity open to encountering the other (and, it is worth remembering, Peirce's theory was in fact already enriched by a consideration for the sign as a 'nervous sensation' and a semiotic meaning). The cybernetic notion of the body as a network of sensible connections induces us to think how the corporeality of a trained dancer incorporates the coordinates and sensations of a new cultural practice. The individual subject, together with its own self-perception, is put into question, destabilised and made fragile, by the tensions initiated by the very act of 'going towards'. These instabilities and re-adjustments allow it to escape the repetition of the same, and to undermine the persistence of habit. As Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela argued, the meeting of heterogeneous sensibilities does not remain on the level of an unsolved contradiction (the hybrid) but produces a systemic reorganisation according to a physical autopoiesis.[40] And yet, as Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers have showed, the problem with the notion of the body as 'autopoietic system' lies in the reversibility of the physical phenomena traversing it: autopoiesis is a tendency of the system towards equilibrium, an integration which, according to the two scientists, is always far from being achieved.[41] Differently from this autopoietic dynamics, it could be said that Jeyasingh's dancers enact a sort of 'ecological wisdom' that "traverses different domains... capable not of integrating but of articulating singularities of the field under consideration to join absolutely heterogeneous components".[42] In other words, they physically perform a series

[39] Jeyasingh's choreographic practice has also produced many disciplinary hybrids: from the cellular biology principles influencing the composition of *In Flagrante*, to botanics and the movements of flowers and plants reliving in *Strange Blooms*.

[40] H. Maturana and F. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980).

[41] I. Prigogine and I. Stengers, *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

[42] F. Guattari, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977* (Semiotext(e), 2008), 40.

of encounters that neither remain detached as citational fragments nor resolve themselves into an equilibrated dance figure but, rather, keep their qualitative singularities alive. The same systemic ecology, or inseparable unity of kinaesthetic experiences, is also at work beyond the incorporation of gestural techniques, implying for example a tight interrelation between human and technological components. Such as in the performance of *Phantasmaton*, a proscenium performance for six dancers featuring an artificially intelligent digital video of a devadasi dancer by Pete Gomes; or in *[h]Interland*, a site-specific work created for the hall of London's Greenwich Dance Agency, including video (again by Gomes) and a live webcast (directed by Terry Braun) of dancer Chitra Srishailan in Bangalore, performing alongside London dancers Mavin Khoo and Sowmya Gopalan.

This cybernetic semiotics of technical and technological encounters is the expression of a different sense of the 'sacred' emerging in Shobana Jeyasingh's chaosmopoligraphies. Instead of being transmitted by the representation of a religious meaning linking the contemporary choreography to the movements of the ancient devadasis, and instead of manifesting itself as a spiritual devotion to the gods, sacredness is now produced in the embrace between the moving bodies and their whole spatiotemporal environment. Intended, rather similarly to Gregory Bateson's conception, as the sensation of being one component of a unique system (in this case, a choreographic system), sacredness is signalled by the many kinaesthetic differentials emerging in all the systemic relations, between past and future, jumps and slidings, the silent quietness of classicism and the turbulence of urban and technological environments, the orange, yellow, brown colours of spices and the electric blue grass of digital video. A feeling not suggested by the dances through the faithful reproduction of ancient rituals but, to use Massumi's words, through their being 'thought out in their environment', or trough their faithfulness to that environment.

Conclusion: The Curve of Moving-With

A choreographic environment can cover an experiential territory of thousands of years and kilometres. But how does a dance manage to be thought, across such enormous spatiotemporal distance? At this point, Peirce's theory can be useful again, and reconnected to the cybernetic idea of connectedness, when he argues that not only we need to take into consideration the direct resistance of bodies to each other, or their contact, but also their attractions and repulsions at a distance: a thing is wherever it acts.[43] We can thus return to the image of the rhizome, which does not cease to link different, apparently distant territorial layers or levels, its topological deformations stretching and bending across them without any break or cut. When Jeyasingh performs Bharata Natyam, she is embodying a sense of sacredness, by actually rhizomatically connecting times and spaces: she starts from a *natya aramba* position showing her body lowered along the central axis of a circle and divided along it through the *araai mandi*, the demi plié of Indian classical dance, creating three equilateral triangles. In

[43] C.S. Peirce, "Notes on the Question of the Existence of an External World", in *Writings of Charles S. Peirce; A Chronological Edition*, vol. 8; 1890-1892, Peirce Edition Project, 2010, 78.

Western ballet, the same position is used as a transition point to spring board away into characteristic, light buoyant movement, whereas in Bharata Natyam it acts as the point of arrival in order to draw attention to the angularity of the bent limbs, and to consolidate the weighted tension that is typical of its line and dynamic. As Jeyasingh topologically imagines, lowering one's legs is always and everywhere perceivable and thinkable as the gesture of lowering one's legs, while one lowered leg is never quite like another.

Along the same topological line, the choreography of *Faultline* is composed of movements coming not only from the Bharata Natyam tradition, but also from martial art forms such as Kalaru and Capoeira, and from Western traditions of contemporary dance, street dance styles and jazz. Here, a flick of the hand performed by the male protagonist to dust down his shoulder (a gesture typical among members of street gangs) encounters a Bharata Natyam open (alapadma) or closed (katakamukha) hand gesture, as they are not simply sensed as gestures per se (though the gestures are indeed present), in their formal distance or resemblance, in their meaning and intention, but in that topological becoming one into another, in that difference and continuity, that give to the movements their rhythm. Adopting Erin Manning's words, we can say that the gestures "move-with the togetherness of a curving that fields metastable equilibriums".[44] Between two gestures, between two ways of moving, a wave always forms in-between, creating an interval that makes itself felt, at the cusp of their actuality. A folding, a proximity, a non-linear contact. From one gesture to the other, tension disappears, as "one senses the intensity of an opening, the gathering up of forces toward the creation of spacetimes of experience ...". In this imperceptible interstitial intergestural opening, the sacredness of Jeyasingh's choreography resides, as a force able to continuously morph itself. "If we lose this intensity of force ..., what we have first and foremost is a step".

[44] E. Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge: MIT, 2009,) 47.

Annalisa Piccirillo

A Mediterranean Matri-Archive.
Choreographic Fragments of Emerging Corporealities

Abstract: This paper aims to refigure the question of archive into a gender-critical perspective, and proposes the theorization of a Matri-Archive: an imaginary place of methodological analysis, a performance-zone which serves to retrieve the corporeal memories of women's creativity emerging from the liquid architecture of the Mediterranean sea. I rely on the philosophical-theoretical debate over the 'archive fever', which today still affects many voices of Dance and Performance Studies, in order to discuss the presumed ephemerality of a dance-event, and thus its (im-)possible archivalization. I envision myself an archivist who after experiencing the choreo-graphies produced by three female Mediterranean and postcolonial artists – N. Belaza; G. McMillen; N. Boukhari – attempts a series of archival exercises to argue the technical dissemination, and the poetical return, of their gestures in form of choreographic fragments. This writing virtually lands in Algeria, Turkey and Syria; from these Mediterranean edges, the three 'archons' begin to explore the multiple senses of 'what' a female corporeality can 'do/become' via the subversive power of dance language. A fragmentary consultation is here offered as an analytical and choreo-political practice, both to present some examples of female agency and eventually to state the urgency of acquiring alternative visions for alternative archives.

Keywords: *choreo*-graphy, *matri-archive*, *Mediterranean*, *digital-video performance*, *fragments*

> The feminine is redefined as a moving horizon, a *fluctuating* path, a recipe for transformation, motion, becoming.
> (Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*)

> And this light is *unveiling*.
> (Hélène Cixous, *Veils*)

> How to preserve the memory of the flesh? ... While there remains this mystery of the touch that goes beyond *touching*, the intention of every gesture, how can one recall this permanence?
> (Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*)

This paper intends to analyse the performing memory of the Mediterranean Sea by diving into the bodily gestures that its liquid archive saves, reserves and disseminates on the stage of contemporary choreo*graphy*. I will consult the corporeal memories that dance, write on, and cross the region, imagining that they emerge from a 'matri-archive' intended as a visionary practice, an imaginary place of methodological analysis, a re-figured locus of deposition and transmission,

[1] The theoretical proposal for the 'matri-archive' finds its operativity in the project titled *M.A.M The Matri-Archive of the Mediterranean: Graphics and Matter* (P.O.R Campania 2007-2013), a digital archive devoted to the works of Mediterranean women artists, which is developed by a group of researchers and by myself in affiliation with the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Please visit: http://www.matriarchiviomediterraneo.org/en/.

[2] See "The Mediterranean Expulsion Machine", in I. Law et al., *Mediterranean Racism: Connections and Complexities in the Racialization of the Mediterranean Region* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[3] See the research study dealing with the complex articulation 'woman-migration' on the basis of the "Beijin Declaration and Platform for Action" (1995): N. Piper, ed., *New Perspective on Women and Migration: Livelihood, Rights and Entitlements* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[4] See Carolyn Hamilton et. al, eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. P., 2009); Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple U. P., 2013).

[5] I cannot discern the writing activity from my dancing esperience; in truth, I've given up dancing on the stage, but keep on moving with my thinking body, proceeding on the pages with attempts, 'steps' – *pas de hors-texte* – trying to move always inside-outside the texuality of the dancing languages that I encounter on my path.

within which female agency generates, composes and performs the poetical differ*a*nce of creativity and the becoming presence of multiple subjectivities.[1]

In the historical conjuncture, I witness the traumatic state of emergency affecting the Mediterranean. The incalculable flows of refugees that arrive in Italy and Greece from North Africa and Syria; the increasing number of migrants who lose their lives trying to cross the sea in makeshift boats, ferries and cargo vessels; the inequities and murderous consequences of EU's security-obsessed control of migration; the geo-political strategies operated by the "expulsion machine" of the fortress Europe:[2] these experiences constitute the direct results of the structural dependence between countries of emigration and immigration, the truth affirming that contemporary migration is integral to North-South postcolonial global relations. The commitment that lies behind my study, and the writing that follows, proves my responsibility in politically assuming the not-yet-elaborated trauma experienced by the European – specifically, the Italian – collective memory in the face of colonial legacy and power-relationship. If, in times of epochal border-restriction, the Euro-Mediterranean policy violates the right of freedom of movement, I invoke the necessity of a 'choreography' that reclaims the right to mobility.[3] More clearly, my appeal is towards a 'historical choreography' which offers a bodily perspective for the multiple stories emerging from our colonial past, that conveys the different but shared experiences of our present, that disseminates the future of the Mediterranean towards a space and a time to-come. My desire is that, on the stage of this choreography, in the imaginary archive of the Mediterranean performance zone, new corporeal memories might gain the chance to move, to be saved, narrated and respected.

My writing assumes a practice of memorial care. In this sense, it is inspired by the critical discussion on the so-called 'archival turn' (which has been involving the Humanities and the Social Sciences since the early 1990s) by proposing the 'archive' as an apparatus which, bound by no means to its traditional definition as a repository of documents, is understood as a subject of inquiry and a strategic practice apt to re-configure and legitimate new forms of knowledge.[4] Hence, I draw on the archival question through some exercises of thought, some interpretative 'steps' meant to situate an archive alternatively devoted to women, whose body movements have been constrained, marginalised and excluded by/from the patriarchal *arkē*.[5]

My 'steps' initiate at the crossroad of Dance Studies and Deconstruction, moving across the fleeting borders of dance aesthetics, video-dance and digital performance. Along these compositional patterns, there emerge the matri-archival works of three artists who disseminate their 'fragmentary' choreo-politics through the porosity of the Mediterranean Sea, along the lands and marine coasts of its liquid universe: the gestures of *Le Cri* by Nacera Belaza 'fluctuating' on the physical coasts of Algeria; the traces of *Mahrem* by Geyvan McMillen 'unveiling' the Turkish borders; the Syrian edges 'touching' the digital screens of Nisrine Boukhari's *The*

Veil. Algeria, Turkey and Syria represent the spaces where the choreographers Belaza, McMillen and Boukhari "commence" and "command" their dancing languages according to a different archival law, whose drive activates practices of corporeal knowledge which disseminate beyond the borders of the their (m-)other lands.[6] In such a displacing movement, new memories are envisioned, re-produced and re-archived in other forms and according to new perceptions, elsewhere and otherwise.

Disseminating Mediterranean Memories

> [D]ance ... cannot be played internally in its entirety ... especially because [the movement] the sign, the cipher moves away from its "here and now", as if it were endlessly falling, forever here en route between here and there, from one here to the other, inscribing in the *stigmè* of its 'here' the other point toward which it continually drifts.
> (Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*)

Investigating the archival sense-making of choreo-*graphy,* I adopt the concept of "dissemination", offered by the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida, to explains how choreography – behind and beyond its differ*a*nces, historical traditions or multiple styles – can be defined as a system of signs and memories which is always already 'differed' and 'dislocated' in time and space.[7] I unfold the deconstructionist trope in order to discuss the energies of the choreographic languages that let their meanings/memories proliferate, keeping many archival possibilities open. Marking a pattern of 'steps', I would like to identify the space of this disseminating process in the compulsory drive for a Mediterranean archive, and, together, in the search for 'other' gendered choreographic memories.

Step n. 1: archiving 'otherness'

> Nothing is thus more troubled and more troubling today than the concept archived in this word 'archive'.
> (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*)

Iain Chambers maintains that "the Mediterranean as a sea of migrating cultures, powers, and histories, continues to propose a more fluid and unstable *archive*, a composite formation in the making, neither conclusive nor complete".[8] If this is true, the Mediterranean sea becomes the site where to retrieve the 'fragments' of dance's cultural memory, whose display is always differentiating, ungraspable, fleeting, and whose un-archiviable *technè* is "never composite nor complete".[9] The archival project-logic, whose disturbing groove is proposed by Chambers as a re-routing of the repressed alterity of the Mediterranean within modernity, is embraced as the necessary support for the revaluation of the 'otherness' of dance,

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[6] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression", *Diacritics*, 25.2 (Summer 1995), 9.

[7] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1981).

[8] Iain Chambers, "The Mediterranean, a Postcolonial Sea", *Third Text*, 18.5 (2004), 423-433.

[9] Ibid.

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and, at the same time, for the envisioning of the Mediterranean as the methodological resource-zone for alternative critical-aesthetical investigations.

In her inquiry into the political and social significance of dance aesthetics, Gabriele Klein touches on those discourses that, in modernity, entrusted dance to the condition of the 'outsider', the 'Other' of western rationality. Regardless of what style, artistic practice or tradition, dance has been and is "a world of the body and the senses, of movement and feelings, as a world of metaphors, for which words fail us ... an alternative world, namely a world beyond language and rationality".[10] This state of dance's otherness asserts, in fact, its subversive power and emancipatory potential, from which to insist on claiming its mandate of avant-garde and counter-narrative. It is what allows, by anticipating it, the movement into the critical correlation of dance aesthetics, archival praxis, and forms of 'otherness' in the Mediterranean today. Dance is envisioned as the field of an historical generation of cultural and political meanings, the making of 'worlds' negotiated through corporeal languages, the ex-scription/in-scription of experiences, the recordings of subjective and collective trans-formations in a new *arkè* of the choreographic.

Step n. 2: *arkē* and choreographic knowledge

> We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives.
> (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*)

Since the so-called 'choreographic turn', initiated by European and North American post-modern performers, dance has been struggling to come to terms with its 'ephemerality'.[11] It was in 1968 when Marcia B. Siegel famously declared that "Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point ... It is an event that disappears in the very act of materializing".[12] In performance studies, the idea of the 'ephemeral' has gained a constitutive status: positing and declaring the ontological 'disappearance' of a performance event is, for scholars of the late twentieth century such as Peggy Phelan, a veritable mantra applied to all live events: "Performance becomes itself through disappearance".[13]

By taking up the invitation of dance and performance studies to consider the dancing event as ephemeral, always destined to disappearance, how is it possible to respond, keeping memory of dance's fluid and elusive essence, to what Jacques Derrida calls the 'compulsory drive' to archive? In his introduction to the volume *Dance*, the theorist André Lepecki individuates five qualities of dance: 'ephemerality'; 'corporeality'; 'precariousness', 'scoring' and 'performativity'.[14] This constitutive trait of dance-identity, *performativity* (understood as a theory of the ways in which statements and promises acquire a world-making force), becomes central to the 'archive fever' in that it "produces a condition of endless citationality of an always singular yet always dispersed (or semi-absent) source, which nevertheless

[10] Gabrielle Klein, "Dancing Politics: Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography", in Gabriele Klein, Sandra Noeth, eds., *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography* (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2011), 17.

[11] For a historical overview on ephemerality see Susanne Franco, Marina Nordera, *Ricordanze: memorie in movimento e coreografie della storia* (Torino: Utet, 2010); on its theoretical, creative and political impact see for example Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains, Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: New York: Routledge, 2011).

[12] Marcia B. Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1969), 1.

[13] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

[14] Andrè Lepecki, "Dance as a Practice of Contemporaneity", in Andrè Lepecki, ed., *Dance* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012), 14-23.

insists on making a dance return: again and again, despite (or rather because of) its ephemerality".[15] Against the claim of the absence and disappearance of dance, its persisting, resisting, and returning emergence necessarily activates the archival vocation-fever. If dance leaves no 'object' behind its performance, it keeps on 'emerging' inside and outside the flesh-matter of the dancing body; what remains is the – shared – experience, and the – fragmented – memory of the event.

In such an experience and in this memory, the body becomes a living archive: the flesh of the dancer's body functions as an archival site; her corporeality embodies, stratifies, and 'disseminates' the cultural-kinetic expression of the encountered languages. Quoting Rebecca Schneider, Eleine Aston remarks that this transforms the canonical conceptualization of the archive, and allows for the chance of registering the knowledge of the corporeal: "If what remains in not the material art object ... cannot we understand and accept this as a different way of archiving: as one that embraces the possibility of the performing, storytelling body as archive; an embodiment of counter-cultural memory?"[16]

Step n. 3: *chora* of a new 'hospitality'

> *Chora* receives everything or gives place to everything.... Everything inscribed in it erases itself immediately, while remaining in it.
> (Jacques Derrida, Peter Eisenman, *Chora L Works*)

The archival praxis of thinking choreography and the ephemerality of dance is informed by, and performed into, a gender-critical perspective. A feminist re-figuration of spatiality is evoked via the notion of 'chora', a place of dissidence within which women discover, deposit and house the subversive potentiality of corporeality. As seen by Elizabeth Grosz: "the notion of *chora* serves to produce a founding concept of femininity whose connections with women and female corporeality have been severed, producing a disembodied femininity as the ground for the production of a (conceptual and social) universe".[17]

If the archive (its 'name') has patriarchal origins (the patrilineal demand of the *arkeion*, the 'house' where power resides; the *archons* commanding, safeguarding, repeating and selecting the order, the law, the tradition), what happens when and if women become the archons of their (proper, *à-même le corps*) body knowledge? What takes place when they access an-other conceptualization of the archive, without generating a reversal exercise of inclusion-exclusion, linguistic hegemony and subalternity, but to document the re-appearance of female graphic gestures, and the re-participation to/of forgotten corporeal stories? The matri-archive is conceived as a space of creation, knowledge, cognition, invention and survival, where women act as agent 'archons'. In a vindication of roles, women "commence" and "command" their body writing; they innervate the "conservation" and the "destruction" of their kinetic abilities.[18] In so doing, they

[15] Ibid.

[16] Elaine Aston, "Feminist Performance as Archive", *Performance Research*, 7.4 (December 2002), 81.

[17] Elizabeth Grosz, "Women, Chora, Dwelling", in E. Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: The Politics of Bodies* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 113.

[18] J. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19.

re-act against the "laws" transmitted by the Western system of dance composition, using their body-scape as the site of contested memories and for the production of counter-narratives, affecting the dissemination of traditional choreo-*graphic* gestures into scenes of new embedded body languages.[19]

The Fragments of the Matri-Archive

> She is simply her watery translucent self ... She will call you by your ancient name, and you will answer because you will not have forgotten. Water always remembers.
>
> (M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*)

The matri-archive is envisioned as a poetical *chora*, a house of the archiving process that works as the 'mothering' structure for the being and the becoming of the performance of movement. As the dance theorist Stephen Turk underlines, the word *chora* resonates with the word *choros*, the round dance, the open dancing, the ground enclosure: "both are related to the Indo-European roots *gher-* (to grasp, to bind, to enclose) and *ghe-* (to release, to go, to abandon)".[20] The un-fixed pairing of binding and releasing, saving and forgetting, preserving and dissolving, recalls the dynamics that rules the gathering-disseminating phenomenology of memory. Michel de Certeau observes that (choreographic) memories emerge in unexpected, un-predictable, and sensible ways:

> Perhaps memory is no more than this 'recall' or call on the part of the other, leaving its mark like a kind of overlay on a body that has always already been altered without knowing it. This originary and secret writing *'emerges'* little by little, in the very spots where memory is touched.[21]

If, on the plane of performativity, the memory of an event, with its traces, marks, corporeal inscriptions or *phantasmata*, emerges 'little by little', what is then produced is a collection of fragments, "detritus", and "remains".[22] These are the ex-corporated touches and intensities that, through the time-space they contemporaneously materialize, become in-corporated acts, 'escapes' that keep on living, re-living, resisting and re-existing in the spectrality of the afterlife. These fragments coincide with the disseminated mnemonic graphic movements saved both 'inside' the corporeality of the dancer and 'within' the bodily perception of the audience. This logic of fragmentation echoes Michael Foucault when he reminds us that the fragment allows the archive to fulfil its function of being a "repository" but, first of all, "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements".[23] This transformative activity conceives the archive as a mode of thinking, where the fragmentary gestures are considered as moments of enunciation, the 'taking place' or the actualization of statements. The theatre

[19] See Michael Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language* (New York: Panyheon, 1972); Christie Adair, *Women and Dance, Sylphs and Sirens* (New York: New York U. P., 1992).

[20] Stephen Turk, "Tables of Weights and Measures: Architecture and the *Synchronous Object* Project", in G. Klein, S. Noeth, eds., *Emerging Bodies*, 197.

[21] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Barkley, Los Angeles, London: UCP, 1988), 87.

[22] See Matthew Reason, "Archive or Memory: The Detritus of Live Performance", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 19 (2003); R. Schneider, *Performing Remains*.

[23] M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 130.

scholar Michal Kobialka points out that the archival research is, indeed, fragmentary, constituting, in its own mode, the very "act of enunciation" of the performing event:

> ... this enunciation is not a thing determined by the reality of effects (Barthes, Racière) or the *habitus* (Bourdieu), but a function of existence exposing the intelligibility of the past and the present by exploring the relationship between a document and its taking place, between the materiality of a document and the impossibility to archive its language.[24]

Performative fragmentation is a dynamic process of rearrangement, that prevents the 'enunciated' memory-trace – or choreographic gesture – to consolidate into an established form. This subversive will to (un-)archive can be 'consulted', as I will do here, in specific feminist practices or, more singularly, in the ability of creation of female dancing subjectivities who, by relinquishing the idea, the desire or the nostalgic drive for fixity, re-archive the dominant systems of dance composition in nomadic ways where feminine cultural activities become and remain visible.[25]

In the Mediterranean matri-archive, the fragment serves as a practice of thinking-searching choreographically, working to retrieve excluded bodies, forgotten voices, hidden movements, and traces of negated otherness. In the liquid space of the sea and of another archive, one can contemplate the emergence of unfixed forms of female agency, the choreo-politics of a bodily affirmation-enunciation that erupts through the memory of the present, at the same time disturbing the very destiny or 'future' of Mediterranean modernity. In Iain Chambers' vision:

> The fragment, the forgotten voice, the ignored body, points to, even if it cannot represent, the disturbance and interrogation sedimented in the history that has consigned us to our time and place.[26]

The choreographic event, recalled in the form of fragmented, 'fluctuating', 'un-veiling' and 'touching' memories, is connected to the *milieu* out of which it generates, and to the 'affective attunement' it entrusts to the dancing bodies. According to the perspective offered by Erin Manning, "No events occur in a vacuum – event and milieu are always cogenerative.... [T]he milieu cannot be understood in spatial terms. It is an affective attunement more that a space, a field more than a form".[27] If affect belongs to the milieu, the dancing body comes – becomes, emerges – in the creative articulation of an "ecology of practices", that is, through the multiple modulation of relational forces that activate an affective difference: "a different ecology soon emerges. This ecology is marked by a new field of affect".[28]

The 'ecological' approach helps connecting the study-proposal of the matri-

[24] Michal Kobialka, "Historiacal Archives, Events and Facts", *Performance Research*, 7.4 (December 2002), 7.

[25] See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2011), 57.

[26] I. Chambers, "The Medieterranean, A Postcolonial Sea", 424.

[27] Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham: Duke U. P., 2013), 26.

[28] Ibid.

archive of female bodily memories, to the study of οἶκος, the house that hosts the poetics of corporeal practices in Mediterranean 'environments'. Indeed, Manning's 'more than human' praxis is enunciated by, extended through, and disseminated in the performances created by Belaza, McMillen and Boukhari, in the singularity and difference of their works. Their creations exceed the liquidity of the Mediterranean live-stage to be re-actualized, dislocated and differed on specific global digital *milieux*. In their experimentations, the liveness of the body-writing moves, appears and dis-appears along multiple digital architectures. It is the trans-formation of the performing stage that provokes a series of questions posed and possibly re-posed along the 'steps' of my writing: how do the new aesthetics of contemporary dance manage the juxtaposition of flesh and the virtual? In what ways do female bodies articulate creative energy? What is their relation to space and time? How do they conceptualize and perform spectral – thus un-archivable – otherness?

Fluctuating

> Everything comes from the body ... Connect, relax and find that space that has ALL sounds ... Don't let yourself to be restricted by the space. Expand your limits....
> (Nacera Belaza)

Born in Médéa, Algeria, the dancer and choreographer Nacera Belaza moved to France, where she first studied French literature, to decide to devote herself to dance. In 1989 she founded the *Compagnie Nacera Belaza*, a group gathering dancers from Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, and Palestine, and allowing the productive meeting of the various performing differences present in the Mediterranean region.[29] What difference does Belaza's style incarnate? The artist seems to have met the aesthetics of dance without attending academic schools, or learning any specific choreographic technique, proving resistant to the 'commandment' of a choreographic knowledge canonically established from the 'outside'. Differently, as a female archon, Belaza 'commences' the movement of her body language thanks to the physical law generated in her-self, in her story and in her identity:

> I never took contemporary dance because I knew I didn't want to learn anything from outside. I had no choice. I had to find my own path. I had to find another way to live in my body, to make it move ... and what is the best starting point if not yourself?"[30]

Belaza enters into an internal, sacred and sensible space from where she releases, and donates, the transformative consciousness of her body-space: "When you go inside yourself, you create the space. You create the consciousness of the space. It's not the space as it is. You transform the space with this consciousness".[31] This approach enables the choreographer to create an affective

Fig. 1: Nacera Belaza, portrait, photo, coutesy by Compagnie Nacera Belaza.

milieu, whose time is in-finite in its finitude, and where new potentialities are invented and selected by/for her, *à même soi*, so as to be able to share "a space, in which time no more plays a role, a space in which we touch upon the infinite and finally are able to share something".[32]

In 2008, Belaza performs the intense a-temporal duet entitled *Le Cri* with her sister Dalila. Immersed in a dark scenography, moving out from an intimate bound, the two women bring fragments – 'fluctuating' gestures – on the stage. Converged at the scene centre, close one to the other, they start a-synchronic graphic gestures, their feet anchored at the same point of 'arrival', their arms slowly rotating and oscillating. The pattern 'release-receive-become' and the repetition-variation of fluctuating movements carry the dancers into a state of trance. It is the physical-kinetic choreographic 'en-trance', where Nacera and Dalila's corporealities cross and pass over, merging into a counter-dance that enunciates vitality, energy, passion, and life. The music increases, the dark scene-sea gets brighter, the dancers start 'crying'. Frenetical yells through their bodies cut the space, scraping, engraving, affecting the air, letting a primordial energy emerge from the inside and reach the outside. The experience of movement negation and, at the same time, the chance of an archival vocation dig inside, desperately searching for a counter-movement affirming the right to mobility:

> ... in *Le Cri* ... we are stuck in the same place ... digging inside of us, trying to find a very deep energy to throw out. This is how I did it in my life. I couldn't go out, I couldn't travel, I couldn't explore, so I said, I will dig inside of myself. It's another way to find freedom.[33]

The minimalist quality of the fragmented gestures hypnotizes the viewer, who shares the experience by moving along the corporeal senses of what the dancing bodies feel on the stage.[34] Indeed, the movements are not meant to make the spectator feel good or pleased (in the live performance, the sound is so loud that the spectators are to be provided with earplugs); differently, the viewer is invited to accept the ephemerality of the gestures, embracing the abstract transformation of their repetitions and variations, their work's re-turned dissolution. In this way the fluctuating gestures assume a *phantasmatic* quality, constituting a fragmented-lasting female memory that persists even when the event de-materializes, as a remaining trace, a performing survival, the 'absent' motion that stays on even more 'present' at the end of, and after, the performance.

What is intriguing is that, in *Le Cri*, the sound is transmitted in different and alternating styles, volumes and rhythms: Larbi Bestam's Arabic chants, the powerful voice of Maria Callas, the blues of Nina Simone, Amy Winehouse's

[32] N. Belaza interviewed by Soumaya El Houbba, "Becoming a circle: Expanding movement with Nacera Belaza", *Al.Arte.Magazine*, March 2013, http://www.alartemag.be/en/en-culture/becoming-a-circle-in-understanding-nacera-belaza/, accessed September 2014.

[33] N. Belaza, http://pica.org/2013/09/10/inside-spaces-spaces-inside/, accessed August 2014.

[34] See Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011).

contemporary soul. One possible reason for this choreographic choice might be that the dancing bodies receive, host, bear, and embody all possible 'beats', as Belaza says: "You ... are not just a space but an empty space ... you receive ALL the sounds.... When you learn to receive, you will learn to become the embodiment of every sound that you bear".[35] The balance established among the plurivocal sounds testifies to the choreo-political challenge to intersect tensions and contradictions in/to Belaza's female subjectivity: "the human is really a balance between many contradictions.... And I had to deal with those [contradictions] because I am woman, Arabic, Muslim, and at the same time I want to dance".[36]

[35] N. Belaza, http://pica.org/2013/09/10/inside-spaces-spaces-inside/, accessed August 2014.

[36] Ibid.

Belaza dances, and in so doing, she discloses the physical and cultural deposit of her French-Algerian, Mediterranean postcolonial and trans-national identity in the archive of her body. She dances, fluctuates, cries and disseminates the presences of her vital corporeality. Here the matri-archival sense-making of the dancer's body-writing seems to resemble what Hélène Cixous, in her manifesto of *écriture feminine*, asks women to develop, that is, the special relationship to the voice, the "voice-cry" of anger that troubles – without return – the cultural order that pushes feminine agency "offstage".[37]

[37] Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 94.

Belaza's 'voice-cry' demands to be heard and remembered differently – in the same way in which the fighting voices rising during the Arab revolutions reverberate across the Mediterranean. It is the artist's political vocation: *Le Cri* documents the *agency* of female subjectivity emerging from the Mediterranean in the ritual of a choreographic belonging escaping fixed and immobile rules of existence. The fluctuating gestures and kinetic wakes propagated by the female bodies, disseminate beyond the stage to be able to merge into the theoretical movement that Rosi Braidotti would advocate to the "nomadic subject": a "transgressive identity, whose transitory nature is the reason why s/he can make connection at all", a feminist-oriented nomadism in the "acute awareness of the non-fixity of boundaries".[38]

[38] R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 35-36.

'Choreographic nomadism': aware of the non-fixity of her dancing identity, Belaza exceeds the limits of her corporeality to disseminate her fragmented

Figs. 2–3: *Le Cri*, Nacera&Dalila Belaza, 2006, photo ©Agathe Poupeney and Laurent Philippe

Piccirillo – *A Mediterranean Matri–Archive*

gestures on a liquid virtuality. At the end of the performance, Nacera and Dalila abandon the milieu of their presence to re-appear and re-emerge, as spectral entities, on a screen positioned at the end of the stage. There, the movements of the performance are recalled in/on a re-invented ground, as if the work re-articulated the potentiality of the fluctuating gestures in a micro-technical dimension. In "Dancing the Virtual", Erin Manning describes the system generated by these micro-movements as "the imperceptible force that activates all movement. They are the force in germ of movement-moving".[39] According to this perspective, if and when corporealites migrate onto virtuality, it is because the resistance and re-existence of their gestures allows for the emergence of a potential, embodied, and new relational force. It could then be stated that Belaza's experimentations with technology consign the germ of a new dancing movement to the Mediterranean matri-archive, an un-sprouted seed waiting to be re-archived in the fragmentary repetition of its event.

[39] Erin Manning, "Dancing the Virtual", *The Swedish Dance History*, *vol. 2* (Stockholm: University of Dance and Circus/Vienna: ImpulsTanz, 2010), 588.

Un-Veiling

> During my career as a dancer I found that we are so focused on dance that we
> do not open our eyes for other subjects.
> (Geyvan McMillen)

The archival drive lands in Istanbul, focusing now on the work of Geyvan McMillen, the woman-artist who has consistently contributed to the experimental diffusion of modern dance in Turkey. Her professional life is the intense witness to this vocation. After absorbing the folkloristic tradition at the Turkish Conservatory, the pioneer choreographer learns the techniques of ballet imported by Dame Ninette de Valois, the founder of the Royal Ballet of London, who, during the 30s and the 40s, played an 'imperialistic' role in the Turkish promulgation of ballet.[40] At the time, McMillen disclosed her body-archive to western dance languages by studying the techniques that Graham and Cunningham created in England and USA. Today, she is involved in projects characterized by an inventiveness that merges dance theatre and video installation. She also worked as a resident choreographer at the National State Opera and Ballet, in the role of founder and director of the Yıldız Technical University Modern Dance Department (1998-2008). Since 2005 she has been leading the *Istanbul Dance Theatre* (IDT+) that develops ideas of training technique starting from traditional gestures of the kinetic Turkish culture. Some examples are provided by the re-articulation of the '*Sufi* Whirling' meditative gesture or her re-elaboration of the 'Turkish Oil Wrestling', the kinetic practice meant to discover strength, force and speed in partnering composition.[41] As the 'archon' of her choreographic practice, in her commitment to education, McMillen promulgates – commences and commands – a choreographic heritage of Turkish culture, accepting and resisting, embodying

[40] See Susan Bauer, "Modern Dance Developments in Turkey, 1990-2005", *World Dance Alliance Global Assembly 2006 – Proceedings*, http://www.worlddancealliance.org/Publilcations.html, accessed October 2013.

[41] See http://www.istanbuldanstiyatrosu.com, accessed September 2014.

and negotiating, the various influences, identities and differences that have come up in her complex and creative encounter with Western otherness:

> I am Turkish and I work within that culture and body. I am not nationalistic. But I do say: I cannot be a Westerner. We eat differently, we talk differently, we communicate differently, we have different rhythms in our bodies and we have different music. Everything is very different from the West. But also I have to follow what we have today in this culture, not go back to the old culture.[42]

[42] G. McMillen interview "If you eat only spinach, it makes you become spinach", Internationaler tanzaustausch ruhr 6/13. 2002, http://old.pact-zollverein.de/medien/_english/_pdf, accessed September 2014.

From her choreo-politic positionality, McMillen wishes to 'un-veil' the silences and troubles embedded in the process of Turkish political-cultural modernization. Dance provides her with a language that denunciates, by bringing to light hidden and in-visible stories, the sexual abuse and subjugation of Turkish women. *Mahrem* (The Hidden) is a piece created in 2006, which represents the testimony of the women resisting the veiled, in-visible forms of male predominance. The work narrates the untold memories relegated offstage, the sexual and corporeal abuses, the gestures of physical and intellectual violence that women, in patriarchal societies, suffer in their homes. McMillen stages performing acts that Judith Butler would describe as the consequences of the "normative violence" experienced by women under the laws of male constraint.[43] The choreographer frames the corporeal violation, the manipulation and domination, the gestures of oppression and power that humiliate female subjectivity inside and outside the national 'setting'. This scenes of violence are composed by sequences of female dancers violently dragged and pushed by male performers; all forms of rebellion seem to be forbidden. On the stage the women perform their roles of 'slaves' or 'concubines', offering docile belly dances to the controlling male gaze. Their dance is, at the same time, the un-veiled expression of commitment, courage and resistance. As Rossella Battisti repeats, Geyvan McMillen "has the courage to rip off the veil and to convey the other half of the sky obscured and mortified by a return to fundamentalism that wants to see women suffocated, dominated and enslaved".[44]

[43] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, New York: Verso), 2004.

[44] Rossella Battisti, introduction to *Mahrem*, video: http://vimeo.com/7514483, accessed September 2014.

In the choreo-political dance of hidden stories dwells the poetical resistance of a counter-story, the counter-gesture that condenses the intensity of the subversive force of women. Indeed, in the temporal de-materialization, fragmentation, and dissimulation of this event, there remains the act of 'un-veiling'. The dancers are covered-wrapped-hidden by a veil, over-imposed as physical and intellectual coercion by the male dancers. Slowly, the women start their rebellion, enacting the un-veiling of bodies' movements and the writing of *jouissance* on stage. Gradually coming 'out' from the fabric that entangles and conceals them, the dancers occupy the space that inscribes their newly-born corporealities in a shocking nudity. Bursting through the lifeless veil-matter, the triumph of flesh constitutes a resisting *phantasmata*, the fragmentary memory-gesture that re-archives and enunciates survival – a female survival, full of life, which refuses to be contained anyhow. If,

in Derrida's words, the matri-archive might signify "the question of the future, the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow ... in the times to come",[45] the memory of the un-veiling is the spectral anticipation, the not-yet, the still-to-come, the statement of the life potentiality, subjectivity meeting the emergence-inception of *naissance* through dancing. Jean Luc Nancy envisions such an emerging gesture – *gestation* – of dance as the thinking and performing practice that re-positions and disseminates (her) multitude of languages:

[45] J. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 27.

> ... an inception: the dance of a birth ... not a gesture. It is rather a *gestation*.... These are the multiple spaces where dance emerges, and with any doubt there isn't only one, primordial, dance, but always and already the one or the other, a plurality of steps as well as a multitude of languages.[46]

[46] Jean Luc Nancy, Mathilde Monnier, *Allitération: Conversation sur la danse* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 142. My translation.

The female dancers of *Mahrem*, before abandoning the scene, turn their back to the spectators, the silent and complicit witnesses of the un-veiled story. On a digital white screen the projection of undistinguishable shapes of male bodies appear-disappear, as threatening waves, in various measures and sizes. It is the instant when McMillen acts out her corporeal strategy to activate unexpected relations between organic and mechanical bodies, the digital and the analogue. As a choreographer-archon, she disseminates her space of invention/intervention along imperative steps of fluid manner, translating and materializing on the dancing scene what Elif Shafak narrates, suggests and hopes for her literary audience: "Do not go with the flow, be the flow".[47]

[47] Elif Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love* (London: Penguin, 2010), 91.

The non-verbal language used by McMillan embodies what remains entangled in the weave of Turkish culture, a society that, while experiencing its 'liquid' and transformative modernization, reiterates physical, political and intellectual 'hardness'. Considering the choreographer as an archivist who collects female stories tainted by emergency, and who displays what is repressed and hidden by the dominant order, we are invited to confront, consult, and un-veil the shameful gestures of patriarchal domination inside and outside the Mediterranean area. The potentiality of McMillan's matri-archive creates a space of hospitality for the sharing and the elaboration of female traumas, the search of forms of corporeal survival and choreographic resistance.

Touching

> It is not impossible to rip any veil; it is in vain to hide an idea.
> (Nisrine Boukhari)

My last thinking-dancing step crosses the Syrian borders to consult *The Veil*, the performance created by Nisrine Boukhari in 2007.[48] Boukhari is a mixed media and

[48] See Nisrine Boukhari's Blog. http://nisrineboukhari.com, accessed May 2014.

installation artist who explores the psycho-geographical intersection between environment and behaviour, experimenting on the interactive and visual 'touches' activated by an aesthetic use of colour and light therapy. She has played a crucial role in the Syrian art milieu, conducting, with her sister, *AllArtNow*, the first independent collective space for contemporary visual artists. Founded in 2005, originally situated in Damascus, this laboratory closed its doors in July 2012 "to open it to Syrian refugee families and starts to work in different places in the world as a nomadic space".[49] If the organisation's initial focus was to establish virtual links to the international art world through the Internet, it serves today as a home for local and international artists who can exchange ideas and establish collaborations.

Boukhari cannot be said to be a choreographer or a dancer, but in *The Veil* she signs the im-materiality of her digital screen with the consistency or 'matter' of a dancing corporeality emerging from, and touching on, the surface of a veil. In this video work, an un-discernible figure moves behind a red veil, choreographing ephemeral gestures according to the rhythms of fractal sonorous vibes. The gestures are ex-scribed inside-outside the monochromatic texture of the veil, flouting like a dancing 'Medusa'. The viewer's eyes perceive and distinguish the traces left by the touching body that pushes, weights, crushes, squeezes, slips, grabs, and stretches the moving-moved texture. While bodily forms press against the screen, boundaries blur and merge in 'con-tact' with the digitality of the video-veiled image. The monochromatic connection of veil, body and matter links substance, weight and gravity, creating a digital corporeality that, in its spectral *revenant*, calls – or recalls – for sensible and sensuous reactions, for new critical approaches.

The Canadian media theorist and curator Laura Marks explores the ways in which a "haptic approach might rematerialize our objects of perception, especially now that optical visuality is being refitted as a virtual epistemology for the digital age".[50] Positioning "haptic visuality" and "optical visuality" on the opposite ends of the spectrum, by privileging the 'haptic perception' for its tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive function, the author maintains that the eyes work as the true organs of touch:

> It involves thinking with your skin, or giving as much significance to the physical presence of another as the mental operations of symbolization. This is not a call to wilful regression but to recognizing the intelligence of the perceiving body.... In the dynamic movement between optical and haptic ways of seeing, it is possible to compare different ways of knowing and interacting with an-other.[51]

If 'haptic visuality' is a tactile seeing and knowing, which involves the viewer's body and intelligence, Boukhari video-choreography constructs and disseminates

[49] See http://www.allartnow.com, accessed July 2014.

[50] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii.

[51] Ibid., 18.

her 'haptic images' inviting for a 'haptic experience'. In consulting the electronic texture of this video, the viewer is not required to identify what s/he is seeing; s/he must sense it with her/his body-archive, treating the alterity of the digital surface as a skin, expressing the infinite possibilities of sensing, his or her proprioceptive memory caressing the other. This dialectic, corporeal, and sensible relation resonates with Luce Irigaray's notion of the feminist 'touch', that responds to the call of the (m)other, an action which, when and if cultivated, provides the chance of intimate communication, which is still able to "save us".[52]

Behind and beyond the veil, the memory of tactility disseminates perception across the malleable fluidity of Boukhari's Mediterranean choreography, allowing for the emergence–becoming of the possibility and potentiality of female corporeality. The trans-forming digital affirms a metamorphic body whose incompleteness offers a potential for the transformation of sexual difference. As the silkworm in *véraison* – "in the moment of ripening and the moment of maturation"[53] – identity emerges in forms of being and in-corporation whose fluxes stream towards the future. The inspiration for this *à-venir* comes and signs the encounter between the dancing hands of Boukhari and the thinking body of Jean Luc Nancy:

> Dance: metamorphosis, transformation, plasticity, fluidity, malleability, becoming…. The beginning body is unformed, the dancing body is always to come (it will never reach a final state, a finished shape and stature…. It is a becoming body, a specific corps whose progress or incorporation will never be complete.[54]

[52] Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London: Continuum, 2008), 2; "Perhaps Cultivating Touch Can Still Save Us", *SubStance*, 40.3 (2011).

[53] J. Derrida, "A Silkworm of One's Own", in *Veils* (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 2001), 91.

[54] J. L. Nancy, *Allitération*, 109. My translation.

Figs. 4–5: Nisrine Boukhari, *The veil*, 2007, video still, courtesy of Nisrine Boukhari

In the act of touching and being touched, Boukhari inscribes and disseminates her personal 'signature'. She choreographs and lets emerge a corporeality that, in its becoming, slips away and displaces the writing of the body on a liquid-digital milieu, while differing the *puissance* or resistance of her poetical–political memory to the ones who consult, and make re-emerge, the virtual eventfulness of her work.

Fig. 6: Nisrine Boukhari, *The veil*, 2007, video still, courtesy of Nisrine Boukhari

Evocated in fragmentary and spectral memory, the choreographic gestures consulted by the matri-archival exercises, recall, reactivate, bear witness, and perform the recent history of the Mediterranean. In the fluctuating gestures of Belaza, the revolutionary weaves of the Arab Springs, which need political elaboration, are released as *cries*; the subversive nakedness of McMillen's gestures un-veil the existence and resistance of the global feminine in the face of corporeal and intellectual subjugation; the being-body-identity behind and beyond Boukhari's digital veil touches on the conditions of Syrian refugees who seek a vital escape from the dolorous tangles of war. Might the archival vocation feel satisfied? Too many other stories stay un-archiviable, the tragic stories of the no-bodies, with no-names, dispersed in the necropolis of the Mediterranean, ghosts who never emerge among the memories-gestures-fragments that my imaginary matri-archive might exercise. Should my responsibility need confirmation, the Mediterranean matri-archive is, indeed, only an inventive locus for thinking and paying attention to the (m)other, articulating the promise of a dignified, cultural and artistic hospitality to 'others' who land on the Mediterranean seashore. If, in the end, it is my I(-eye)

confronting alterity – "It is me, I, with the other, the other within me, it's one gender going into the other, one language going through the other"[55] – my imaginary matri-archive records and transmits the interconnection of the choreography of bodily her-stories, never erasing difference, only looking for new visions and alternative archives.

[55] H. Cixous, "Difficult Joys", in *The Body and the Text* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 14.

Roberto Terracciano

Coded Borderscapes.
Locative Media, Memory and Migration in ManifestAR's *Border Memorial*

Abstract: Augmented Reality technologies challenge the conception of the virtual as a transcendental elsewhere. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it, the virtual is immanent in the real (Grosz 2001). The article will take into account the Augmented Reality Art of Mark Skwarek and his so-called AR interventions designed for smartphones screens, in order to explore how the virtual and the real unbind each other and how matter releases its potential. Mark Skwarek's virtual interventions try to restore the seamlessness of the borderland and reterritorialize the border by means of topological distortion. In *US/Iraqi War Memorial*, the artist overlays a virtual necrogeographic map of Iraq designed by a network of burial sites of deceased Americans soldiers and Iraqi civilians during the Second Gulf War. In the Border Memorial: La Frontera de los Muertos, the traditional Mexican festivity El dia de los muertos has been uncannily translated into a memorial that unveils the scope of the loss of life and reveals the places were human remains have been found along the border. Skwarek's art comes alive on smartphones screens as tridimensional coffins or Oaxacan traditional calaca skeletons: these objects are digitally designed and superimposed in the actual field of view to revive the humanity and reality of the immanent Other (Mezzadra 2012). The two interventions display the sites where memory turns into matter and vice versa: by following Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (2004), it will be argued that the virtual image is the blasphemous cultural transduction of the physical space through which newness enters the world.

Keywords: *Keywords: augmented reality, blasphemy, intervention, memorials, architecture, visual media*

Augmenting Visual Culture and Border Politics

Still, they move. Bodies of migrants who did not survive the clandestine passage from Mexico into the US through the North American desert, while leaving instantaneous digital memories of their movement. Digital ghosts trapped by GPS coordinates trigger the movement of living bodies inside the complex architecture of the American borderland. ManifestAR's augmented installation *Border Memorial: La frontera de los muertos* documents and re-actualizes the memory of the migrants who died in the act of crossing, showing the relation between the US/Mexican border and locative media technologies.

Not only does ManifestAR's augmented reality art afford for a counter-representation of Southwestern US-Mexico borderland by superimposing visual data into the geographical location, but, by using mobile phones localization features, it also opens a discussion on the reconfiguration and complexification of the border, exposing it to a postcolonial critique. In so doing, it also provokes us into a re-assessment of the compound word *mobile medium* as a technology that is

moved through space, or that moves itself (like drones or satellites). I understand mobile media as that which produces mediated movements inside a physical and digital grid. In this paper, I discuss the augmented qualities of contemporary borders as assemblages in which economies, technologies, politics, architectures and cultures conjoin. Far from being a simple wall or a line drawn on the sand, borders have become heterogeneous and mobile *dispositifs* that selectively include and exclude migrant subjectivities into and outside the space of Western citizenship, yet those stakes are far more visible at the location of the border turning the steep line on the sand into a *borderscape*, an intricate network of portable segregation.

Indeed, visual culture and architecture are deeply entangled with the innovation of American warfare policies. In two different books, visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff and urbanist Eyal Weizman respectively discuss the spectacularization of the Second Gulf War, and the connection between urban and housing policies and the permanent Israeli colonial warfare against Palestinians.[1] Despite their different focus, the two studies share the argument about the western gaze as mediated by assemblages that are used to de-humanize the Other –Iraqi or Palestinian. While Mirzoeff argues that the militarization of everyday spaces is deeply rooted in the relation between the massive production of images broadcast via televisual technologies and the mobile and fixed spatialities of the suburb (the home theater or the SUV's exoskeletal protection), according to Weizman, the very creation of infrastructures for the communication of people, goods and data (such as antennas and highways) has strategically served the slow colonization of the Palestinian territory creating differential spatiotemporalities for Israelis and Palestinians.

Like mobile phones, borders are now portable. By the end of this paper, I will argue that software is a space for struggle and negotiation because the use of software is not limited tosurveillance of pre-existing spaces. Code itself produces spatialities and subjects whose techniques of the body are tightly conditioned by software and, as a matter of fact, deeply embedding code in their ontogenesis.[2] If portable devices inaugurated a new visual era of ubiquitous surveillance and self-perfectioning algorithms creating patterns of knowledge through the parsing process of visual information, visibility on the network is a crucial point to be discussed when studying locative media. The argument from the side of resistance also takes the dichotomy between visbility and invisibility into account, where the ability to be transparent stands for the possibility to be seen and to interact with digital networks. Invisibility of the code inside coded spaces works on both sides for the planner/developer and the citizen/user: the more the code permeates reality the more border subjectivities become invisible.

Although new media theorist Lev Manovich argues that we should replace the old binary opposition between visibility and invisibility with fields and functions bearing specific value for each point of the networks,[3] what now stands for visible

[1] See Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) and Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israeli's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2007).

[2] Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011).

[3] Lev Manovich, "The Poetics of Urban Media Surfaces", *First Monday*, 4 (2006).

or invisible is being present both in the digital layer and on the physical ground, leading to the possibility to be parsed, managed and controlled even though not connected to digital networks. In the artwork I discuss in this paper, borders are invisible and yet they do matter because they permeate everyday life serving as matrix for the subjectivities transiting across them. According to Eugene Thacker and Alexander Galloway instead, this logic is at the core of the discussion about tactical media, those media that tactically open cracks inside the networked heterotopy. Galloway and Thacker argue that if existence is the science for control, nonexistence is the tactic for future media affording the flight from the protocological structure of contemporary cyberspace. To be existent on a network equals to be responsive to a range of limited parameters as codified bits of culture: face-recognition algorithms, for exemple, are permeated with late 18th century Lombrosian criminal theories.[4]

Contra Galloway and Thacker (but perhaps through a productive misreading), the San Diego-based collective Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 (EDT 2.0) calls for a visibility of transborder subjectivities, operating with hacked mobile phones that populate the Global Positioning System, turning it into a Geo-Poetic System. The Geo-Poetic System leaves tracks on the physical ground and the GPS map.[5] For EDT 2.0, tactical media are not that which is nonexistent to a node of the network, but that which transduces that network into something else. And that is the function of techno-geographical blasphemy. By calling ManifestAR's intervention blasphemous, I draw on Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural blasphemy[6] and on Donna Haraway's cyborg as illegitimate offspring of militarism and capitalism.[7] As it will be shown later in detail, ManifestAR's use of commercial platforms such as *LayAR*, transduces the flow of informations driving the movement of users who re-perform the US/Mexican Border augmented architecture with a different pace and in different directions.

The tactics adopted by ManifestAR is the use of information visualization fueled with data about the number and location of the death of Mexican migrants. In so doing, it redesigns a geography of mourning in a tactical memorial as a form of visibility and resistance. *Border Memorial*'s calacas, like Haraway's cyborgs, are coded with irony.

The use of calacas, the Aztecs' traditional effigies, witness Mexican layering of the colonial experience, the Spanish colonialism who left *el dia de los muertos* as an occasion of religious syncretism, the economic colonialism inaugurated by the US *geistarbeite Bracero Program* in the first years of the 20th century, and finally the outsourcing policies of the *maquiladora* system coming along the NAFTA agreement in the 1990s.[8] In particular, in the name of Mexican modernization, the *maquiladoras* technological industry displaces rural families calling for cheap labour, discouraging higher education in order to produce hardware and software as the material core of the culture of mobile media.[9] The diffuse memorial scattered across the border challenges the Nation-State geography by deforming its

[4] Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2007), 136, and Sarah Kember, "Gender Estimation in Face Recognition Technology: How Smart Algorithms Learn to Discriminate", *Media Field Journal,* 7 (2013), http://www.mediafieldsjournal.org/gender-estimation-in-face-reco/.

[5] Electronic Disturbance Theater and b.a.n.g.lab, "Geo Poetic Systems (GPS): Fragments, Fractals, Forms and Function Against Invisibility", *Trans-Scripts*, 33 (2013), 290–304.

[6] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), 226.

[7] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

[8] Enrique Dussels Peters, "The Mexican Economy Since NAFTA: Socioeconomic Integration or Disintegration?", in Dieter Plehwe, Bernhard Walpen and Gisel Neunhoffer, eds., *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[9] Ursula Biemann, *Performing the Border*, 1999.

boundaries and lighting up other stories from contemporary exploitation.

Geographies for the Mourning: Postcolonial Tactics of Re-memory and Re-implacement

ManifestAR's augmented art aims at filling physical public spaces with data that are not supposed to be located there. Before *Border Memorial,* John Craig Freeman and Mark Skwarek of ManifestAR coded other locative art interventions such as *ProtestAR* and the *US/Iraqi War Memorial.*[10] Both interventions work by connecting smartphones to the GPS network and to the *LayAR* server. In this triangulation (user/server/satellite) the intervention itself *takes (over the) place*, in that it recodes space as open by making the political and cultural issues of the locale visible.

Following the protest taking place in Zuccotti Park during the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, ManifestAR started the project *ProtestARs* inviting people to take pictures or videos of themselves holding up banners and posting them on the *ProtestARs* website together with Zuccotti Park GPS coordinates. The submitted videos and .gif images were automatically shown in the Augmented Reality layer of the *LayAR Browser* in the cleared out plaza that was eventually turned into a post-modern virtual collage.

The digital overtaking of Zuccotti Park stresses how bordering policies are active also *inside* the US national space, separating the 99% of US citizens and Wall

Fig. 1: ManifestAR and Mark Skwarek, *ProtestAR*, digital composition http://protestars.wordpress.com/, 6 October 2011

Street financial elites. In *Us/Iraqi War Memorial*, their first augmented memorial, ManifestAR started to work with the displacement of distant memories taking over the American homeland: the memorial consisted in a map of tri-dimensional coffins covered with stripped and starred flags or modeled in bare wood carved with Arabic words such as 'adūw' that ironically translates 'enemy' in Arabic. A

[11] See ManifestAR, *ProtestARs*, 2011, http://protestars.wordpress.com/, and ManifestAR, *US/Iraqi War Memorial*, 2012 http://usiraqiwarmemorial.wordpress.com/.

single casket was designed for each of the 52,036 recorded casualties as reported by *The Guardian* and the Wikileaks War Log. This necrocartographic data map was then offset to the latitudes of the US East Coast in order to be visualized by smartphone users through the *LayAR* browser application. Those data have been recollected and visually offset in a gesture of rupture: the signifier (the map) and what it represents (the territory) are violently disconnected both geographically and linguistically by the use of the ironic inscription digitally engraved in the virtual casket. Using the Augmented Reality application, the visitors of the memorial re-map their reality by including the distant memory (the onscreen three dimensional object) that dis/continues and intrudes the actual field of view through geolocalization technology. The perception of digital objects on the physical ground generates a sense of angst and loss affecting the body with a layered virtual geography that cuts across the physical surface.

This is what Jason Farman, after Edward Casey, calls implacement. Implacement is that which "locates our sense of proprioception with others and

Fig. 2: Mark Skwarek and John Craig Freeman, *US/Iraqi War Memorial*, digital composition, http://usiraqwarmemorial.wordpress.com/, February 2012

with objects in a space. Implacement serves as the counterpart to displacement which 'represents the loss of particular places in which their lives were formerly at home'".[11] *Border Memorial* shares the virtual overtaking of place as an act of resistance with *ProtestARs*, and displaces the movement of the visitors as it happens in *US/Iraqi War Memorial*. In this essay, I argue that augmented memorials like *Border Memorial* work in two different directions: on the one hand, *La frontera de los muertos* makes the political and cultural stakes animating the geography of the borderland visible, on the other it opens a space for contestation of the United States' neocolonial policies, transducing the public-but-bordered space of the Nation and the enclosed space of its cultural dimensions.[12] In fact, not only does *Border Memorial* take place in the US/Mexican borderland but a section of the

[11] Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 39.

[12] Here I refer to Appadurai's book *Modernity at Large* in which the cultural theorist argue the Nation-State produces itself through memorials and museum as its cultural dimension. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota U. P., 1996).

Southwestern desert virtually takes over the location of the American temple for contemporary culture: the court of the MoMA in New York.

Border Memorial addresses the issue posed by the reconfiguration of borders as spaces generated by code, so that locative arts such as ManifestAR's can respond to the augmentation of such architectures and their becoming concrescent networked geographies. Furthermore, the memorial stresses the relation that the artists undertake with physical – yet not 'natural' – landscapes and their 'perversion' through coding practices that bring about questions on the movement of migrant bodies across the border's new transparent skin. Skwarek's and Freeman's artworks lie in the conjunction where the body emerges as a digital datum in GPS geo-localization systems and where memory, in the form of virtual images, is poured out of the surface of mobile screens into a world that obeys the laws of Newtonian physics.

The border cuts space but there is no void between the regions it splits: on the contrary, it causes an intensification that allows new objects to ingress the world. As the Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, the border is a living and productive *herida abierta* and what it produces is a borderland where new cultural forms and new resistances grate, bleed and congeal:

> The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging from a third country –a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.[13]

Despite being economically and technologically restrained to those who can afford it, creating a *de facto* class-bounded space, AR art challenges the idea of the museum as a white cube where the virtuality of dead objects is preserved. The ubiquitous aura of the *alibi et alias* is thus the augmented quality of the *hic et nunc* of these site-specific pieces of art: the place of production, performance and reproduction of these projects is not unique, they happen in different times and in different spaces at once. The artists' interest in memorials in the form of augmented reality as a way to both celebrate and honor the deceased, is an invitation to rethink public space, citizenship and the technology regulating them while silently running in the background. Borderlands are areas in which, as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson suggest, "there is a certain intensification of political and even existential stakes that crystallize relations of domination and exploitation, subjection and subjectivation, power and resistance".[14] I would also add that there is an intensification of technological investment contrasting with the aesthetics of ruin to which they seem to be condemned. Geolocalization technologies, used in border patrolling as well as in social media, are virtual-actual nexuses catching the body into the networks through chips in electronic passports, SIM cards, ATM

[13] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Chicana Studies (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 3.

[14] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29.4-5 (July-September 2012), 71.

devices, and through biometric identification that attach even the offline body to the online grid. Skwarek and Freeman's perversion of code brings virtuality from the folds of reality into the actual field of view by subverting the use of ubiquitous computing and surveillance devices that normally silence themselves, their own bias and the processes that brought them into the world.

These subversions of the code are what Bhabha would call blasphemies. According to the cultural theorist, a blasphemy is not simply an insult to a sacred text, it is rather the betrayal of its poetic form as it is translated into prosaic language.[15] In this case, the use of blasphemous code unveils the *mise-en-scene* of cleared out and bordered spaces, a cultural location turned into the desert of the real. Donna Haraway, on the other hand, calls cyborgs blasphemous, because blasphemy "protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community".[16] Blasphemy, that is, grants both continuity and discontinuity by breaking the code from the inside, it is nonexistent precisely because it is not transparent and it interrupts the representation, not by hiding itself but in a gesture of full presence. In the same way, Skwarek and Freeman's memorials are doubly blasphemous in that they remap coded-managed cartographies and tactically subvert the information-fueled applications (AR browsers) with silent uncanny tridimensional images. The immersion into the virtuality of the memory as tactics for the counter-representation of the colonial space generates a sense of implacement, a new sense of being-in-the-world. The GPS coordinates of *Border Memorial,* while displacing the movement of the visitors on the physical ground and replacing the silenced casualties caused by border policies, re-implace the movements of the visitors into a geography of the mourning.

In the following sections, I will focus on the two directions undertaken by the digital memorial reworking of the geography of Mexico and that of the United States: memory as a tactic of resistance *and* presence, and implacement as a means for transduction of the physical-digital infrastructure.

In Bits and Bones: Memory and the Immanent Outsider as a Transductive Actor

In this section, I will look more closely at memory as both matter of the memorial and tactics for counter-representation of border-crossers. In particular, the counter-representation of the flow of migrant subjectivities whose lives are welcome as labour but whose participation to local culture is constantly silenced. The silent and uncanny memorial for the deceased becomes then a celebration of the living. From the memory of the server to the memory of the mobile phone, the map drawn by the ensemble of data represented by the digital *calacas* engenders the virtuality of the memorial in two ways: on the one hand, by exploiting the

[15] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 226.

[16] Haraway, Simians, *Cyborg and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149 .

productive confusion between the digital and the virtual (as something not real, a mere mapping devoid of the thing mapped); on the other hand by bringing silenced data into visibility. In this way, *Border Memorial* offers an occasion to remember migrants living inside the national space, even if deprived of civil rights.

Virtuality according to Deleuze's reading of Bergson, is not that which is not real, on the contrary, it is always real but not actualized yet. Actuality is not opposed to reality, but to the virtual: the lines of differentiation drawn by virtuality when they emerge on the plane of the actual are all real but potential, they lie outside the range of limited possibilities, they point to futurity rather than to the future.[17] By bringing the memory of the deceased into visibility, in order to remember the living, *Border Memorial* works then as a necropolitical tool questioning the space of the Nation and the identity of migrants.

In fact, by visualizing the excess of border-architecture, *La frontera de los muertos* focuses on the inclusion of outsiders rewritten in a code other than the one used by mainstream media. As Mezzadra and Neilson suggest, borders too are not fixed in time, they are a phase of topological deformation of space where political stakes intensify and where relations of power and processes of subjectivation materialize in the most visible and violent form. In this scenario, augmented borders are not technologies of selective exclusion, but rather of differential inclusion as they produce the subjectivity of the illegal worker, the unauthorized and yet recognized "immanent outsider", the subject coming from elsewhere as a key "piece" of the neoliberal machine. In fact, far from being only the subject of exclusion, the "immanent outsider" also becomes a "key actor in reshaping, contesting and redefining the borders of citizenship".[18] The immanent outsider's agency is that of remodeling the space and deforming it, creating spaces of exceptions within and outside the borders. These spaces are heterogeneous and far more complexly distributed than in the Eurocentric West-East and North-South diagram: indeed, they are incorporating each other like in an emulsion in unexpected ways. The world-making process of globalization is reproduced in the richest countries as well, where part of the population is cast out from participation to its wealth. Finally, the immanent outsider does not need to move (and in fact s/he is "invited" not to do so) to be caught in the mechanisms that facilitate the proliferation of borders.

Border Memorial renders these processes and materializes them in bits and bones on the screen by reprogramming and perverting the geography of the public and that of the museum space turning them into suspicious places. Of course, the physical body immersed in this virtual architecture is perfectly aware of the political stakes of the digital memorial; as a matter of fact, one must tune into it by browsing the layers available on the application. The digital flâneur is thus urged to connect to an alternative arrangement of space which is neither coded by the State nor by private companies, but is managed through a completely different scheme although it is made of the same matter (SIM cards, chips, GPS and face

[17] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 113.

[18] Mezzadra and Neilson, "Between Inclusion and Exclusion", 71.

recognition softwares). This technological assemblage – the smartphone – reproduces the affect of events that were not experienced in the first place neither in a shared space nor in a shared time with the very event the memorial is linked to, through perception. This happens because, according to Elizabeth Grosz's reading of Bergson, past and present are not variations of degrees in strength but they are indeed different in kind, to the same extent that remembrance and perception are; the proximity of the (virtual) object to the body dangerously connects memory and perception short-circuiting them. As she puts it:

> The present as it is by perception and action, is fundamentally, and paradoxically, linked to space. The distance of an object in space is a direct measure of the threat or promise of that object in time: the nearer the object, the more immediate its impact on the perceiver. Space signifies or represents our near future, that future which is already tied to the present, that future which is implied in or posited by our current perceptions and actions. Space, perception, objects, action are all aligned through my body's location and placement as an object among the other objects in the world.[19]

[19] Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 106.

Threat or promise are two equal but opposite affections that intensify as the object is approached both in space and in time. That which is near is threatening and promising, affecting a region or all of my body, exciting humors from my heart to my hands and to my legs with expectation or with fear, urging my body to movements of curiosity or escape. The subject crossing the sensitive augmented skin of nation-states, is surveilled by helicopters, cameras and drones for it threatens to re-configure its immune system. These affects, modulated by mainstream media from the border to the screens, from the screens to the body are subverted and performed in the AR art by Freeman and Skwarek. Immersivity, the desire to penetrate the opaque surface of the screen as if it were transparent, collapses. The body is already in there and its presence is localized by the smartphone antennas and screens. They no longer act as walls where reality is narrated and represented; instead, they are mobile technologies performing the network from the moment they are turned on. The contemporary contradiction that wants the body free to move while it is performing a hub of a web also reflects the fact that the only haptic border is that of the screen. As if it were a phantom limb, visitors sense the object yet they cannot touch it, they cannot touch the alien who haunts their visual field: the skeletons are silent and indifferent to the pace of the body that navigates the architecture they build, the visitors' bodies can even penetrate their polygonal surfaces, still the screen is the only touchable thing.

On the border of the screen, the body synesthetically senses the virtual objects, relating to them and creating a temporary and fluid architecture. The body becomes part of the architect's concern in the process of designing as a part of the design itself. In fact, the visitor's proprioception, the capacity of the body to register displacement within the body, becomes a pivotal element of this deforming
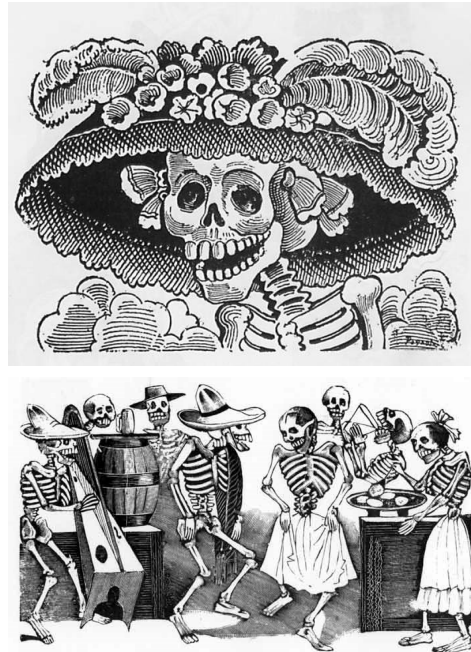
Figs. 3-4: José Guadalupe Posada – *La Garbancera* (*La calavera Catrina*, upper, and *Calaveria*, lower)*,* zinc etching, 1910-1913

space. Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi envisions the topological turn in architecture as a call to pay attention to the process and the movement rather than to the separation between pure form and matter. In his view, process is not a momentum bounded by two forms (the virtual idea and the end-product) but a proliferation of forms stemming from unpredictable movements.

As a consequence, the architect's role is that of a catalyst for newness and emergence of objects and spaces entering the world. There is no such a thing as pure form, as the whole process of design-building-exhibition and dwelling is impure from the beginning for it engulfs parameters that do not respond exclusively to physical laws. In fact, they also resonate with economical reasoning and with the afterglow of the project as it is donated to everyday life. In the same fashion, visuality and movement are closely connected, because "actual traces of the virtual are always effects of movement":

> When we see one object at a distance behind another, what we are seeing is in a very real sense our own body's potential to move between the objects or to touch them in succession. We are not using our eyes as organs of sight, if by sight is meant the cognitive operation of detecting and calculating forms at a distance. We are using our eyes as proprioceptors and feelers. Seeing at a distance is a virtual proximity: a direct, unmediated experience of potential orientings and touches on an abstract surface combining pastness and futurity. Vision envelops proprioception and tactility, by virtue of past multi-sense conjunctions whose potential for future repetition our body immediately, habitually "knows," without having to calculate. Seeing is never separate from other sense modalities. It is by nature synesthetic, and synesthesia is by nature kinesthetic. Every look reactivates a many-dimensioned, shifting surface of experience from which cognitive functions habitually emerge but which is not reducible to them. It is on that abstract surface of movement that we "live" and locate.[20]

[20] Brian Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible," ed. by Stephen Perrella, *Hypersurface Architecture*, 68.5/6 (May-June 1998), 21.

Thus, what is really affecting and touching the body is the distribution of the virtual *calacas* on the physical ground. The very relation in space between the virtual objects, and between the virtual objects and the human body creates an

architecture of mourning. As the artists recall in their statement, the project was designed to "visualize the scope of the loss of life by marking each location where human remains have been recovered with a virtual object or augmentation".[21] Here, the scope does not refer only to the count of casualties but also to the opportunity for action of the camera and the field of view it frames. Thus, the recollection of the focal points within this virtual architecture is an uncanny urgency for movement and contemplation. In particular, in the *US/Iraqi War Memorial* and in *Border Memorial*, the simulation of "hauntedness" of the space replaces the celebratory quality of the classical memorial that crystallizes a point in time and starts off the narration of a new history. Instead, the contemporary memorial is continuously remapped and reterritorialized by the visitors' random path-making. At the same time, the body experiences the uncanny feeling that something it knows, and that it has long tried to send back beyond the borders of chaos, is actually here turning its homeland into a suspicious place.

Figs. 5: Mark Skwarek and John Craig Freeman, *Border Memorial: La frontera de los muertos,* digital composition, http://bordermemorial.wordpress.com/, January 2012

The ubiquitous ghosts perform the virtual architecture each time a visitor at the MoMA, access the Internet via the LayAR application to view the digital landscape of Border Memorial: from the hardware of the smartphone located in New York to the hardware of the server (probably located in a Scandinavian country), several worlds open and connect to each other to finally render onscreen the memory of the dead.

Memory is the very matter of a memorial, molded by one's sense through perception. A brief detour through Peter Eisenman's solid memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin allows us to map similarities and differences with Freeman and ManifestAR's memorial and highlight how virtual memorials work. Designed following the Bergsonian diagram, according to which what runs from pure memory to perception is not a difference of strength but of kind, Eisenman's memorial consists of a grid of dark grey stelae installed in a sloping ground that contrasts the undulated surface created by the ensemble of the stelae's top surfaces. This differential space, and the abrupt variation in perception it triggers, materializes the sensation of loss and angst from a remote region of

22 Peter Eisenman, Luis Galiano, and K. Michael Keys, *Blurred Zones: Peter Eisenman Architects, 1988-1998* (The Monacelli Press, 2003), 314.

memory that the visitors experience as they immerse their body into the grid. Eisenman's deep refusal of symbolic representation, engendered by the traditional memorial, is actualized in the choice of the stelae as opposed to images, symbols or texts. In his memorial (and in his own words), "the time of the monument, its durationis different from the time of human understanding".[22] Thus it could be argued that what the Berlin Memorial intercepts is time as duration while the traditional memorial captures an instant in space. In fact, its extensive structure is not a point to go toand stop, but rather a plan to get lost in, where space and time stretch together: the architectural structure interacts with the body and transduces memory into perception. According to Henri Bergson, actual sensations occupy definite portions of the body while pure memory does not interest any part of it and does not urge it to action unless memory is actualized in the form of image. The virtual image affects the body with virtual sensations pushing it to movement in space and in time:

23 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 140.

> Memory, actualized in an image, differs then profoundly from pure memory. The image is a present state and its sole share in the past is the memory from which arose. Memory on the contrary, powerless as long as it remains without utility, is pure from all admixture of sensation, is without attachment to the present, and is consequently unextended.[23]

For Bergson, then, matter holds multiple and latent memories: the work of the artist or of the architect is to elicit and excite such states by remodeling matter in order to return memory in the form of affect and perception. But whilst Eisenman's architecture is strictly linked in memory and matter with Berlin, Skwarek's digital memorials are ubiquitous. In fact, Eisenman's grid, located between Brandenburger Tor and the Tiergarten was seamlessly embedded in the urban fabric of voids that have characterized Berlin for over half a century, its shape and austerity still reminds today the wounds of war despite Berlin's contemporary relentless towering skyline. Instead, Skwarek and Freeman's process of design (coding), construction (calculation) and exhibition (reproduction) take place in three different places; as a result it is always out of place, unhomely and blasphemous.

Tame Your Code: The Blasphemy of Transduction in Generative Architectures

This final section interrogates how augmented memorials such as *Border Memorial* link the memory of the past with a politics for the future through coding practices. In fact, *Border Memorial* brings here and now the humanity of the deceased immanent outsiders. In the process of coding, it overlaps the space and time performing the memorial's unhomely architecture of despair. The AR intervention

focuses on the ability, possibility and the chance for the body to act and move through space and time from either sides of the border. From this standpoint, they also account for the ones who cannot move and who are caught in the machine of post-colonial capitalism beyond the borders. In the digital memorial, the visitors' movements are part of the installation itself, and they follow paths triggered by the installation but not determined by it: the in-between space of the memorial draw an architecture that never crystallizes into pure form.

While discussing Jameson's third space of postmodernity, Homi Bhabha sees the border as the privileged site for creation of transductive identities. In *The Location of Culture*, he argued that the liminal space of the border is an invitation or a promise for the future; to live at the border of one's own identity – be it of class, race or gender – grants the opportunity to move beyond the settling down of identities themselves as they are opened to a space of flow that allows hybridization. In temporal terms as well, the present cannot be thought like an interruption between the past and the future as it rather expands into our contemporaneity, elastically involving remote regions of past and future in the act of the present world making.[24] In this sense, augmented spaces of control and mainstream corporate media work together to narrate the present and its immediate future without its 'beyond', the space as a gated citizenship that selectively include migrants inasmuch as labour but not as humans: living on the borders (beyond and across them), then, leads to inevitably sense the unhomeliness and the inconsistency of the postcolonial condition; as Bhabha argued:

> Being in the 'beyond', then is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also ... to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond', becomes a space of intervention.[25]

Such a space is intervening in that it grows from the folds of reality and in between territories and phases of modulation of actual spatialities. *Border Memorial* generates a space for intervention where the identities of the dead or of the visitors are pushed to their limits, creating for each actualization (each connection to the LayAR browser), an instance of new relational space. In this sense, these memorials design fluid and ever expanding cartographies. The virtual memorial performs with physical objects and bodies what generative design draws by calculation.

Generative design is based upon the idea that the designer/programmer triggers a project to grow on its own according to patterns of repetition and variation, from a simple sketch, evolving into more complex forms, naturally expanding like plants or snowflake crystals. The algorithm individuates such processes as it conditions but does not determine the evolution of the generative object. According to

different styles, algorithms can be exclusively devoted to consuming data and incorporating change in order to strategically control the processing and flow of information as it happens in surveillance systems, or be open to crash and tactically create new and unexpected forms as it happens in Skwarek and Freeman's memorials. In fact, their virtual geography of movement grows out of a map of cardinal points that attract and repulse the bodies of the visitors who draw conditioned paths between one virtual object and another.

ManifestAR's code exceeds speech and writing as it consists of a text written by humans in a highly formalized grammar and language; a language which is neither natural to humans nor understandable by the machine. The written code is then an interface or a negotiation firstly because it is neither human nor machinic, but also because it is a special kind of writing that performs like a speech act. It acts upon the physical world in the moment it loops the algorithm in its flow, processes the information in the moment the software reads them and translates them in the language of 1s and 0s.[26] The code that builds these memorials reverts the bias that mobile technologies carry and performs a different kind of code/space. According to Rob Kitchin, a code/space deeply differs from a coded space in that a code-managed space is only augmented with functionality of softwares (like a system to reserve and retrieve books in a library) while in code/spaces, the software is embedded in its ontogenesis (like it does in airports).[27] If the border performs a certain kind of movement framed into a certain space, and the mobile phone as well produces a space and a time framed by its software, then what kind of space do these AR interventions perform? Skwarek and Freeman's memorials produce a space that locates itself in a digital-physical junction at different latitudes of the globe. They reproduce, in a variated style, the spatiality that a body entertains with the element of the cardinal architecture in the desert and the space they generate is of transductive kind. According to French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, transduction is a process of ontogenetic modulation of a dominion; in its unfolding, it poses different relational problems to be solved once at a time:[28] the body meets the digital objects and runs after them in curiosity or away from them in fear, the solution that visitors find is a step in the making of a new spatiality and in becoming space of the body. Code/spaces, according to Kitchin, "should be understood and conceptualized as relational and emergent spaces in which software frames the unfolding but does not determine it".[29] This is the logic of generative design that produces and reproduces itself according to patterns of repetition and variation introduced by calculation in different conditions. If the generative designs of nature reproduces similar schemes according to different actualizations like a crystal of ice, it doesn't mean that each crystal is determined to be designed in the same way. In fact, infinite environmental agents might affect its ingression into the world as a new object in that unique actualization of the space-time. This cardinal and bodily architecture expanding by relating the focal points that build it up, opens up to the error, to surrender, to the crash of the system or

[26] Geoff Cox and Alex McLean, *Speaking Code* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2012), 35.

[27] Kitchin and Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*, 72.

[28] Muriel Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transidndividual* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2012), 6.

[29] Kitchin and Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*, 74.

to the seamless repetition of mathematical operations.[30] The differential identity is one of the trigger conditions for the movement evolving in continuous negotiations through which it draws borders and trace a network-like system. This structure is different from the postmodern pastiche. In fact, its complex grammar coordinates the various elements in the moment of their contact and hybridization. I would like to add to Guillermo Gomez Peña's "menudo chowder", where "stubborn chunks" stay afloat,[31] the idea of the emulsion. In the emulsion, temporal identities do not erase themselves but combine in new unexpected ways to return separated in either previous or in new forms according to contingencies. Here there might be stubborn chunks but they are crystallizations of whole assemblages together. In Simondonian terms, borderlands, as fluid cultural spaces produced by technical objects, are characterized by metastability, the property that allows a minimal variation to re-organize matter in a state of false equilibrium around a clot, a crystallization, an intensification.[32]

In Skwarek and Freeman's memorials, the digital event is a stranger element popping out from the visual field into the mobile screen. As Bhabha points out, it

> ... reveals the interstitial; insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the 'unstable element of linkage', the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which 'newness comes into the world'. The foreign element 'destroys the original's structures of reference and sense communication as well' not simply by negating it but by negotiating the disjunction in which successive cultural temporalities are preserved in the work of history and at the same time cancelled.[33]

If, as Bhabha put it, "translation is the performative nature of cultural communication",[34] as language *in actu* rather than *in situ*, it is also true that the target language of the conveyed message is what becomes actually modified in the act of translation, rather than the message itself. In the language of spatiality, the blasphemous act of the memorial as intervention is not of trans-lative nature, as the overlapping of coordinates would suggest, it is rather of trans-ductive kind for it undergoes a process of ontogenetic modulation. In this sense, ManifesrtAR's memorial are modulations of the medium and of the space they design according to architectures that are internal and external to the medium and different from the ones the mediumwas designed for. Skwarek and Freeman use the LayAR commercial platform to code deeply site-specific ubiquitous memorial that render onscreen the humanity and the post-humanity of the immanent outsider, paradoxically with images recalling mourning and inhuman violence. The political use of these digital objects and their positioning on the online grid and on the offline ground transduces the function of the hardware and the software individuating the ecological and economical processes, tracing new typologies of spatialities and delimiting their borders. In particular, the software that not only augments the potentialities of the spaces of modernity but generates and manages

[30] See Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics and Space* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2013).

[31] Guillermo Gomez Peña in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 219.

[32] Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual*, 6.

[33] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 228.

[34] Ibid., 228.

them, thus becomes the privileged place for conflict and negotiations of identities at their limits.

Roberta Colavecchio

Eco-Art Machines.
A Chaosmotic Perspective on Postcolonial Capitalism

Abstract: Putting the complex debate about ecology (for which the essay will draw on the transversal and networked vision theorized by Félix Guattari) in dialogue with Rosi Braidotti's neomaterialist, postanthopocentric and zoepolitical perpective on contemporary posthuman condition, the article will attempt to reflect on the dynamics of contemporary postcolonial capitalism. The paper will propose a posthuman analysis of a series of works by the art collective Mongrel and its spin-off YoHa, which focus on hegemonic ecologies of power connected to mineral matters that are central to the assemblage of technological devices: *Tantalum Memorial* (Mongrel, 2008), *Aluminium* (YoHa, 2008), *Coal Fired Computers* (YoHa, 2010). The first an installation centered on telephone communication, re-cycling human voices in recorded bits of information; the second a graphic book and a video, compos(t)ing images and data debris of archival nets; the last one an installation of intra-acting human (lung), natural (coal) and technological (computer) matters, they all enact a process of framing, de-framing and re-framing, unfolding as re-cycling processes of human as well as non-human matter. This posthuman entangled matter shows a real as well as virtual complex economic, cultural and political eco-system where hegemonic dynamics of power unfold. In the light of the contemporary debate about art and the politics of ecology, drawing on Guattari's theoretical reflections on a new esthetic paradigm, traceable in Mongrel's and YoHa's art projects, how can we address the question of ecology so that it could help not only the understanding of postcolonial capitalism but also its re-thinking in the frame of a *chaosmotic* vision of culture, where new, unprecedented subjectivities can arise and a practice of political regeneration can be enacted?

Keywords: *postcolonial capitalism, ecology, citizenship, YoHa, posthuman, new media art*

Introduction

> The digitalization of a growing number of material and mental operations is not always easy to reconcile with the existential territories that mark our finitude and desire to exist.
> (Félix Guattari, *Un Amour d'UIQ*)

In the 1980s, French philosopher Félix Guattari registered the complexity of the early process of digitalization, and the difficulty of preserving the equilibrium between the organism and its environment (essential to the survival of both of them) in the context of "the acceleration of the infospheric stimuli, the semiotic inflation, the saturation of every space of attention and consciousness".[1] More than thirty years later, Guattari's concerns are confirmed by the increasing psychospheric pollution, accompanied by the progressive acceleration and digitalization of information flows: virtual currencies, social relationships mediated

[1] Bracha L. Ettinger and Akseli Virtanen, "What Gives Us Life?", *Future Art Base* (26 September 2013), http://www.futureartbase.org/2013/09/26/what-gives-us-life/, accessed 28 December 2013.

by Web 2.0 platforms, new architectures rethought within the spaces of Augmented Reality, cyborg subjectivities configured and processed on smartphones and iPads screens.

Moreover, this complex environment, all too for our interpretative grids to be able to decipher it, is pervaded by a schizophrenic social climate that presents many variations: over-consumption coexisting with the depletion of worlds' reserves of biodiversity; the epidemic of anorexia/bulimia in one part of the world contrasting with the poverty-induced starvation in the other; new forms of warfare entailing the use of remotely controlled technological weaponry; and neo-colonial experiments responding to the global economy demand of geophysical resources.

As Rosi Braidotti remarks in her posthuman cartography of contemporary nature-cultural scenario, what contemporary subjects are witnessing is the opportunistic trans-species commercialization operated by the centrifugal force of advanced bio-genetic and digital capitalism.[2] Caught up into its plot, bodies are doubly mediated: by bio-genetical and by informational codes. Therefore, the daily exposure to the accelerated flows of digital capitalism is accompanied by the molecular contamination of organic and inorganic forms of life: consumer products such as genetically recombined plants, animals, and vegetables are examples of this cross-contamination.[3] The social scenario emerging from these trans-species encounters is a schizophrenic one, where nostalgia and paranoia coexist with enthusiastic and euphoric aptitudes.[4]

Franco Berardi defines those tendencies respectively 'neopaternalism' and 'accelerationism': neopaternalists express a nostalgic sentiment through the refusal of a technique so advanced that it is impossibile to govern it efficiently, so they support the return of a paternal law, intended as the symbolic force instituting the law and the limit, as well as a psychic order based on the respect of the law. On the other hand, accelerationists express their faith in the power of technique, and they wait for the overthrow of the model ruling it, as if it were an implicit promise of technological development, a potentiality which is immanent to technologies.[5] Although these two tendencies emerge as diametrically opposite trends (the reduction of the space for symbolic elaboration on the one hand, the acceleration of the imaginary flux on the other), they paradoxically can be seen as two sides of the same coin. As Berardi explains, overwhelmed by the wave of nervous stimuli that the mind receives from the infosphere, the present becomes so dense that it occupies every moment of conscious attention; therefore erasing, or drastically reducing, the space that is necessary for the imagination of the future and the memory of the past.[6] Caught up in such a spatio-temporal compression, both neopaternalist and accelerationist bodies recognize themselves as impotent, overwhelmed by a present overloaded by infodata, and therefore incapable of paying 'attention to life': what French philospher Henry Bergson defined as a work of adjustment of the past to the present, and their trespassing towards the reinvention of the future.[7] Accelerationists are inattentive because they wait for a

[2] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 119.

[3] Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013)

[4] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 141.

[5] Franco Berardi, "Senza Madri", *Commonware – General Intellect in Formazione*, (27 November 2014), http://www.commonware.org/index.php/neetwork/511-senza-madri, accessed 30 November 2014.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Henry Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul, William Scott Palmer (Mineola: Dover, 2004), 172-173.

future destined not to perform in a present which is stuck into the accelerationist loop; neopaternalists are distracted because, moved by a nostalgic affect, they end up in a mere repetition of principle, which is ethically, politically and imaginatively useless.

According to Berardi, this situation of panic is symptomatic of a missing affective bond between bodies, and it can be traced in various socio-cultural scenarios.[8] In contemporary ecological debate, for example, such a condition of impotence and inattentiveness to life results in the emergence of a new reactionary pan-humanity, one where, as Braidotti remarks in her recent analysis of the contemporaty 'posthuman situation', the global sense of interconnection among humans, but also between the human and the non-human environment, is based on a shared sense of vulnerability and fear of imminent catastrophes, such as that which sets the tone of environmentalism and current animal rights claim.[9]

Nevertheless, this essay argues, active attempts at converting reactionary passions into productive praxes are coming from what might be called 'the eco-art machine': "a particular set of open relationships between the human and the world, animals and objects",[10] a social material assemblage that seeks to create new ways of thinking, perceiveing and sensing life's infinite possibilities other than the ones produced by the deterritorializing mechanisms of capitalistic value-extraction.[11] If the absence of an affective bond between bodies is responsible for the inability of coordination and sustainable cohabitation of different forces (both human and non-human) sharing the planet, then the eco-art machine can help in the reconstruction of an affectivity nowadays reduced to an operational function. Embracing Berardi's standpoint, this essay proposes that art can function as a therapeutic re-enacting of sensibility,[12] for, as critics maintain, in its struggle against capitalism, it brings into focus the themes of nature and matter, and therefore it challenges contemporary socio-cultural conjunture by opening it up to a transversal ecological dimension, one which is able to spatio-temporally reinvent new social and material arrangements.[13]

Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytical and chaosmotic thought, this essay develops a machinic perspective from which to address contemporary ecological issues within the context of global trans-species capitalism. Specifically, it wonders about the postcolonial character of contemporary capitalism, by starting with Deleuze and Guattari's post-Marxist definition of capitalism as an encounter of deterritorialized flows (labor and capital) tending towards the decoding of the socius "in order to make it ... a deterritorialized field",[14] and producing "an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge against which [capitalism] brings all its vast powers of repression to bear, but which nonetheless continues to act as [its] limit".[15] As such, this essay asks, can capitalism possibly be thought of as a mode of trans-species production that is inseparable from a history of colonization resting on the extraction and accumulation of nature-cultural forces? Hence, does it presents a postcolonial dimension? And how does the term

[8] Berardi, "Senza Madri".

[9] For in-depth analysis see Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 76-81, on 'compensatory humanism'.

[10] Susan Ballard, "The Audience and the Art Machine: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *Opera for a Small Room*", in Ian Buchanan and Lorna Collins, eds., *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Visual Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 125.

[11] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 107.

[12] Franco Berardi, "Il Ruolo degli Artisti al Tempo della Dittatura Finanziaria", *MicroMega* and *L'Espresso* (18 May 2012), http://blog-micromega.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2012/05/18/franco-bifo-berardi-il-ruolo-degli-artisti-al-tempo-della-dittatura-finanziaria/, accessed 2 December 2014.

[13] TJ Demos, "The Post-Natural Condition: Art after Nature", *Artforum International Magazine* (New York, April 2012), 197; Berardi, "Il Ruolo degli Artisti al Tempo della Dittatura Finanziaria".

[14] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004), 36.

[15] Ibid., 37.

'postcolonial' qualify capitalism? These questions will be addressed throughout this essay through an engagement with postcolonial critique, and Deleuze and Guattari's theories about art, chaos and ecology.

Autopoi*ethics*: A Machinic Ecology of Postcolonial Matters

As maintained by Guattari, what he calls 'eco-art', a desiring machine which he identifies as the most important force of resistance to the steamroller of capitalist subjectivity, unfolds as a practice which is able to restore transversal connections across mental, social and environmental ecologies, and reinvent the dynamics of cohabitation.[16] In that sense, together with and in cross-connection to other forces (such as philosophy and science), it works as a navigational tool within global economy's chaotic flows.[17]

If chaos is not "absolute disorder but rather ... a plethora of orders, forms, wills – forces that cannot be distinguished or differentiated from each other, both matter and its conditions for being otherwise, both the actual and the virtual indistinguishably",[18] art can be referred to as an effective training for orienting and re(con)figuring unprecedented 'chaosmotic' scenarios.[19] As Deleuze and Guattari remark:

> Art indeed struggles with chaos, but it does so in order to bring forth a vision that illuminates it for an instant, a Sensation.... Art is not chaos but a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation, so that it constitutes, as Joyce says, a chaosmos, a composed chaos – neither foreseen nor preconceived.... Art struggles with chaos but it does so in order to render it sensory.[20]

Guattari recognizes in aesthetics a discipline that takes an interest in the sustainability of the relationship between the organism and the environment, the point of connection between the psychic decomposition and the semiotic flows coming from the economic, mediatic, artistic machine; it is a diagnostics of, and, at the same time, a therapy for the relationship between the organism and its environment. To what extent can art and aesthetics trigger, process and unfold productive praxes that reconstruct a sense of orientation, and prefigure existential territories within the chaotic grids characterizing contemporary cultural scenario?[21]

Faced with the progressive projection, dematerialization, and acceleration of communicative and productive relations (algorithmic subjectivities, technological devices mediating social relations), faced also with contemporary bio-genetic contamination of bodies and matters (OGMs and bio-food, drugs, medicines, animal testing and lab experiments, just to name a few), rethinking the spaces and times within which cultural practices process themselves is an urgent ethico-political concern, and art, as critics maintain, can be a potential place for such a transversal ecological engagement, "in that it connects to the animal, the vegetable,

[16] Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans.by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New Brunswick: The Athlone Press, 2000), 53.

[17] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2-5.

[18] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 5.

[19] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains, Julian Pefanis (Indiana University Press, 1995), 99.

[20] Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 204-205.

[21] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 64.

earthy and planetary forces that surround us".[22] A "site of post-anthropocentric becoming",[23] as Braidotti would say, a fold that makes the chaotic variability perceptible, and that transforms it into a 'chaoid variety', art offers itself as a threshold to many possible worlds.[24] Hence, as a site of trans-species encounter and contamination, art, that – as Heiddegger put it – has the function of making, and making itself the space of a dwelling that is, first of all, a space of hospitality and cohabitation, comes up as a place of practice and contention among nature-cultural bodies and *figures* which are both and at once social and material.[25]

For such a composite nature, it can help us perceive and access the equally complex aspects of contemporary capitalist flows of production and consumption, especially if addressed from a postcolonial perspective. In fact, a critique of contemporary capitalism could be more efficaciously developed from a postcolonial stance, for it recognizes the paradoxical, ambivalent character of the social and material bodies acting on contemporary cultural scene.

As Miguel Mellino explains, the term 'postcolonial' refers to the heterogeneous reality of the post-colonial present, in its strictly literal, hence historical-chronological sense. In discourses about race and migration, 'postcolonial' refers to a condition that is symptomatic of the social, cultural and economic dishomogeneity characterizing the space of the ex-colonizing societies.[26] Intended as a 'colonial retaliation' against old metropolitan centers, as the 'irruption of margins within the center', as the 'return of the colonial phantom of race and racism back to the belly of the beast', the postcolonial condition embodies a 'rupture' that unfolds both in continuity and discontinuity with the past: although it indicates the persistence of colonial powers in the present (neocolonialism), it does not correspond to the mere repetition of the colonial system of the past, rather it expresses the complexity and the irreducibility of subjectivites that resist this state of things.[27]

As such, that is as the paradoxical cohabitation of opposite forces (on the one side the persistence of colonial power, on the other one the resistance to it) delimiting a place of cultural contention, the postcolonial condition registers the complexity of cultural, economic and historical dynamics within the context of global trans-species capitalism, and remarks the importance of opening up new spaces for self-expression and effective choice, and of restoring time as an attentive border-crossing of past-present-future into each other, in order to construct self-awareness in a sustainable relationship with the surrounding environment.

From this standpoint, art comes up as a space of experimentation within which to try out and perform the desire of self-representation, where to construct one's own singular temporalities, what Guattari calls *refrains*: "individuated niches of the self within which it is possible to create the cosmos",[28] repetitions that constitute the very supports of existence, the ceaseless regeneration of both singular and collective historicity, their unceasing adjustment to one another, the reconciliation

[22] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 96. See also TJ Demos, "The Post-Natural Condition: Art after Nature", 197; Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 53.

[23] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 96.

[24] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[25] Martin Heidegger, *Art and Space*, trans. by Charles H. Seibert (The Hagues: Nijhoff, 1973), 3. On the concept of figure see Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: Univestity of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

[26] Miguel Mellino, "Cittadinanze postcoloniali. Appunti per una lettura postcoloniale delle migrazioni contemporanee", *Studi Culturali*, 6.2 (August 2009), 292-294.

[27] Stuart Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-War History", *History Workshop Journal*, 61.1 (2006), 1-24; Mellino, "Cittadinanze postcoloniali", 292-294.

[28] Berardi, "Poetry and Financial Automation of Language", *Future Art Base* (Aalto University School of Art, 17 October 2010), http://www.futureartbase.org/2011/10/17/poetry-and-financial-automation-of-language/, accessed 2 December 2014.

[29] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 38.

[30] Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester UK: Zero Books, 2010), 2.

[31] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 450-451.

[32] Neil Smith, "Nature as Accumulation Strategy", in Leo Panitch, Colin Leys, eds., *Coming to Terms with Nature*, Socialist Register, 43 (2007); Vandana Shiva, "The Corporate Control of Life", *dOCUMENTA(13)* (2011).

[33] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 2.

[34] Humberto R. Maturana, Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living*, in Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky, eds., *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 42 (Dordecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1980).

[35] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Fours Essays*, trans. by Vadim Liapunov (Austin & London: The University of Texas Press, 1981); Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). On neomaterialism see Rick Dolphijn, Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012).

of the world with the multiplicity of the desiring bodies, organic as well as inorganic, inhabiting it.[29]

But what does it mean for the eco-art machine to intervene into the spatio-temporal reinvention of the world, today? Which revolutionary openings into contemporary space-times should eco-art process in order to make the environment, of which it is simultaneously symptom and productive practice, a sustainable one? [30]

In the light of current bio-genetic and digital capitalism, intervening spatio-temporally in political and cultural contexts means to take care of the space of the planet and of the bodies inhabiting it (the Batesonian complex 'organism-in-its-environment') within a multiplicity of times, accelerated by the digital and material flows of globalization.[31] Then, to intervene in global times and spaces will mean attempting to reconcile technology and the planet, the organic and the inorganic, nature and matter. That is an urgent concern, both in practical and theoretical terms, today, as we assist to an increasing and controversial debate focusing on ecological issues. In fact, while contemporary theories and practices of production, distribution, and consumption expose us to the extension of life beyond the realm of organic matter (as in the Internet of Things), current ecological debate, despite being heterogeneously inflected, tends to be articulated either in terms of a denunciation of neoliberal logics that reconfirm nature as subsumed to them, or by voicing a claim that, however active, limits the ecological perspective and the concern for survival only to organic forms of life.[32] In the light of contemporary postcolonial capitalism, that is in the light of a historical and socio-cultural conjuncture wherein organic as well as inorganic postcolonial subjectivities are both implicated with and resistant to a repressed history of natural and human exploitation that Western power perpetrated on the rest of the world, is it possible to step out of such neocolonial partial visions, so to reconfigure a transversal ecological scenario where to experiment and evoke a sustainable cohabitation of the natural and the material forces of the world?

Drawing from the writings of authors such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Elisabeth Grosz, Franco Berardi, and Rosi Braidotti about the arts and the forces they enact, this essay attempts to explore and develop new modes of conceptualizing politics, and the ways in which arts and politics can be linked together, in contemporary capitalist scenario.[33] Specifically, it attempts to rethink arts and politics through a transversal, material ecological philosophy: an ecosophy 'autopoi*ethically*' oriented towards the qualitative flexible cohabitation of organic and inorganic material bodies.[34] The 'neo-materialist ecology' this essay proposes, by engaging with specific contemporary eco-art practices, should be intended as a process of ceaseless contention of different forces coming together and contaminating each other in their trans-species bio-chemical and spatio-temporal encounters.[35]

From the chaosmotic perspective, ecology stands out as an emerging, flexible, and precarious equilibrium in constant redefinition through the shifting synergy of the singular forces composing it: a dis-equilibrium. Just as an acrobat on a wire, who, in order "to maintain the ongoing truth of his basic premise ("I am on the wire"), ... must be free to move from one position of instability to another",[36] so a neo-materialist, chaosmotic ecology enfolds autopoietically: as a dis-continuos, machinic, digital evolution of combined parts, forces, and bodies, as "an endless turnover of components under conditions of continuous perturbation and compensation of perturbations".[37]

As Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's researches on biological systems explain, autopoiesis traces a horizon of possibility for rethinking the ways of doing and getting by in the world. According to the Chilean scientists and philosophers, autopoiesis coincides with biological organisms' capacity for self-regulation. Autopoietic machines are homeostatic systems, naturally tending towards the maintenance of a relative stability (metastability) among their parts. Moreover, the unity of the autopoietic machine is neither given by its individual components, nor by the sum of them. Rather, it coincides with the qualitative relation among its parts:

> An autopoietic machine ... has its own organization (defining network of relations) as the fundamental invariant ... autopoietic machines are unities whose organization is defined by a particular network, not by the components themselves or their static relations ... for a machine to be autopoietic, its defining relations of production must be continuously regenerated by the components which they produce.[38]

Defined as a relational unit, the autopoietic machine coincides with the complex 'organism-in-its-environment' that Bateson individuates as the ecosystems' unit of survival.[39] In that sense, environmental ecology could be intented as a machinic ecology, where nature becomes an emerging assemblage of parts that, being relatively independent from the agency which is proper to the assemblage, assure its internal diversity, characterize it as non-totalizable and half-open, and guarantee its "uncommitted potentiality for change".[40] The resonance of Maturana and Varela's autopoietic systems with Bateson's cybernetic ones, and above all, Guattarian reinterpretation of machinic autopoiesis offer a special perspective for analysing and elaborating a concept of neo-materialist ecology aiming at the chaosmotic connection of both organic and inorganic components of the complex 'organism-in-its-environment'. Especially, the way Guattari reinscribes machinic autopoiesis beyond the domain of biological organisms, extending it to technological *others* as well as to artistic, social, and economic machines, is of crucial importance for evoking a chaosmotic ecology, because it introduces a qualitative link between organic matter and technological or machinic artefacts.[41]

As he foresaw at the end of the Eighties:

[36] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 498.

[37] Francisco J. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York and Oxford: North Holland, 1979), 13.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 451.

[40] Ibid., 498. On qualitative part-whole relation see also Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2010), 24, and Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, and Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2013), XII.

[41] Guattari, *Chaosmosis*; Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 94.

[42] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 66. According to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical stances, "the war machine does not necessarily have war as its object" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau*, 416), rather the trace of a creative line of flight: it has to do with a particular way of inventing and occupying new space-times. Revolutions, artistic movements are war machines. They record comunication disturbances between the organic and the inorganic, and intervene spatio-temporally for a chaosmotic re-adjustment of metastable bodies and forces.

[43] Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995)

[44] Raymond Williams, "The Technology and the Society", in Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, eds., *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 293-299.

[45] See the art collective official website www.mongrel.org.uk, accessed 3 March 2013.

[46] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

Natural equilibriums will be increasingly reliant upon human intervention, and a time will come when vast programmes will need to be set up in order to regulate the relationship between oxigen, ozone and carbon dioxide in the Earth's athmosphere. We might as well rename environmental ecology 'machinic ecology' because cosmic and human praxis has only ever been a question of machines, even, dare I say it, of war machine.[42]

Residual Aesthetics: Art as Re-Cycling

As cultural studies and media theory critique maintain, the relationship between technologies and societies should be intended as a complex interaction where both terms are actively involved in a problematic process of exchange.[43] Such a practice of negotiations requires an attentive contextualization, in order to understand the way in which technologies are invented and used by a society, as well as how they simultaneously convey cultural, political, and social changes in a certain historical conjuncture.[44] The acknowledgement of the interdependence of technologies and societies is a fundamental premise for the attempt to ethically and politically recalibrate (together with artistic practices and research) the relationship between nature and matter within contemporary fluxes of globalization. Such an attempt is particularly evident in the eco-art machines assembled by the London-based art collective Mongrel and its spin-off YoHa (born from the collaboration between Matsuko Yokokoji and Graham Harwood).

As defined by the artists, Mongrel "is a mixed bunch of people, machines and intelligences working to celebrate the methods of London street culture".[45] Officially founded in 1997 by Graham Harwood, Mervin Jarman, Richard Pierre-Davis and Matsuko Yokokoji, it emerges out of their combined practices at ARTEC (London Art and Technology Centre) in 1995, in response to a reactionary approach to emergent digital technologies and to their application in the field of arts and the humanities. As the name of the collective evokes, Mongrel's artistic research intends to play with contemporary nature-cultural contaminations, by fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue between new media and postcolonial themes, such as cultural differences and their hybridization in the light of the history of colonization and its cultural legacy extended to ecological, technolgical and economic issues.

During the 1990s, Mongrel's interdisciplinary and transversal approach found expression in cybercultural experimentations: the issue of difference was mainly inflected as a challenging of the categories of race, class, gender and sexuality in and through new media technologies. Early works, such as *National Heritage* (1997) and *Rehearsal of Memory* (1995), are examples of this first phase of their artistic production, focused on the destabilization of the normative law instituting class categorizations, racist and nationalistic structures of feelings.[46]

Today, Mongrel and YoHa's eco-art machine has extended to the field of matter, and, specifically, to technological materials. In so doing, they situate those processes of reappropriation of technologies Guattari encouraged through the evocation of a post-media age at the level of a (neo)materialist molecularity.[47] Here, the focus is centred on a series of installations based on the study of the minerals that are used for the production of technological devices, or which are somehow involved in the history of their evolution. Emerging as aesthetic experimentations negotiated at the intersection of nature, matter, colonialism and globalization, Mongrel's and YoHa's artworks offer a reticular perspective (interconnected and decentralized) from which to elaborate a chaosmotic, autopoietic, neomaterialist ecological thinking through which to re-frame contemporary capitalism into a postcolonial perspective.

[47] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 61.

In a Benjaminian vein and through the archaeological study of everyday objects and media, that is through a 'temporal excavation' into technological culture aimed at the transversal reading of old media and new ones, Mongrel's and YoHa's eco-art machines recognize the active role of matter within contemporary social formations.[48] Furthermore, the archaeological approach to technologies proves to be preparatory to their genealogical rewriting, and consequently, to a transversally ecological reading of the species: by means of a socio-ontological approach to media, the collectives' artistic production reveals a close kinship between organic and inorganic bodies, the promiscuous cohabitation of human, vegetal, mineral, and technological bodies, their shared active participation into machinic socio-cultural formations which crucially highlight the neocolonial inflection of hig-tech production. In that sense, they trace a horizon of possibility for the empathic rewriting of affective bonds, a new animalism, as the one invoked by Paul B. Preciado: the promise of a 'photosynthetic cooperation', a 'molecular enjoyment' of nature-cultural bodies, the emergence of material-semiotic processes, encounters, and figurations which reinflects neocolonial relations of power.[49]

[48] Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

The affective kinship among environmental, social, and technological bodies is explored and problematized by Mongrel and YoHa through the assemblage of processual machines connected to everyday objects and technologies. In that sense, their works express the contemporary aesthetics of an art in the process of rethinking itself in terms of a performative language, deeply situated in everyday life context.

[49] Paul B. Preciado, "Le féminisme n'est pas un humanisme", *Libération* (26 September 2014), http://www.liberation.fr/chroniques/2014/09/26/l e-feminisme-n-est-pas-un-humanisme_1109309, 2 October 2014; Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_ Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

As Nikos Papastergiadis remarks, within the spaces (institutional and non-institutional, real as well as virtual: academic environments, museums, art galleries, institutes of culture, websites, online platforms, network apps etc.) where discourses about art and cultural practices proliferate, one can register a new modality of conceiving and enacting artistic practices which is taking a distance from a linguistic, semiotic, representative paradigm no longer fitting the contemporary historical conjuncture.[50] It constructs itself around a new performative paradigm, attentive to the process rather than the end product, to the

[50] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 8.

[51] Nikos Papastergiadis, "Spatial Aesthetics: Rethinking the Contemporary", in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke U. P., 2008), 364.

[52] Ibid., 363.

[53] Ibid.

working of art rather than the work of art: what I have named an 'eco-art machine'.[51]

As a practice that is embedded in the complexities of contemporary socio-cultural conjuncture, art takes a challenging and problematic stance within the debate about the contemporary, and "stretches its contexts and strategies in paradoxes: museums without walls, cities as laboratories, living archives, walking narratives".[52] As remarked by Papastergiadis, under a process of dematerialization and dissemination that is also traceable in contemporary art practices and production (and that poses a range of questions in relation to the role of institutions, the function of the curator, the dynamism of social interaction etc.), and as a response to it, "the coda for the contemporary artist is now defined by the desire to be *in* the contemporary, rather than to produce a belated or elevated response to the everyday".[53]

Foil wraps and cans, computers, mobile phones: objects of everyday life at the core of a series of works by Mongrel and YoHa. Connected to the mineral matters that are central to their assemblage, and that entitle the three art installations (*Aluminium*, *Coal Fired Computers* and *Tantalum Memorial*), in the art practices of the collectives these objects and technological devices come out of a shared trans-disciplinary and trans-species speculative practice aimed at investigating contemporary socio-cultural dynamics within the context of 'postcolonial capitalism'.

As Miguel Mellino suggests in his review of the Italian edition of Sandro Mezzadra's *The Postcolonial Condition* published by Ombre Corte (Verona, 2008), an interesting perspective from which to think about the notion of postcolonial capitalism can be traced in Mezzadra's definition of the postcolonial stance as "an unstable and uncertain condition where the very possibilities of capital – its self-constituting as a 'machine of differentiation' – have to be constantly reaffirmed, or rather they are daily challenged by the practices of women and men who, in their irreducible multiplicity, seek to escape the action of its biopolitical devices of confinement".[54] Standing out as an oxymoron, where the word 'capitalism' (intended as an economic regime governing the accumulation of wealth and its privatization, by means of opportunistic mechanisms of differential inclusion) is in a paradoxical relation to the term 'postcolonial' (intended as the condition of irreducibility of the subjects simultaneously, conjuncturally and differentially included and excluded from the neoliberal flows of the market), the phrase 'postcolonial capitalism' designates a complex unstable cultural condition, a space of continuous contention between capital and its conjunctural *others*.

[54] Miguel Mellino, "Viaggio ai confini mobili del capitalismo globale. Un mondo dove convivono diversi modi di produzione, di lavoro e temporalità storiche. «La condizione postcoloniale», un saggio di Sandro Mezzadra" (13 March 2008), http://www.ombrecorte.it/rass.asp?id=143, 10 December 2013; Sandro Mezzadra, Federico Rahola, "The Postcolonial Condition: A Few Notes on the Quality of Historical Time in the Global Present", *Postcolonial Text*, 2.1 (2006), http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/393/819 , accessed 10 December 2013.

[55] Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 4.

Exceptions, excesses, residues are produced along the mobile borders traced by neoliberal technologies of government,[55] on the limits in respect to which it conjuncturally establishes the parameters of a differential inclusion within the economic flows of production and consumption. They are ready for the reuse. Captured again in the accelerated flow of the economic, mediatic, artistic machine.

But, besides a trendy, institutionalized art there is an art that recycles residues, rather than capturing them, and, beyond a politics of claiming and survival, it makes room for newness.

Embracing Mellino and Mezzadra's concept of postcolonial capitalism, extending it to the neomaterialist, non-anthropocentric perspective elaborated by Guattari, Grosz, Braidotti, Preciado, Haraway – among others – Mongrel and YoHa's eco-art machines could be looked at as an example of such a challenging recycling practice.[56]

[56] Ibid., 67.

ALUMINIUM. Beauty, Incorruptibility, Lightness and Abundance, the Metal of the Future

> The extraction of value from any material, place, thing or person, involves a process of refinement. During this process, the object in question will undergo a change in state, separating into at least two substances: an extract and a residue. Coffee beans and coffee grounds, coffee grounds and a coffee pot, a coffee pot and a cup of coffee, a cup of coffee and a shot of caffeine, a shot of caffeine and a slight spike of energy, a spike of energy and a decision, a decision and its consequences, the consequences and a fragment of history, a fragment of history and an aluminium factory, an aluminium factory and aluminium, aluminium and a coffee pot, a coffee pot and coffee grounds, and so on.
> (Raqs Media Collective, "With Respect to Residue")

"Aluminium xmas trees, pots and pans, door and window frames, wall claddings, roofings, awnings, high tension power lines, wires, cables, components for televisions, radios, computers, refrigerators and air-conditioners, cans, bottle tops, foil wraps, foil semi-rigid containers, kettles and saucepans, propellers, airplanes, gearboxes, motor parts, tennis racquets and zepplins".[57]

[57] YoHa, http://yoha.co.uk/node/536, accessed 12 October 2013.

Objects of everyday life made up of aluminium. Fragments of the quotidian landscape collected in a book. Scraps of sparkling matter re-framed in a video sequence. The metal of the future, embodying futurist and fascist image of modern technological life, signifying both speed and strength, appears in the images and strings of words on a page; it passes on a screen in many forms, it mixes up with human figures in images leaving trails of themselves, expanding and combining in new ones. Compenetrating liquid matters. Lightness and abundance. YoHa's project *Aluminium*, commissioned for the abandoned 1930s Alumix building – a Fascist-era factory in Bolzano (Italy) – and presented at Manifesta07 in collaboration with Raqs Media Collective, is a futurist search engine performing fragments of hidden histories through a video and a graphic book. Re-writing and re-framing the documentaries *Aluminium on the March* (1956), *Metal in Harmony* (1964), and other promotional films for the aluminium industry together with Futurist Manifestos, this eco-art machine or 'contraption'[58] – as the artists call it – challenges hidden ecologies of power tracked down in the landscape of everyday

[58] Term usually used by Harwood to describe his works as machines, or assemblages, that do not smoothly function, rather they only barely work. These assemblages enact a demystification of technological apparatuses, by producing allegories – rather than utilities – with the aim of infecting and tainting historical representations. As the artist explains: "A contraption in English is where the domain of the technical overlaps the imaginary, an experiment with nothing to prove. Usually strange, unnecessarily intricate, unfinished, inherently unstable, improvised machine". http://yoha.co.uk/coalcontraptions, accessed 24 October 2013.

life, and recycles its residues into new performing assemblages, temporal spaces for reflection and imagining.
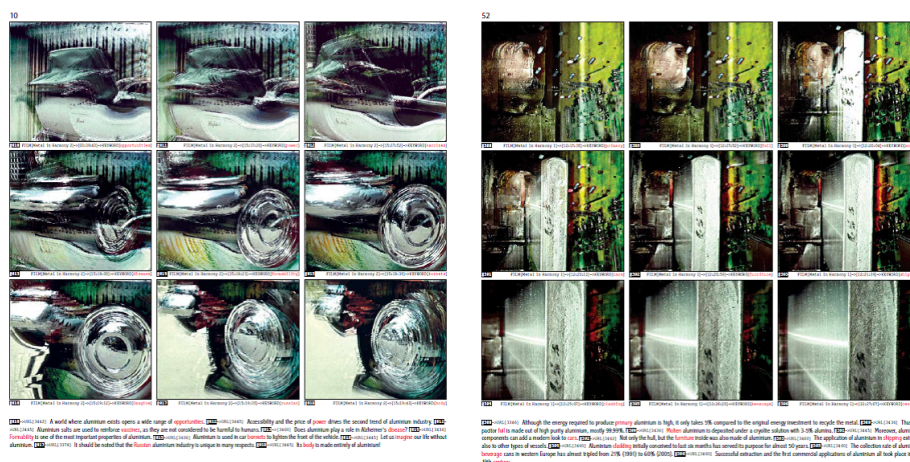
Figs. 1–2: YoHa, *Aluminium: Beauty, Incorruptibility, Lightness and Abundance, the Metal of the Future*, 2008, stills from G. Harwood, *Aluminium: Beauty, Incorruptibility, Lightness and Abundance, the Metal of the Future*, *The Rest of Now*, *Manifesta7* (Bolzano, Italy, 19 July - 2 November 2008), download available at http://download.yoha.co.uk/aluminium/aluminium.pdf

Both the video and the graphic book come out as the breaking down of the framing and editing of the two documentary films, and their fluid re-composition into a residual aesthetics: "Because we despise the precise, mechanical, glacial reproduction of reality in these films, and as we are not interested in the movement which has already been broken up and analysed by the lens, we code up ways for time to occur across the division of the frame".[59] This residual montage, restoring time and matter into the fractures of history, is obtained through the use of a software designed to generate, edit and continuously update a composite networked image made up of the results of Internet searches guided by keywords (aluminium, fascism, futurism), phrases and compositional forms selected through the word frequency analysis of Futurist manifestos and documents found at the Alumix building, then associated to the frames of the films. By revealing the movement between the frames, being able to predict it, the algorithm produces a residual, "mesmerising liquid sequence of images in which the separation between frames and therefore between activities – consuming and producing – and material is collapsed, merged into a startling alchemy of human, foodstuffs, information, machines and materials. It is as if the regular division of time of the old film stock has been exposed to the illumination of continuous duration and convergence of matter it had sought to hide".[60] The mesmerizing, liquid sequence of images is rendered on the book as a grid of frames accompanied by strings of codes associates, key words and Internet search-engine results.

Turning the book into a machine (just like Futurism proposed to do with man), that is turning it into the logically performed algorithmic organization of frames

[59] Graham Harwood, *Aluminium: Beauty, Incorruptibility, Lightness and Abundance, the Metal of the Future*, download available at http://download.mongrel.org.uk/aluminium.pdf, accessed 28 September 2013.

[60] Antony Iles, "In the Mud and Blood of Networks: An Interview with Graham Harwood", *Mute Magazine* (12 October 2010), http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/mud-and-blood-networks-interview-graham-harwood, accessed 25 November 2013.

and sentences with no logical connection to each other, YoHa exposes the users-consumers to the illogical outputs produced by the logical neoliberal technology of government informing objects and practices of everyday life.

Fig. 3: YoHa, *Aluminium: Beauty, Incorruptibility, Lightness and Abundance, the Metal of the Future*, 2008

As Harwood maintains, "on the boundaries of art, the works are contraptions made up of situations, peoples, geographies, networks, technicalities that bring the historical, social, economic, political into proximity with each other to create a moment of reflection and imagining".[61] Montage, that was the main gift of twentieth century art, valuing fragmentation and conflict over continuity and organic unity, ripping images out of their contexts and sticking them together to reveal new images, meanings and poetics from the interplay, makes an important issue arise, a question which is especially relevant to nowadays imploded and decentralized capitalist production and circulation of postcolonial bodies: "do networked images in their proliferation and multiple contexts undermine the assumptions of montage or reinforce them?"[62] From an autopoietic perspective, one could say that the aesthetic question is not what the network does to pictures, but rather what pictures want from the network. In terms of a historical renarration, and of the affective memory of a fascist past, the question is not to understand what the archive of (post)colonial history wants from the bodies, but rather what bodies want from it.

Starting from Futurist manifestos, passing through the objects of everyday life, from foil wraps and coffee pots to bottle tops and saucepans, from the first futurist cookbook to the Italian fascist colonization of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Libya, the artwork reveals the ecology of a futurist, fascist, colonial power connected to aluminium and opens up a space where to re-inscribe, re-frame, re-cycle the sediment of its social history. The residues of such a hegemonic ecology of power, that which is left behind when value is extracted, and "never finds its way into the manifest narrative of how something (an object, a person, a state, or a state of being) is produced, or comes into existence",[63] are the histories and lives of colonized lands, earth, people and cultures.

As a residual assemblage that takes up futuristic logic and turns it upon itself through high-technologies, as a contraption, as a logical construction that has no logical outcome, *Aluminium* eco-art machine situates itself on the mobile borders of

[61] Ibid.

[62] YoHa, http://yoha.co.uk/node/515, accessed 24 October 2013.

[63] Raqs Media Collective, "With Respect to Residue", in G. Harwood, *Aluminium*, 60.

[64] "an actant ... is something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general". Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications", *Soziale Welt*, 47.4 (1996), 371; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[65] Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory", 371.

the complex, unstable spaces of contention of postcolonial capitalism, and stretches its strategies in paradoxes, just like the latter does. While focusing on the materiality of a metal, actant[64] among – and interconnected to – many others of the history of Fascism and Futurism, *Aluminium* poses questions about the role of technology in particular social formations. As Antony Iles asks, "do particular technologies produce particular social formations, or do particular social formations need particular technologies? Furthermore ... how exactly are we integrated into capitalist technologies and how are they integrated into us?"[65]

From the perspective established by the concept of postcolonial capitalism, the answers to these questions have to be constantly negotiated, just like the stances of resistance to the capitalistic machine of differentiation. By making complexities, paradoxes, and transversal connections among the natural, the cultural, the historical, the political, the social and the economic evident, YoHa's work offers itself as a liminal space where not only to reflect and fill the gaps of history, but also to imagine and experiment negotiations, a space where to process framings, de-framings, and chaosmotic re-framings, a space where to learn to think across the relations between ecosystems, map lines of flight, and prefigure new, unpredicted existential territories.

Re-Cycling Citizenship: A Postcolonial eARTh Re-framing

As Braidotti asserts in her recent cartography of the contemporary posthuman condition:

[66] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 60.

> The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropomorphic elements.... The vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoe*.[66]

[67] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 9.

Confronted with progressive digitalization and acceleration of information flows, the adoption of Braidotti's neomaterialist, non-anthropocentric and zoepolitical perspective could help art depicting the chaotic grids resulting from the intricate relations of power, objects and practices of everyday life, and imagining new modalities of intervention: thought across the lens of posthuman theory, art could work as a plane of composition that "cuts across and plunges into, filters and coheres chaos through the coming into being of sensations",[67] and in so doing re-orients contemporary subjectivities towards more sustainable assemblages.

The dialogical encounter between theoretical practices (both philosophy and art, here approached through the lenses of contemporary neomaterialist ecosophy and new media art practice) ethically and aesthetically oriented towards the sustainable cohabitation of organisms and matters with-in the environment can help perceiving and recognizing the possibilities of intervention within the chaotic evolution of capitalism, in the short term, while preparing the ground for a desired long-term networked process of change. *Coal Fired Computers* (YoHa, 2010) and *Tantalum Memorial* (Mongrel, 2008) clarify such a chaosmotic perspective of art, that is its capacity of intervention within the chaotic context of contemporary capitalism.

Figs. 4–5: YoHa, *Coal Fired Computers: 300.000.000 Computers – 318.000 Black Lungs*, 2010, http://yoha.co.uk/cfc, accessed 23 March 2014

Coal Fired Computers: 300.000.000 Computers – 318.000 Black Lungs is a project by YoHa, in collaboration with Jean Demars. The artwork uses descendants of Charles Parson's 1884 steam turbines to power a computer with two half tons of coal. The computer screen displays data of miners from around the world who have contracted lung disease; information which is then used to activate the inflation of a pair of black lungs attached to the contraption. This posthuman assemblage of lungs, computers and coal responds to the displacement of coal production to India and China after the UK miners' strike in 1984/85 by making evident the twisted complexities of capitalist dynamics concerning the production of networked and digital technologies.

While the imperatives of capitalism impose the displaced extraction of coal in order to respond to world's demand of electricity (the 42% of which rests on fossil fuels) and to power the manufacture of approximately 300.000.000 computers produced each year, the World Health Organisation records 318.000 annual deaths caused by exposure to coal dust. As the artists remark: "the common perception is that wealthy countries have put this all behind them, displacing coal dust into the lungs of unrecorded, unknown miners in distant lands, however coal returns into our lives in the form of the cheap and apparently clean goods we consume".[68]

[68] YoHa, http://yoha.co.uk/cfc , accessed 3 February 2014.

Taking up the perverse logic of capitalist production to stretch it to its limit, to turn it upon itself, the barely working contraption aims at burning as much coal as possible while operating just to pollute air and produce health residues, to infect its cyborg body and collect electricity, disease and power upon it, so to recompose a perverse, hidden network of relations that would remain otherwise abstract.

Similarly, *Tantalum Memorial* is the sculptural transposition of an intangible network of conversations and relations weaving together the ambiguities of globalization, migration and contemporary addiction to constant communication. Specifically, the artwork embodies a network of conversations recorded for a previous project: *Telephone Trottoire* (2006), a 'social telephony' network designed by Mongrel in collaboration with the London radio programme *Nostalgie Ya Mboka* and processed by the London Congolese community. Inspired by the practice of 'radio trottoire' or 'pavement radio' through which during colonialism, as well as after the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1960, news were passed around on street corners to avoid state censorship, *Telephone Trottoire* calls Congolese listeners, plays them a phone message on a topical subject and invites them to record a comment and pass it on to a friend by entering their telephone number. As an assemblage of electromagnetic Strowger telephony switches (the first automated telephone system patented in 1891, which switches were in service until the 1990s when they were replaced by digital technologies made from tantalum) activated by the records of Congolese's telephone conversations, a computer on which screen one can monitor the dialing progress of the calls, and headphones through which hearing the messages passed around in sponken Lingala, *Tantalum Memorial* stands out as a towering rack of cables and switches showing and performing the hidden cost of our mobile phones: 600.000 humans dying each year because of coltan wars in Congo, and half of the local gorilla population exterminated by miners and rebels induced to hunt them for food by consequent poverty and starvation.[69] Coltan is a mineral mined in Congo (home to 80% of world's coltan reserves) for the production of metal tantalum, an essential component of mobile phones and other technological devices. In order to face the high demand of them coming from the so called First World countries, local militias force Congolese population into mining coltan, which is coveted by dozens of international mining companies. That which comes up as a civil war, is actually one of the multiple ways of dying woven in the twisted network of neo-colonial relations of power.

[69] "In order to mine for coltan, rebels have overrun Congo's national parks, clearing out large chunks of the area's lush forests. In addition, the poverty and starvation caused by the war have driven some miners and rebels to hunt the parks' endangered elephants and gorillas for food. In Kahuzi Biega National Park, for example, the gorilla population has been cut nearly in half, from 258 to 130". Imtiyaz Delawala, "What is Coltan?", http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/story?id=128631, accessed 20 January 2014.
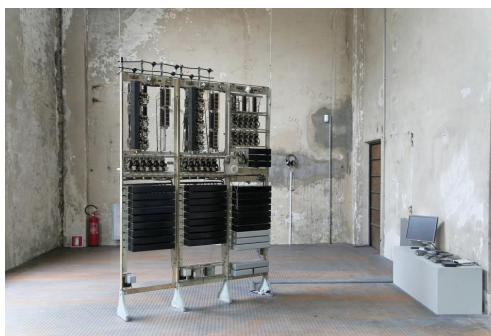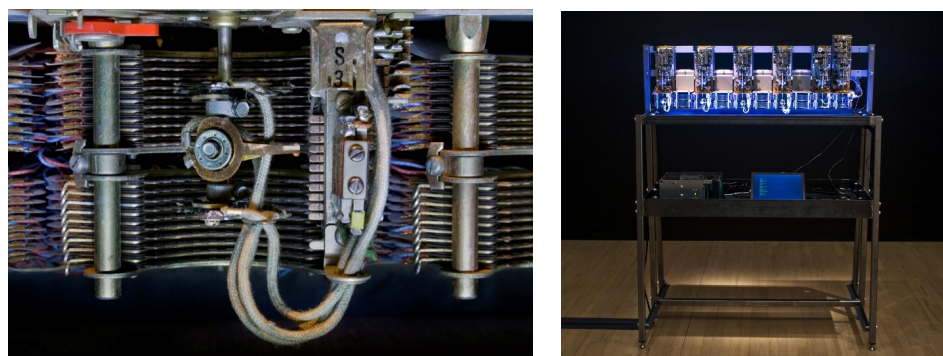

Fig. 6: Mongrel (G. Harwood, R. Wright, M. Yokokoji), *Tantalum Memorial – Residue*, 2008, http://mediashed.org/files/mshed/images/TM-Manifesta7lo.preview.jpg, accessed 18 March 2014

From a non-anthropocentric perspective, consistent with Braidotti's vitalist and zoepolitical thinking, the two installations come up as cyborg bodies that, performing the technicalities of capitalist logic, make its chaotic variabilities, complexities and exceptions perceptible.

As *machinic phyla*, both natural and artificial "matter in movement, in flux, in variation ... conveyor of singularities and traits of expression",[70] *Coal Fired Computer* and *Tantalum Memorial* let coal and coltan run through the veins of cables of their electrical bodies enliven by the labor of Indian, Chinese and Congolese miners whose recorded immigrant voices echo those of their colonized ancestors.

[70] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 409.

Figs. 7–8: Mongrel (G. Harwood, R. Wright, M. Yokokoji), *Tantalum Memorial – Reconstruction*, 2008, http://mediashed.org/files/mshed/images/TM-Manifesta7lo.preview.jpg

While recycling the residues of the capitalist machine of differentiation and weaving their re-membered histories together with the agential materiality of software and objects of the quotidian polluted landscape, the two assemblages call into question not only the re-articulation of the nature/culture divide into a continuum (natureculture), but also the urgent concern, registered by Tolia-Kelly – among others, of "thinking about [citizenship] ecologically ... through geographies of landscape, nature and coordinates of everyday lived experience".[71] As she remarks in her ecological study of diasporic citizenship connected to the value of landscape and memory, "citizenship can only be understood materially (as bodies in the world), texturally (through cultural texts and textures of inhabitation), and conceptually (as a multidimensional way of thinking being, living, and feeling)".[72] While the dis-located material bodies of postcolonial peoples, animals and lands work, die and suffer, the technological devices they produce, those cultural texts consumed in the practices of everyday life by a portion of presumed proper citizens, evoke landscapes, ecologies and peoples that are *other*, and yet part of their everyday life.

[71] Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, *Landscape, Race and Memory: Material Ecologies of Citizenship* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 4.

[72] Ibid., 2.

By connecting the twisted complexities of capitalism to the objects and practices of everyday life, to the material, textural and conceptual dimensions of the ecological citizenship, by mixing them up into a re-cycling, residual aesthetics,

Mongrel and YoHa's machinic assemblages enact the cutting gesture, the framing that leads to the creation of the chaosmos. As Elizabeth Grosz argues:

> The frame is what establishes territory out of the chaos that is the earth.... With no frame or boundary there can be no territory, and without territory there may be objects or things but not qualities that can become expressive, that can intensify and transform living bodies.... Framing and deframing become art's mode of territorialization and deterritorialization through sensation: framing becomes the means by which the plane of composition composes, deframing its mode of upheaval and transformation.... The frame separates. It cuts into a milieu or a space. This cutting links it to the constitution of the plane of composition, to the provisional ordering of chaos through the laying down of a grid of order that entraps chaotic shards, chaoid states, to arrest or slow them into a space and a time, a structure and a form where they can affect and be affected by bodies.[73]

[73] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 11-13.

As a frame for the chaotic variability of contemporary cultural landscape, the cutting gesture of Mongrel and YoHa's contraptions, or eco-art machines, opens up a fold, a threshold, an in-between space to be re-framed, re-territorialized by means of transversal connections that relocate human matter, earth and technology within the flow of the nature-cultural becoming and into an ecological dimension of citizenship: here the stances of dis-located miners are far and yet so close to those of raped lands and killed animals, woven into the same differential historical, socio-economic and political spaces. In the current neoliberal and postcolonial condition, when flows of migrating peoples, objects, data and natural resources strategically oriented by the neoliberal technology of government displace the old geographies of national power and pollute the psychosphere, thinking transversally, that is across the species and their political, social, economic interconnections, becomes an indispensible, urgent concern for contemporary trans-species subjectivities.

The entangled matter of Mongrel and YoHa's installations, their performative assemblages and re-cycling of residual subjectivities and their hidden histories, of dirty matters and their landscapes, of virtual data and material software, of flesh, voices, animals and earth, aluminium, coal, coltan, tantalum and switches, mobile phones and computers, coffee pots and bottle tops, become a space where to claim both the recognition of differences and the possibility of imagining new ways for them to arise, multiply, regenerate, live together into new, unprecedented existential territories of a third landscape[74] where to prefigure "the process of becoming a citizen; of becoming [nature-culturally] in place".[75]

[74] On third landscape see Gilles Cléments, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* (Paris: Éditions Sujet/Objet, 2003).

[75] Tolia-Kelly, *Landscape, Race and Memory*, 2.

Ebru Yetiskin

Paratactic Media and Social Networks. Emerging Forms of Resistance to Algorithmic Power in Artistic Practices[1]

Abstract: This article deploys the concept of 'paratactic media' to define emerging practices which exploit the logic of algorithmic governance in subversive artistic interventions as a means to expose and contest authoritarian regimes of power. By means of an engagement with the works of Istanbul-based artists during the 2013 Gezi Park Resistance in Turkey, the essay explores the ways in which paratactic media are able to uncover and remediate the invisible layers of algorithmic regulation through aesthetics of friction, cacophony, foolishness, depletion and waste.

Keywords: *new media, activism, governance, resistance, data, art, algorithm, Turkey, Gezi Park*

Introduction

Today there is an emerging logic of power, which loosely corresponds to Gilles Deleuze's notion of the society of control and which has been recently described as algorithmic governance.[2] Algorithmic governance is seen as the expression of a kind of joint governance of social networks with governments and corporations acting together while also competing with each other. Algorithms are not only used for data mining, computer modeling, simulation and forecasting. Tarleton Gillespie has argued that the algorithm has become "a key logic governing the flows of information".[3] Within the free spaces and temporalities of algorithmic platforms, micro bits of quotidian practices are subsumed into capitalist value and transacted to third parties, such as advertising agencies, banks, and pharmaceutical, biotech and insurance companies.

Algorithms are also said to have a covert function in obscuring the questionable practices enacted by governments, corporations and institutions, such as fraud, illegal trade, wiretapping and surveillance. Algorithmic governance is built on the logic of the 'firewall', thus preventing access to information about cost analysis, data privacy, sales contracts, the profile of networked actors and decision-making processes. They become profit-making means of production for governments and corporations aiming at rationalizing dominant patterns in global capitalist cultures. Whereas algorithms such as those deployed by Google analyses and exploits attention, knowledge and behavior, Facebook focuses on the curating of identities and the conversion of desires into monetized and accumulated data-products. PageRank's algorithm extracts surplus value from network activities and reveals the potential of mathematical models capable of approximating human behavior to the

[2] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on The Societies of Control", *October*, 59 (Winter 1992), 3-7; See also pioneering discussions on algorithmic governance: David Beer, "Power through the algorithm? Participatory Web cultures and the technological unconscious", *New Media and Society*, 11.6 (2009), 985-1002; Francesco Musiani, "Governance by Algorithms", *Internet Policy Review*, 2.3 (2013), http://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/governance-algorithms, accessed 29 August 2015; Matteo Pasquinelli, "Anomaly Detection: The Mathematization of the Abnormal in the Metadata Society", https://www.academia.edu/10369819/Anomaly_Detection_The_Mathematization_of_the_Abnormal_in_the_Metadata_Society, accessed 29 August 2015.

[3] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms", in Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot, eds., *Media Technologies: Paths Forward in Social Research* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012), 216.

[4] Giorgio Griziotti, "Biorank: algorithms and transformation in the bios of cognitive capitalism", *Quaderni di San Precario*, 6 February 2014, http://quaderni.sanprecario.info/2014/02/biorank-algorithms-and-transformation-in-the-bios-of-cognitive-capitalism-di-giorgio-griziotti/, accessed 17 March 2014.

[5] Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2013), 9.

point of shaping it.[4] Since algorithms are defined as a design for "the infallible execution of automated order and control"[5] it is critical to explore how algorithmic operations are reappropriated in subversive and resistant ways for alternate purposes.

By introducing the concept of paratactic media as means to creatively intervene in the processes of algorithmic governance, I will explore how the covert operations of algorithmic schemes in global capitalist culture are reappropriated in order to stimulate alternative actions, knowledge and perception. In this regard, this article will not focus on software as such, but on a variety of artwork and artistic method produced during the 2013 Gezi Park movement in Turkey and characterized by their use of existing algorithmic operations as means to promote political and economic change.

In the first section, the Gezi Park Protests of 2013 will be reviewed from a critical point of view in order to discuss the dissemination of algorithmic governance on a global scale. In the second section, the concept of paratactic media will be introduced. In the last section, the invisible layers of algorithmic regulation, such as friction, cacophony, foolishness, depletion and waste will be discussed using the illustrations and analyses of some subversive artistic practices linked to the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey. The artistic compositions, which I selected, do not necessarily have sophisticated technical components, but rather include low-tech and mixed media based approaches, which reveal and intervene in the hidden processes of algorithmic governance.

1. Opening New Spaces for Algorithmic Governance: The Gezi Park Protests in Turkey

In recent years, especially in rapidly changing and persistently uncertain political-economic environments, those who have been resisting and offering diverse motives as well as solutions migrate to online platforms as a result of public demonstrations. In this way, large-scale data populations become instruments to monetize and accumulate data-capital within algorithmic platforms. Expanding the limits of algorithmic governance on a global scale, social media platforms link disconnected members, who have had the violence of government-corporation networks imposed on them in various local contexts.

The 2013 Gezi Park Protests in Turkey can be viewed as a recent case of the extension of algorithmic governance on a global scale. On May 28, 2013, the police attacked a civilian group, which had organized a sit-in to resist the unlawful privatization and demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul. This was yet another act of expropriation of common space by the government-corporation network in Turkey. In the next few hours, information about this event was disseminated via social media, attracting more people to participate the protest with the hashtag, *#direngeziparkı* (#resistgezipark.) In the following one-month period, a wide range

of individuals and groups who had diverse interests and motivations identified with the resisting actors and participated in the protest. At least 235 protests were added to the Gezi Park Protests in other cities and villages within Turkey. Most of these acts of civil disobedience in rural areas were against the growing power of government-corporation network, which were responsible for the ecological destruction caused by the construction sites for hydroelectric power stations, and within the mining and the real estate industries. Some demonstrations were also seen in other countries with significant Turkish communities. Having been associated with Occupy movements by the hashtag, #occupygezi, the resistance expanded globally and echoed simultaneously with the protests in Egypt and Brazil. According to a report by the Social Media and Political Participation Lab of New York University on the role of social media in Gezi, "While the protests started as a local, grass-roots mobilization opposing plans to remove Gezi Park, they soon escalated into anti-government demonstrations, and were quickly internationalized, with the Occupy movement being particularly active after the third day of the protest: by the fourth day, more than 30% of unique users employing protest hashtags were English speakers; Twitter accounts like "YourAnonNews", "AnonOpsLegion", "AnonOpsMob"; part of Anonymous, a network of hacktivists, also started to appear among the most retweeted".[6]

The Gezi Park Protests indicates a significant wave of migration of large populations to online platforms as well. This means the making of data-capital and data-labor also expanded for the sake of algorithmic governance.

According to Tunç, in recent years:

> Turkey is witnessing an explosion in social media, ranking the fourth largest in global use of Facebook and eighth largest for Twitter with 31.1% penetration, and 11.337.500 active Twitter users. From 2012–13, the number of Twitter users in Turkey increased from 7.2 million to 9.6 million. The number of tweets sent daily also increased dramatically, by 370%. Turkish Internet users now send approximately 8 million tweets per day, or roughly 92 tweets per second.[7]

Tunç also indicated the dramatic increase in the production, exchange and circulation of data among users in Turkey especially during 2013 Gezi Park Protests. The number of active users on Twitter increased enormously from 2 million to 10 million in only 1 month during the Gezi Park Protests: "It was during the Gezi Park Protests of May–June 2013 that Twitter became a widely accepted source of news for the Turkish public. On May 31st, the total number of tweets sent on a daily basis in Turkey skyrocketed from the normal 9–11 million to 15.2 million, the day when the events erupted into a national movement".[8]

Thus, the 2013 Gezi Park Protests reveal that waves of public demonstrations and resistance movements that have local and online extensions can open new spaces to expand the power of algorithmic governance in contemporary capitalist cultures. Generating multiple settings for conflict and regulating contagious

[6] Social Media and Political Participation Lab, "*SMaPP Data Report: A Breakout Role for Twitter? The Role of Social Media in the Turkish Protests*", http://smapp.nyu.edu/reports/turkey_data_report.pdf, accessed 8 April 2015.

[7] Aslı Tunç, "Can Pomegranates Replace Penguins? Social Media and the Rise of Citizen Journalism in Turkey", *Freedom House*, 2013, http://freedomhouse.org/report/struggle-turkeys-internet/can-pomegranates-replace-penguins-social-media-and-rise-citizen#.VBV9sS6SxuC, accessed 14 March 2014.

[8] Ibid.

interaction of resisting groups can thus become an instrument for creating emerging data markets through the making and control of free labor via digital platforms. In Turkey the severe disregard of freedom, violations of rights, police brutality, repressive measures and unlawful acts of the government, acting with specific corporations, institutions and foundations facilitated the making of such a large number of protestors as well. In 2014, a research group in Turkey, Konda revealed that "49.1% (i.e. one out of every two protesters) decided to participate in the protests after seeing police brutality".[9] Media censorship became another push in the migration to online platforms and the rise of data flows. During the protests, the 3 main television networks completely ignored the demonstrations, by either mentioning them only in passing on the evening news, or carrying on with their regular programming.[10] As a result of mass media disregard and censorship, 69% of protesters in the park indicated that they first heard about the events from social media. Only 7% received the news from television, 10 times less than at the national level, which amounts to 71,3%. The collusion between government and media owners, who have sizeable investments in finance, energy, real estate and construction sectors, along with the aggressive use of repressive measures, has thus undermined the effectiveness of regulatory agencies such as legal system, trade unions, journalists and non-governmental organizations.

> This makes the outlets vulnerable to government pressure, and incentivizes holding companies to use their media arms as lobbying firms for major government contracts. For instance, Türk Telekom continues to hold a monopoly in Internet infrastructure and broadband services, despite the privatization of Türk Telekom in 2005, and the nominal opening of the market to competition. With Türk Telekom still 30% state-owned, the independence of the country's dominant Internet provider is a matter of serious concern.[11]

Coşkunoğlu draws attention to the growing role of the State in Internet governance, classifying Turkey as a battleground country due to restrictions it has imposed on the Internet thus contributing to the consolidation of authoritative and regressive trends surrounding online platforms. This is clearly not only a local problem. We need to go deeper to fully grasp the emerging totalitarian regimes of power on a global scale.

In the recent years, the agents of resistance have been superimposed and subjected to the increasing pressure of governments and corporations in a two-fold way. On one level, the pressure comes from the local governments and their related networks of corporations, foundations and institutions to control the monetization and the accumulation of all sorts of capital. On the other, global corporations are expanding their integrated networks and increase their power to control data-capital and data-labor. The conflict among the networks of

[9] Konda Research and Consultancy, "Gezi Report", 5 January 2014, http://konda.com.tr/en/raporlar/KONDA_Gezi_Report.pdf, accessed 20 March 2014.

[10] CNN Türk broadcasted a documentary about penguins, which later became one of the most popular meme of the protest. The survival of the penguins was perceived as the survival of all struggling agents of plurality and diversity. Along with this, in the first 2 weeks of the protests, the police used 150.000 tear gas canisters and 3000 tons of water was used by water cannons. More than 1900 people were detained, 7959 were injured, 63 cats and 8 dogs died and more than a thousand of birds were blinded, left their eggs or died.

[11] Nate Schenkkan, "May 2013 - July 2014: Turkey's Long Year of Content Restrictions Online", *Freedom House*, http://freedomhouse.org/report/struggle-turkeys-internet/may-2013-july-2014-turkeys-long-year-content-restrictions-online#.VBWF7S6SxuA, 25 March 2014.

governments and corporations, which act and compete with each other in global capitalist cultures, indicates an emerging form of clash on two frontiers, while also being capable of coordination. As Benjamin Bratton argues in *The Black Stack*, "This is a clash between two logics of governance, two geometries of territory: one a subdivision of the horizontal, the other a stacking of vertical layers; one a state, the other a para-state".[12]

Ultimately, the clash between these two logics of governance serves the sustainability of the national state, and the growth of the para-state. As I will discuss further in detail, the rise of authoritative and repressive regimes is related to and is becoming a by-product of the growing global software market.[13] Algorithmic infrastructures and cloud platforms overwhelm and displace the traditional functions as well as the authority of the states. When this occurs, as a reaction, states and governments intensify their collaboration with specific corporations, foundations and institutions in order to sustain their power.

The Gezi Protests can be considered as a consequence of this clash because the state had begun accumulating and monetizing data-capital through its centralized systems to compete with the para-state. After the dramatic expansion in online platforms, the state increased the level of using coercive measures such as censorship, denials of access, binding regulations and surveillance mechanisms. For instance, before the Gezi Protests, in 2012, The Department of Education in Turkey created a mobile portal for students and their parents to receive information such as exam results. However, this also allowed the personal data of 17 million students to be sold to mobile network operators, which used the database for targeted advertising.[14] In a similar fashion, in 2013 The Ministry of Health reportedly established a centralized health record database without seeking patients' consent and sold the information contained in the database to private companies.[15] The Turkish state monitored and accumulated data-capital by coercive and authoritative measures, and developed its competitive capacity against global corporations by deploying custom-made software known as, *Medula*, as "an obligatory passage point".[16] Then it took steps to monetize this capital via a government-related local firm, *Data Med*, thus excluding the commercial trade of a global firm, *Intercontinental Marketing Services*, which used to monopolize the accumulation and sales of data to global pharmaceutical corporations in Turkey. A similar case also occurred in the mobile communications sector where binding laws enforced the restriction of competition and the regulation of telecommunication companies. SIM card registration has become mandatory and tied to the user's national identity number, thus accelerating the establishment of extensive databases of user information, eradicating the potential for anonymity within communications, enabling location-tracking, and simplifying communication surveillance and interception. The latest amendments to Law 5651 regarding the Internet, voted after the Gezi Protests, on 5 February 2014, turn Internet Service Providers (ISPs) into instruments of data-accumulation, censorship and

[12] Benjamin Bratton, "The Black Stack", *E-flux*, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-black-stack/, accessed 3 June 2014.

[13] "In 2012, the global software market was reported to be worth 265.8 billion euros, almost 25 per cent of the global IT market.... Between 2007 and 2011, software accounted for nine per cent of all cross-border foreign direct investment (FDI) projects and this sector will continue to be a significant source of international investment, driven by renewed market growth, continuous innovation and the need for companies to extend their global reach". The world IT market grew by an estimated 5.1 per cent between 2011 and 2012 when revenues reached just over a trillion euros (1.08 trillion). Oxford Intelligence, *"The Software Report 2013"*, June 2013, http://www.oxint.com/reportdetails.cfm?id=39&title=The%20Software%20Report%202013, accessed 1 July 2015.

[14] Rıfat Başaran, "17 Milyon Öğrencinin Bilgileri Satıldı", *Radikal*, 21 October 2012, http://www.radikal.com.tr/ekonomi/17_milyon_ogrencinin_bilgileri_satildi-1104844, accessed 22 June 2015.

[15] SGK Rehberi, " Sayıştay SGK'daki Veri Satışı Yolsuzluğuna Dur Dedi", *SGK Rehberi*, 7 December 2014, http://www.sgkrehberi.com/haber/49009, accessed 22 June 2015.

[16] Michel Callon, "Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay", in John Law, ed., *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (London: Routledge, 1986), 196-233.

[17] Reporters Without Borders, "Enemies of the Internet 2014", 12 March 2014, http://12mars.rsf.org/wp-content/uploads/EN_RAPPORT_INTERNET_BD.pdf, accessed 9 May 2015.

[18] Freedom House, "Freedom On the Net 2013: Turkey Country Report", https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2013/turkey#.VZDvKlWqqko, accessed 13 June 2015.

[19] John Ribeiro, "We will eradicate Twitter: Turkey blocks Twitter access", *PC World*, http://www.pcworld.com/article/2110760/turkey-appears-to-have-blocked-twitter.html, accessed 21 March 2014.

[20] The Citizen Lab, an interdisciplinary laboratory based at the University of Toronto, has found evidence that a program called '*PackageShaper*', produced by *Blue Coat Systems*, a United States-based company, is in Turkey. This program is used for Internet filtering, and Citizen Lab has described it as a dual-use technology, because its data-gathering capacities could be used for surveillance as well. Spyware programs that give a customer the ability to observe and control a targeted person's computer – produced by Italian company, *Hacking Team,* and by the United Kingdom-German company, *Gamma International*, has also been tracked in Turkey. These spyware- algorithmic schemes permit a customer to intercept passwords, and they access email as a user of the device, types the passwords in and they can even remotely turn on a device's microphone to record conversations going on nearby. Privacy International, "The Right to Privacy in Turkey", 23 June 2014, https://www.privacyinternational.org/sites/default/files/UPR_Turkey.pdf, accessed 11 May 2015.

[21] New America Foundation, "Uncontrolled Global Surveillance, Updating Digital Controls to the Digital Age", March 2014, https://digitalegesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Uncontrolled-Surveillance_March-2014_final.pdf, accessed 3 July 2015.

surveillance, forcing them to join a state organization that centralizes requests for content blocking or removal. If ISPs do not join and install the surveillance tools demanded by the authorities, they are faced with losing their commercial licenses. Law 5651 also requires ISPs and other technical intermediaries to keep user connection data for one to two years, and be ready to surrender them to the state authorities when demanded. The law does not specify what kinds of data must be surrendered, in what form or what use will be made of them.[17]

The state adopted restrictive, totalitarian and coercive measures by regulating judicial mechanisms and hence allowing for imprisonments, mass surveillance and censorship. In its "Freedom on the Net 2013" report, Freedom House stated that government censorship of the Internet in Turkey became relatively common and has increased steadily over recent years. State authorities added several thousand websites to its blocked list, increasing the total to almost 30.000. In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights found Turkey in violation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights for blocking access to the hosting platform, Google. During the Gezi Park Protests, several users received fines, prison time, or suspended sentences for comments made on social media sites.[18] After the wide range of social media use during the Gezi Park Protests, access to Twitter was blocked when a court ordered that protective measures be applied to the service. Following allegations posted by anonymous users about the government's corruption and abusive use of power, the prime minister of Turkey, who described social media as "the worst menace to society" and vowed to "wipe out Twitter", stated his concerns about national security, flaunting his disregard for criticisms of global actors: "I don't care what the international community says at all. Everyone will see the power of the Turkish Republic".[19]

The technologies of repression are a multibillion-dollar industry. Turkey has become a consumer and a competitor in this growing industry. Recent reports revealed that during the Gezi Protests, software programs for mass surveillance were imported to Turkey.[20] The New America Foundation also draws attention to the relationship between the emergence and growth of the commercial surveillance software market and its buyers, such as governments that have become repressive in a totalitarian manner in order to sustain state power; other agencies, which oppose the authority of government-corporation networks; and commercial organizations, which are involved in research and product development. According to a 2014 report of the New America Foundation:

> In 2011, the Wall Street Journal reported the annual value of the retail market for surveillance tools has increased from 'nearly zero' in 2001 to around $5 billion a year. The Arab Uprising and documents from the fallen regimes that became public in the aftermath have shed light on this growing industry. Some authorities employed this technology for political control and to facilitate internal repression, the suppression of the media as well as civil society, and other violations of fundamental human rights.[21]

National governments are increasingly purchasing surveillance technology manufactured by a small number of corporate suppliers and using them to control dissidents, spy on journalists, and violate human rights.[22] Reporters Without Borders' "Enemies of the Internet" report highlighted the increasingly important role a small number of private-sector digital mercenaries play in providing authoritarian regimes with censorship and surveillance technology. In this way, surveillance and censorship operations of the nation states were outsourced to digital mercenaries in the global software market.[23]

In fact, Turkey has been among the few countries to import surveillance technologies since 2003.[24] However, the lack of evidence about the users and hackers of the surveillance and censorship software leaves room for speculation. Here, the main problem is the uncovered and invisible operations of various entities, including states, corporate social media networks, big corporations and other anonymous users, who struggle to accumulate and monetize data-capital. Lev Manovich points out "even researchers working inside the largest social media companies can't simply access all the data collected by different services in a company". Data is fragmented and dynamic. Thus, those who work with data have also fragmented and dynamic networks of collaboration. Since users cannot access information to learn how these governance mechanisms operate via the stack of data, the question of how to resist non-transparent and coercive dominance of power networks becomes a complex problem. If algorithmic schemes are becoming a contemporary form of governance, alongside states and markets, of regulating, centralizing and coordinating through fixed protocols, we need to discuss how this new form of governance can be remediated through subversion and forms of resistance within contemporary capitalist cultures.

2. Paratactic Media

Paratactic media emerge as a response to contemporary artistic practice. Works of paratactic media use various modes of composition and artistic methods, especially when tactical media activism, such as flash mobs, memes and hoaxes, evolve into popular entertainment, marketing and propaganda tools of governments, institutions and corporations. In paratactic media, tactic means to "[insinuate] itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance".[25] As –*para*, taken as a prefix, means alongside, beside or beyond, "paratactic" refers to imaginative collaborative actions and interventions alongside, beside or beyond tactic and tactical media activisms. Whereas tactics and tactical media may appear as the norm, supported by the presence of avant-gardist techniques as presets of the meta-medium of software, today they too often are able to reproduce the spatio-temporal dynamic of the state and financial capital. Excesses of memes, remixes, mash-ups and the churn of Net

[22] Reporters Without Borders, "Enemies of the Internet 2013 Report: Era of the digital mercenaries", http://surveillance.rsf.org/en/, accessed 13 March 2014.

[23] A Citizen Lab report on the commercialization of digital spyware reveals that a spyware program called *FinFisher1 Command & Control* of *Gamma International*, which has a commercial export license in the UK, but not in Germany, has been identified in a server in Turkey since 2012. Defined as 'Governmental IT Intrusion and Remote Monitoring Solutions' by the company, this spyware collects a wide range of data from infected devices?, such as a mobile phone or a computer. The data is stored locally in a hidden directory, and it is disguised with encryption prior to exfiltration. Although the presence a spyware on a server in any given country does not necessarily imply that country's law enforcement, security or intelligence services are running the server, the owners of the company, *CT Telekom*, and its use of generic host providers is likely an attempt to camouflage the true operator of the spyware. Citizen Lab, *"For Their Eyes Only: The Commercialization of Digital Spyware"*, 1 May 2013, https://citizenlab.org/storage/finfisher/final/forth-eireyesonly.pdf, accessed 3 July 2015.

[24] Ben Wagner and Claudio Guarnieri, "German Companies Are Selling Unlicensed Surveillance Technologies to Human Rights Violaters – and Making Millions", *Global Voices*, 5 September 2014, https://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/09/05/exclu-sive-german-companies-are-selling-unlicensed-surveillance-technologies-to-human-rights-violators-and-making-millions/, accessed 30 June 2015.

[25] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1984), 229.

[26] Jussi Parikka, Tony Sampson, eds., *The Spam Book: On Viruses, Porn, and Other Anomalies from the Dark Side of Digital Culture* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2009).

flotsam are indicative of these accelerated conditions of communicative capitalism.[26]

Faced with the shortcomings of tactical media within algorithmic governance, there is an interest among politically minded media artists in renewing and modifying such tools. By exploring and reusing the operational processes of algorithmic schemes, paratactic media works realize subversive actions and creative interventions, which do not only represent and imitate the task-specific nature of algorithmic schemes, but also produce performative and intervening compositions against ignorance, extinction, degeneration, corruption and destruction. Rather than being merely infected and pacified by the conditions and predications of its medium, paratactic media produce background information about the medium as such, its operational process, its users and their patterns of action. Since algorithmic regulation is not transparent, a paratactic media activism can explore, reuse and reveal the operations of a political surveillance mechanism, or a network of corruption among corporations, foundations and governments, which are meticulously obscured from the public. In this way, they become a performative attempt at uncovering the invisible functional principles of contemporary power structures. For instance the 2013 work of Paolo Cirio, *Loophole for All*, unveiled the privileges of offshore businesses by promoting the sale of real identities of 200.000 anonymous the Caymans Islands companies. As Cirio notes:

[27] For a detailed account of Cirio's research, Paul Cirio Ltd, "Documenting and investigating offshore centers", *Loop4All.com,* http://loophole4all.com/doc.php, accessed 30 June 2015.

> Most of the banking sector uses offshoring not only to hide assets but also to conduct unregulated speculations through special financial instruments, often 'toxic' and damaging to real economies. The system of so-called 'shadow banking,' blamed for aggravating the global financial crisis, grew to $67 trillion globally in 2011.[27]

The artistic method of Cirio can be used to introduce paratactic media because in this processual artwork, he investigated offshore centers to reveal their social costs and to envision solutions to global economic inequality. By imitating and reappropriating the global algorithmic operation of companies and governments for an alternative purpose, Cirio hacked a regulatory agency, accumulated and monetized data for common use, made this data accessible to the public, exposed an invisible and inaccessible process, curated a fake identity and integrated public participation for this creative intervention. After researching the offshore banking system, Cirio hacked the governmental website of the Cayman Islands Company Register to accumulate a list of all companies registered within this major offshore center. Then he made the data accessible to the public and exposed it by digitally counterfeiting Certificates of Incorporation documents for each company, all issued with his real name and signature as a fake authority persona. The counterfeit certificates were also published on the website *Loophole4All.com*, where the public was called on to hijack the firms' identities by buying Certificate of Incorporations,

starting at 99 cents, enabling them to avoid taxes. Within this multi-layered processual work, Cirio uncovered the secrecy surrounding the real owners these companies as well as the massive corporate identity theft that benefited from the anonymous, but legitimate companies within global capitalist power networks. He basically reused, resampled and remediated various entities that act upon each other, such as hard-copy materials, data-sources, websites, certificates, white papers, buyers, legislative measures and financial assemblages. In addition, the work set up an algorithmic regulation scheme to publish the stolen information through a company in London (Paolo Cirio Ltd.) and a data center in California, while the identities of the Cayman companies were sold through Luxembourg, via *PayPal.com* to route the profit of the sale to Cirio's operational head quarter in Manhattan. Under the scope of this paratactical approach, the work produced and communicated information about the invisible benefits of specific jurisdictions for legal liability, financial transactions, and publishing rights. Passing beyond the constructed distinction between the digital and the physical worlds, the artist also used mailboxes in the Caymans, London and New York City, and set up most of this scheme through his passport, ultimately shielding his personal legal liability by means of his Italian citizenship.

As illustrated in Cirio's artwork, paratactic media reuses and remediates inescapable conditions and connections among various entities that act on each other which includes bots, individuals, objects, institutions, organizations and sources, without the use of a single coordinating and subordinating conjunction. In paratactic media, there is not a distinction between human and non-human agencies. Instead, different components of paratactic media generate processual flows and networks to create an intervention on action, knowledge and perception. Experimenting with new modes of politics and aesthetics, Hito Steyrl draws attention to political and military tasks of "proxy armies", entities in large numbers, which can potentially be used to bias public opinion, for example, by writing fake messages in high frequency and dishonestly improve or damage the public perception about a topic.

> A Twitter chat bot is an algorithm wearing a person's face, a formula incorporated as animated spam. It is a scripted operation impersonating a human operation. Bot armies distort discussions on Twitter hashtags by spamming them with advertisement, tourist pictures, or whatever. They basically add noise. Bot armies have been active in Mexico, Syria, Russia, and Turkey, where most political parties have been said to operate such bot armies. The ruling AKP alone was suspected of controlling 18,000 fake Twitter accounts using photos of Robbie Williams, Megan Fox, and other celebs.[28]

[28] Hito Steyrl, "Proxy-Politics", *E-flux*, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/proxy-politics/#_ftnref22, accessed 7 September 2015.

In paratactic media, heterogeneous fragments are dynamically connected with no particular order and hierarchy; they act in heterarchic flows. The components compose a geometric sequence of diverse units that features a collaborative juxtaposition. As brilliantly performed in the GIF animation works of Erdal İnci during the Gezi Park Protests, dynamic flows of light, color and gesture demonstrated contemporary movement and action patterns of these various types of human and non-human entities. Inci's artistic method uncovered how a single unit is cloned, and alongside with others, formed an anonymous body creating a kind of dynamic movement assemblage.[29] Inci's work enabled the viewer to perceive the mutational interaction of entities, whether it be bodies, or light sources, that act upon each other in a self-reflexive way. In *Media Ecologies*, Mathew Fuller argues that "the heterogeneity, the massive capacity for disconnectedness of the parts, coupled with the plain evidence of their being linked by some syntax, of writing or performative action, allows for the intervention of newly transversal, imaginal, technico-aesthetic or communicative dynamics to flower".[30]

The dictionary definition of *parataxis* says that it is the arrangement of "propositions one after the other, without other expression of their syntactic relation", therefore, without conjunctions, and even "without logical connection", paratactic resonates with "the fabric of rhizomes, the conjunction, ...and...and...and...".[31] As Andrew Goffey puts it, "Algorithms act, but they do so as part of an ill-defined network of actions upon actions", paratactic media introduces challenging

Fig. 1: *Flood of Light*, 2013, ©Erdal Inci, .

interventions of both human and non-human agencies of diverse orders that act up on each other.[32] In these GIF animations, simple snapshots of movement of only one or two seconds, as single units are positioned next to each other, and turn into entrancing and magnetizing video loops by creating volatile hypnotic orders and magnetic attention-grabbers. Each unit in paratactic media, morphogenetically engenders a "matrix of immanent universes and they are hypotactically assembled in relation to the immanence of what it is next to [-*para*], what it abuts to and differs from. Such hypotaxis is virtual, that is, for its actualization, it demands power to the imagination".[33] Emphasizing the power of imagination in

[29] Erdal İnci, http://erdalinci.tumblr.com/, accessed 2 June 2014.

[30] Ibid, 15.

[31] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 25.

[32] Andrew Goffey, "Algorithm", *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, ed., Matthew Fuller (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), 15-20.

[33] Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies, Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2005), 14.

contemporary resistance practices, these works challenge the viewer to shift their attention, knowledge and the perception through a self-reflexive method.

3. Paratactic Media Layers

Paratactic media works do not just reveal and reuse the operational logic of contemporary capitalist system, but they also deal with the recurrent delays of resistance and struggle. In this regard, paratactic media has to unfold the multi-layered processes of algorithmic governance. In potentially conflictual situations, fabricated tensions and constant crises obscure unlawful setups. As they scatter attention, knowledge and perception in multiple ways, they can also be useful in the making and control of large-scale data-labor and data-capital. Gabriel Tarde and Georg Simmel clearly saw that conflicts don't constitute a paroxysm of separation between individuals and groups, but tend to be a very intense form of social bonding.[34] From a strategic management point of view, Oliver Williamson reads governance as the creation of order to achieve mutual gains.[35] Conflicts and constant tensions are increasingly instrumentalized to control resistance. In order to prove the need for absolute power (state) and its logic of governance, problematic events are used to bring back random deviations to the discourse networks of global elites, and their keywords such as national security, economic development, financial stability, justice and the war on terror. Recent resistance movements at a global level revealed that the increasing mutual interactions with other resistance movements at local contexts have revived some shared concerns about the spread of coercion, destruction and corruption. However, when agents of resistance are depleted enough, their desire and belief in popular values, such as democracy, equality, justice and freedom, could be limitlessly postponed in continuous variation. Then the need for existing structures and static antagonisms (i.e. state and citizen) is reproduced and conserved as a result of this shared exhaustion. Provocative statements, risks, uncertainties and traumatic events are superimposed almost in an orchestrated fashion within a certain period of time in order to exhaust resistance. Conflict between disputing parties is preserved and fueled by a bombardment of polemics, speculations, spam, conspiracy theories and deceits to discredit any new claim to power. Tarleton Gillespie argues, "To efficiently design algorithms that achieve a target goal (rather than reaching a known answer), algorithms are 'trained' on a corpus of known data... The algorithm is then run on this data".[36] Popular stereotypes, clichés, spam, generalizations and dominant categorizations are considered to be such a corpus of known data and act as a metanoise which is ultimately functional to algorithmic governance. They deploy a combination of conservatism and fabulation in their attack on mnemonic schemes. Cacophony serves to attract and distract attention so that algorithmic operations can be run on such data-flows generated by the noise of various reactionary agents. When reactions reach a certain point in which

[34] Sergei Tonkonoff, "A New Social Physic: The Sociology of Gabriel Tarde and Its Legacy", *Current Sociology,* 61 (May 2013), 272.

[35] Oliver E. Williamson, "Strategy Research: Governance and Competence Perspectives", *Strategic Management Journal*, 20.12 (December 1999), 1087–1108.

[36] Tarleton Gillespie, "Algorithm (draft) (#digitalkeywords)", *Culture Digitally*, 25 June 2014, http://culturedigitally.org/2014/06/algorithm-draft-digitalkeyword, accessed 3 July 2015.
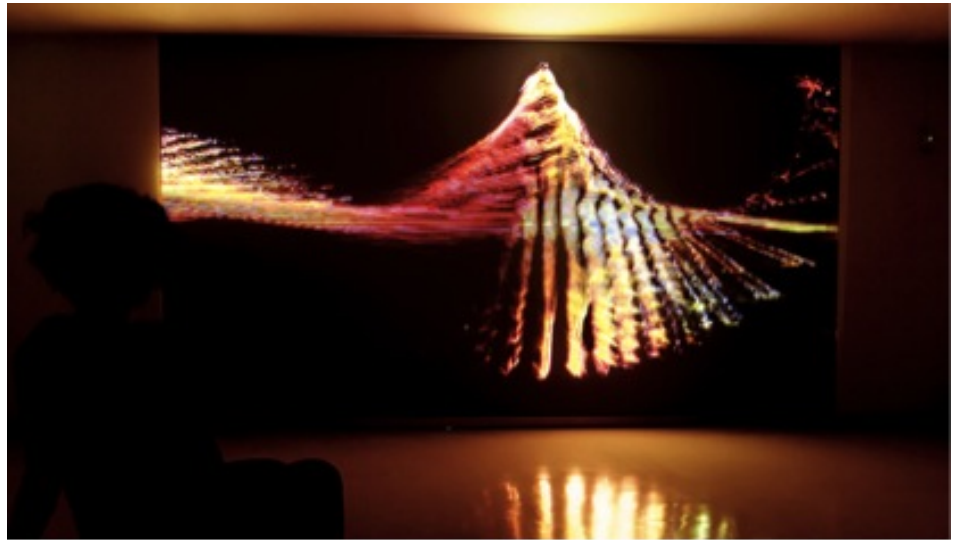
Fig. 2: *Bipolar Fractal*, 2013, ©Ozan Turkkan

they lead to surplus, such as an unwanted change, they are removed, liquidated and devalued. In this way, agents of resistance are super-stimulated and their affective resources can be extracted and put into work to produce data via algorithmic schemes, such as the data flow of tweets toward a provocative statement. If the frequency of this process increases, then resisting agents are depleted, consumed and wasted. It is this waste, which is processed and used to reproduce dominant patterns. Paratactic media works explore and subvert these invisible layers of algorithmic governance.

3.1 *Friction*

For paratactic media, friction is not a metaphor but a fundamental layer in which to work. In algorithmic governance, friction is used for forecasting, risk assessment and management. For paratactic media, fabricated disasters, constant tension, crises and wars are considered socio-political and economic dimensions of friction. In basic physics, friction is simply defined as a force resisting the relative motion of two surfaces in contact, or fluid layers, and material elements sliding against each other. The conflict between the government and resistance in rural areas who oppose ecological destruction, can be seen as an example of friction. One of the most important aspects of friction is that there is no need for relative motion to generate force. In other words, friction can occur even when the contrasting sides maintain their position for a long period of time. In this case, friction becomes invisible and it is used in order to preserve the existing power structure in a relatively regulated manner despite tensions.

   Kinetic friction generates a different kind of force than static friction. Whereas relative motion exists in kinetic friction, there is no relative motion in static

friction. This leads us to analyze social and political-economic change from the perspective of basic physics. For instance, although some agents remain fixed to an opinion in a a controversy, their tension can become an instrument for change in the longer run because static positions become a resource to generate known data, such as popular information, polemics, spams, clichés and stereotypes. Algorithmic operations run on this corpus of known data, the meta noise.

Besides, kinetic friction occurs at a maximum threshold of static friction. In this case, the meticulous analysis of data production and data flow which cause static friction becomes critical to controlling rhizomatic and unexpected actions and motions. For this reason, data concerning the maximum threshold of static friction should constantly be analyzed and kept under control to assess risks, forecast random deviations and to sort relative motions. For the profit of global power networks, algorithmic analysis of capital flows, whether it is financial, affective, political or social, becomes critical in forecasting risk because divergent and resistant motions should be regulated to sustain power, sometimes at all costs. If an actor triggers contagious dissent, the anarchic scope of circulation reveals itself as a para-state apparatus accumulating relational metadata.

Before the 2013 Gezi Park Protests, friction was experienced as increasing manipulation and provocation of diffetent groups. Especially the last two weeks before the protests revealed that the amount of friction and noise experienced on a daily basis reached a level of high frequency.[37] The government and its followers issued a number of provocative statements and actions against journalists, on issues such as abortion, the Alevi community, the LGBT community, alcohol use and environmental destruction. In this way, the static friction between numerous groups and the government-corporation network reached a maximum threshold on May 28, 2013. It was an unexpected event for many to witness an act of resistance, in which a parliamentarian was physically defending the rights of a tree in Turkey, where the ecological movement is indeed a negligible political-economic priority. Once the police attacked the group engaged in civil disobedience, information disseminated via social media attracted more people to participate in a rhizomatic fashion. Kinetic friction was generated. Extraordinary collaboration and action among various groups who had previously been in opposition to each other was experienced in numerous ways. Then the resistance turned into an anti-government protest and transformed into a sort of static friction between the resisting agencies and the government. Although the government could have used its power to disperse resistance, it somehow allowed the making of an active, large-scale peer community, which was migrating to algorithmic platforms. As discussed in detail in the first section, after allowing the making of data-capital and free labor during the Gezi Park Protests, the government adopted strict measures to control this large-scale data-capital and its labor captured by social media corporations via censorship, denials of access, binding regulations and surveillance mechanisms.

[37] See a list of provocative statements and actions against journalists, the issue of abortion, the Alevi community, the LGBT community, regarding alcohol use, concerning environmental destruction, that was adopted by state institutions and officials one week before the Gezi Park Protests here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gezi_Park_protests.

3.2 *Cacophony*

Friction generates error and noise. Large amounts of noise in data flows are used also for constant risk assessment and quality assurance. Hito Steyrl emphasizes the role of algorithms that run on noise.[38] For instance, visual data captured by sensors, which use optical technology, is noise because the sensors cannot always read the image. The algorithm cleans the picture from the noise, or rather defines the picture from within noise. This operational scheme is paratactical because it works on past pictures to help creating the image and offers an interpretation of data based on affinities to other data. On the other hand, data obfuscation becomes a tactic to hide sensitive data in a large dataset with random noise. A random act or an inflammatory statement by a state official can draw attention to a temporary zone of attraction and hide the unlawful actions of a government-corporation network. Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum define data obfuscation as an alternative tactic of "informational self-defense, a method that acts as informational resistance, disobedience, protest or even covert sabotage".[39] However today governments and corporations reappropriated this alternative tactic to covert their illegitimate actions by producing misleading, ambiguous and confusing information as an act of concealment or evasion. Excesses of memes, conflicting statements and images are used to accelerate the conditions of communicative capitalism. Due to noise and errors generated and transmitted through various users, such as the reactions against the provocative statements of the governor of Istanbul during the Gezi Park Protests, the surplus created by the resisters can be used to absorb and cover sensitive facts, such as The Internal Security and National Intelligence Law, which was proposed during the Gezi Park Protests, and passed later in 2014.[40]

Friction and foolishness engender cacophony and they are instrumentalized to increase participation and activate labor for the sake of algorithmic governance. As reflected by the Deleuzian saying, today the fool becomes a contemporary figure of the barbarian despotic machine. In *Evil Media*, Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey explain how foolishness plays an important role in 'psychological operations' by intelligence agencies:

> [psyop units] insult the intelligence of their recipients, the enemy, aim to trigger in them a significant margin of overconfidence ... black propaganda hopes to extend the production of doubt, the encouragement of turncoats, or estrangement from familiar sources of information, it also functions to lure recipients into the idea that their enemies ... are more stupid than had previously been thought.[41]

[38] Hito Steyrl, "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise", *E-Flux*, 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/proxy-politics/, accessed 3 July 2015.

[39] Finn Brunton, Helen Nissenbaum, "Political and Ethical Perspectives on Data Obfuscation", in Mireille Hildebrandt and Katje de Vries, eds., *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 164-188.

[40] Nate Schenkkan, "The Future of Turkish Democracy", *Freedom House*, 15 July 2014, https://freedomhouse.org/article/future-turkish-democracy; Ali Ünal, "Turkish Parliament Approves National Intelligence Bill", *Daily Sabah*, 17 April 2014, http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/04/17/turkish-parliament-approves-national-intelligence-bill, accessed 3 July 2015.

[41] Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey, *Evil Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), 43.
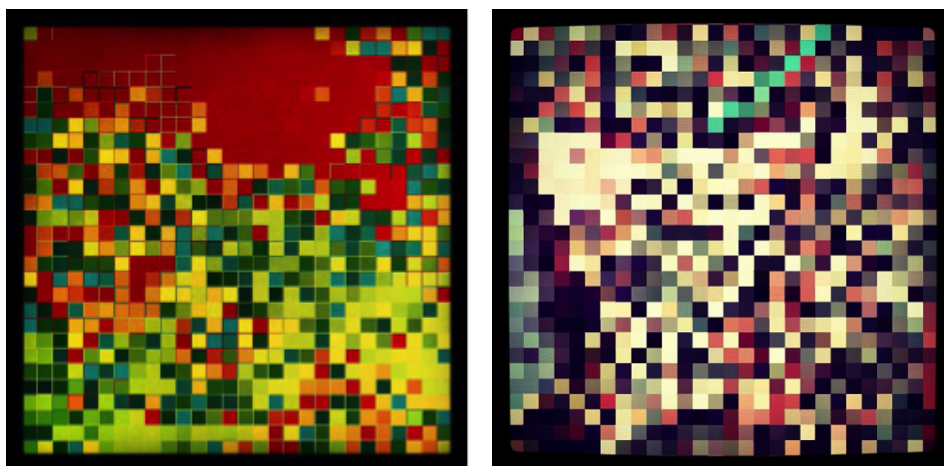
Figs. 3–4: *Live to Pixel*, 2013, ©Baran Gulesen

These maneuvers of "necropolitical war", as Rosi Braidotti might call them, are realized in a two-fold way to reproduce authority and power-related dichotomies.[42] First, overconfidence is achieved in the heart of the loosely defined enemy. This phase can also be considered the revolutionary spark in which capital-data is accumulated by intensified data flows. Then, the implied lack of sophistication in the fool suggests that enemies understand their opponents as being less capable of thought and action. This encourages the enemy to act without sufficient care and diligence, to rush, mostly oriented and magnetized toward goals set by others.

In what we might call 'depletion design', the high frequency and exchange of noise, traumatic events and "crisis exhaust the means of a politics of representation, too slow for the state of exception, too ignorant of the distribution of political agency, too focused on the governability of financial architectures".[43] Instead of considering such crisis situations a problem of communication, paratactic media works consider cacophony a subversive layer. If random users of cacophony were magnetized in an alternative way to become parasitic transmitters, propagators and infecting agents of resistance, then they would also become creative forces for unconventional political-economic action.

3.3 *Waste*

Paratactic media can emerge by collecting and producing what is considered and ignored as devaluated, useless, insignificant and incapable of presenting immediate sources for the capitalist production. Waste becomes one of the fundamental resources of paratactic media for the composition of resistant actions to access truth which are concealed. Using "power to value the useless",[44] paratactic media "create(s) a kind of disjunction and non-specificity that undermine[s] logical clarity and causality, leaving room for a certain vagueness and interpretation".[45] Using

[42] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

[43] Carolin Wiedeman and Soenke Zehle, eds., *Depletion Design: A Glossary of Network Ecologies* (Amsterdam: XMLab and the Institute for Network Cultures, 2012), 5.

[44] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 83.

[45] Gillespie, cit. in Richard Leppert, ed. "Introduction", *Theodor Adorno: Essays on Music* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 63.

some of the fundamental aspects of glitch and pixel art, Baran Güleşen realized a repercussive project, *Live to Pixel*, about media censorship, foolishness and waste during the 2013 Gezi Park Protests.[46] In *Live to Pixel*, the artist worked with the given aesthetics and rationale of authoritative measures, such as censorship, and the inability to access reliable information in a crisis situation. Focusing on problems of trust, stability and truth, he questioned the contemporary logic of power: why and how media channels failed to communicate information and cover breaking news. By considering media as a type of waste to recycle, the artist suggested, instead of concentrating on incapability and incompetence, users needed to work with failures, inabilities and incapacity to generate evolving modes of thinking and action. In a similar fashion, Matthew Fuller gave an account of the use of stupidity in programming as follows:

[46] Baran Güleşen, *Live to Pixel,* 2013, http://www.barangulesen.com/pixel.html, accessed 22 January 2014.

> in order to program, you have to understand something so well that you can explain it to something as stonily stupid as a computer. While there is some painful truth in this, programming is also the result of a live process of engagement between thinking with and working on materials and the problem space that emerges. Intelligence arises out of interaction and the interaction of computational and networked digital media with other forms of life conjugate new forms of intelligence and new requirements for intelligence to unfold.[47]

[47] Matthew Fuller, *Software Studies: A Lexicon* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), 10.

[48] Michael Nunes, ed., *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures* (New York: Continuum Books, 2011), 3.

Error reveals not only a system's failure, but also its operational logic.[48] For *Live to Pixel*, Güleşen wrote a source code, specified some tasks by commands via algorithms, and shared it online for others to continuing using in imaginative ways with the low-tech aesthetics offered by errors and glitches, and the compressions of pixels. In its failure to communicate, error and noise signal a fissure, a *poiesis*, a track of outflow from the predictable confines of algorithmic regulation. In *Live to Pixel*, whose aim was recapturing and exploring the behavioral patterns of algorithmic schemes, Güleşen recycled cacophony, foolishness, friction, depletion and waste in use within algorithmic governance. The artist designed a process of communication within an environment of open-source development. The work remixed and subverted regulatory power by reducing video-streaming resolution in real time. It thus gave anyone the power of manipulating the audio-visual information, not by coercion, but by consent.

Paratactic media works reuse waste to reveal the background information of the government-corporation networks and the dispossession they actuate. As David Harvey noticed in *Resisting Cities*, "the problem is not the common *per se*, but the relations between those who produce or capture it at a variety of scales and those who appropriate it for private gain".[49] The on-going "Mapping Dispossession Networks" project also aims at decelerating the pace of destructive political-economic operations by revealing the complex relationships that are extremely challenging to sort in a linear context.[50] The Collective of Networks of Dispossession tries to create a change in what is sensed, believed, desired and

[49] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), 78.

[50] The Collective of Networks of Dispossession, "Mapping Dispossession Networks"*,* 2013, http://mulksuzlestirme.org/#about, accessed 22 January 2014.

valued by making various cartographies of government-corporation networks. The paratactic media collective is composed of members who have experience, knowledge and access to diverse fields, such as law, journalism, art, social sciences, banking, advertising and finance. They collaborate in collecting data and researching data sources making them available for public access. Networks of Dispossession arouses the power of the imagination by collecting and producing what is considered waste. Each form of data, such as the list of executive board members of a company, has no value when it is located, for instance, on a specific company's website. But this trash was turned into treasure in a site-specific composition, when it is reused, remixed and remediated paratactically in relation to other data. These single units of data and sources might have been considered useless, insignificant and incapable of presenting immediate sources used for capitalist production.

Figs. 5: *Networks of Dispossession*, 2013-ongoing, http://goo.gl/n0nXtl, accessed 8 October 2015

The fixed data-capital is not converted for monetization, but it is accumulated for producing, communicating and distributing information for alternative actions. Information gathered and produced by Networks of Dispossession is shared and circulated preemptively via their website, the 13th Istanbul Biennale, Facebook and Twitter. Networks of Dispossession worked cooperatively with other minor resistance actions as well. As data is never a given, it is constantly produced and manipulated by the collaborative actions of various power networks, the collective worked with low-tech actions, such as creative uses of hashtags and micro-blogs (i.e. *#KabulEdilmedi* –#Rejected) which revealed the list of disallowances for resolutions in the Turkish Parliament. In this way, knowledge was also treated as dynamic, mobile, extensible and recombinable. What was also experienced with this work is the emergence of a precarious resistance and a kind of open-source processual knowledge production. Rather than merely re-thinking the nature of the "state-finance nexus", as David Harvey put it, paratactic media ultimately proposes

new communal forms of non-property and transparent autonomous modes of bottom-up collective action by creative interventions of artistic practice.

Conclusion

In contemporary capitalist cultures, algorithms emerge as one of the fundamental logics of governance. After the recent waves of public demonstrations large segments of the populations have migrated onto online platforms. In this way they have contributed to the global extension of the production, circulation and exchange of data-capital as well as data-labor. As a reactionary response, nation states have increased restrictive and authoritarian measures. In this article, first, I try to draw attention to the interconnections of the state and the para-state. I argued that the rise of totalitarian regimes, seems strongly related with the growth of the para-state. As a result, today algorithmic governance operates by obfuscating the unlawful acts of corporations and governments, such as fraud, illegal trade, wiretapping and surveillance. Alongside this, algorithmic schemes rationalize dominant patterns and prevent access to information regarding cost analysis, sales contracts, profiles of networked agents and decision-making processes.

Paratactic media works emerge as a response to this new mode of governance by politically-minded media artists. By way of their creative interventions and artistic methods, paratactic media explores and reuses the concealed operations of government-corporation networks to stimulate alternative actions, knowledge and perception in various ways. Whereas some works may include complex technical components, others benefit from low-tech and mixed media-based artistic methods. In displaying their work and making it accessible to public, paratactic media artists integrate public participation and collective action in their processual works. Hacking the operational mechanisms of regulatory agencies, accumulating and monetizing data for the commons, exposing behavioral patterns of data-flows, curating fake or anonymous identities, exploring and reappropriating the logic of restrictive and authoritative measures are some of the basic features of paratactic media. Paratactic media artists work with alongside, beside or beyond the agencies of control that use friction, foolishness, cacophony, depletion and waste as attention-grabbing and neuron-eroding schemes of algorithmic governance. Allowing multiple interpretations and finding ways to communicate information for alternate purposes, paratactic media collaborate and perform with responsive minor hacktivist-like organisms and actions by simply asking "what can we learn from a virus?"[51] By repeating and imitating the fractal logic of control, paratactic media reproduces subversive actions and participatory creative interventions to generate short-term resistance of performative crowds against ignorance, degeneration and destruction.

[51] This is the theme of a performance-lecture, *Contagious Bodies*, which I gave at the 2012 Tanz im August Festival in Berlin with a group of contemporary dancers, performance artists and independent researchers in regard to my ongoing research on the contagious movements of virus-like organisms, technico-aesthetic interventions and social change.

Acknowledgments

Viola Sarnelli

Al Jazeera's *The Stream*.
Digital and Diasporic Geographies beyond the West

Abstract: A few months after the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolts, the satellite news channel Al Jazeera English, broadcasting from the Middle-Eastern region for an international public, launched 'The Stream', presented as "A television show based on a social media community". By integrating the social media into the news production process, The Stream is expected, according to its authors, to transfer the geographic and cultural variety of the internet into a television format. This paper aims to explore how a transnational media like Al Jazeera English uses the convergence between television and social networks to 'give voice' to the changing relations of power and cultural influence between the West and the Rest, particularly through the category of the 'diaspora'. By analyzing some episodes of the program, this paper will look at how in The Stram this term, loaded with historic and cultural meaning in migration studies and media- and postcolonial theory, becomes part of the everyday language of a multi-media community. The article analyzes how the term 'diaspora' is used and transformed within The Stream media environment: as a field for 'social change'; as an element contributing to discussion, democracy, modernization; as a key aspect to elaborate the cultural complexity of contemporary societies.

Keywords: *social media, television, convergence culture, diaspora, middle east, digital media*

> I don't think of myself as an Indian writer anymore because, really,
> I don't live there. In a way, that experience of belonging to the diaspora
> is more interesting than trying to pretend that I am what I'm not.
> (Salman Rushdie, *Conversations with Salman*)

1. Introduction

In May 2011 the satellite news channel Al Jazeera English (AJE) launched 'The Stream': a television show created from a blend of different media formats characterising AJE's coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions a few months earlier. In this programme, the television 'flow' is absorbed into the 'stream' of social media, while at the same time incorporating in the TV format some user-generated contents published on the social media platforms, to shed light on underrepresented topics.[1] This article focuses on some of the elements characterising 'The Stream', and particularly on how it selects and represents a category of guests who are represented as 'the diaspora'.

The intertwining between satellite news and social media is one of the latest evolutions in the rich media environment of the Middle-Eastern and North-African (MENA) region. For AJE, the so-called 'convergence' of different media

[1] I refer to the concept of 'flow' as originally defined by Raymond Williams, *Television* (London: Collins, 1974).

tools and cultures soon became a new variation of its founding narrative of 'giving voice' to a collective subject mostly identified as 'the people', identified as the protagonist in the story told by the channel's coverage of the events of 2011 (such as the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt).[2]

In contrast to Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA), the audience of AJE has never been united by geographic proximity, nor by linguistic commonality. While a part of AJA's audience can be categorised as 'diasporic', corresponding to the first and second generations of Arab immigrants in the West, AJE speaks directly to the second and third generations, as well as to a wider international public. Also in The Stream, the channel aims to give voice to this broad, heterogeneous and sometimes undefined community of viewers, through the mediation of social networks.

In a context where electronic media can offer *resources* and *disciplines* for the construction of new identities and imagined worlds, as already found by Arjun Appadurai almost twenty years ago, it is specifically the interaction among different media tools and local situations that leads to new potential *technoscapes*.[3] In the case of The Stream, the cultural and political landscape of contemporary diasporas is constructed and presented through a multimedia environment, combining social media practices with the codes of satellite television. By drawing on theoretical perspectives derived from the fields of media and diaspora studies, this article tries to describe how these groups are portrayed in an unconventional television show, aired by the first news channel broadcasting in English from the Middle East, and representing on the television screens a multimedia modernity exceeding the West.[4]

The main aim of The Stream, as declared by its creators, is to give value to the geographic and cultural position of its contributors. The problem of the Net as a selective space, in terms of ethnicity and nationality has been raised by many authors since its beginnings and it is still relevant today: despite the number of Internet users in Asia currently being double the number in Europe and more than three times those in North America, the main digital hubs and crossroads remain firmly based in the United States and Europe.[5] In this sense, the way in which AJE combines the use of social media with its satellite broadcasting is presented as a way of modifying consolidated patterns in the configuration of what, following Dodge and Kitchin, we might call a 'cyber-geography.'

Yet, despite the efforts of the channel to select guests and topics from the most remote areas of the world, the social media involved in this operation are not politically or geographically 'neutral'. Against the idea of the Net as an open and de-materialised 'no-topia', the need to reconsider the intersections between the physical and the digital space has been reinforced by the use of smart-phone applications, constantly signalling the position of their users, and by the quasi-monopolies established by a few California-based social media companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Google.[6]

Based on these technological and cultural premises, the selection of the participants of the show and the construction of the 'diaspora' category reflects

[2] "Voice to the voiceless" was one of the first slogans used to promote the channel. The mediated construction of "the people" as the main subject of the revolutions has been investigated by Henri Onodera, in "Raise Your Head High, You're an Egyptian!", *Sociologica*, 3 (2011).

[3] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3, 34.

[4] David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 173-203.

[5] Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin, *Atlas of the Cyberspace* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2001). For recent statistics see http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm, January 2013. For the distribution of the main digital hubs see *chrisharrison.net,* http://www.chrisharrison.net/index.php/Visualizations/InternetMap, September 2012.

[6] Fivos Papadimitriou, "A Geography of Notopia", *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 10.3 (2006); David Morley, *Home Territories,* 173-203; Geert Lovink, "A World beyond Facebook", in Geert Lovink and Miriam Rasch, eds., *UnLike Us Reader: Social Media Monopolies and Their Alternatives* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2013).

some of the contradictions characterising the channel. The aspiration towards cosmopolitanism collides with nationalist constraints; the advocacy of political and cultural minorities often coexists with the promotion of the host nation's interests; the promotion of a 'counter-hegemonic flow' relies on the dominant position of the main corporate media companies.[7] Still, what emerges, at least in the limited sample of episodes analysed, is an attempt to re-position the diaspora members within the television landscape, by portraying them as fully recognised social actors in a complex modernity, and by displaying their diasporic condition not only in its collective, communal dimension but also in a more individual, 'existential' mode. In this sense, the resulting 'diaspora' on the screen is made of a combination of commonality and singularity; of general, recurring patterns and varieties of conditions depending on geography, politics, history and personal life experiences.

By introducing the language and functionalities of social media online communities into the televisual medium, The Stream tries to constitute a space which is intrinsically 'diasporic', as a mediated common ground for different, specific diasporas. Three main components, namely the online community following the show, diaspora as a 'common condition' of displacement and the specificity of several diasporic communities, are combined in The Stream episodes, with variable outcomes. It is this displaced, transnational or postnational dimension displayed in The Stream that seems to constitute the core of channel's audience, incorporated into the EuroAmerican modernity, and yet at the same time belonging to parallel realities. The geographical space covered by The Stream episodes is defined by not being Western, by being eccentric with relation to dominant centres of media power; still, the new US hegemony in the field of communication, reinforced by means of social media, seems to be taken for granted. This said, without the geographic mobility and the widespread reach of the corporate social media, it would not be possible to include into a television show a variety of individual and collective voices, such as those of the diasporic communities, in the way it is done in The Stream.

2. The Stream: "a social media community with its own daily TV show"[8]

One of the most evident features of The Stream is its drive to mobilize a sense of community, solicited by a continuous dialogue between the presenters and the social media users taking part in these mediated discussions. The first presenter of The Stream, the 'Afropolitan' musician Derek Ashong, used to conclude every episode of the show by saying "thank you for staying with us ... we'll see you online",[9] underlining in this way the central role of the online community in the television show. Although other men and women of different origins succeeded Ashong as presenters, the core concept of the show hasn't changed. As declared by the authors of The Stream, its main objective is to construct a social media

[7] Daya K.Thussu, ed., *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contraflow* (Routledge: London, 2007).

[8] Http://stream.aljazeera.com/about, accessed March 2014.

[9] 'Afropolitan' was a definition found on *Derrickashong.com*, http://derrickashong.com/about-me/, accessed January 2014.

'community' which could directly contribute to the television programme, by broadening the cultural and, most importantly, the geographical variety of the topics covered.

> The site compiles information from around the globe by working with our audience and then the television show is the place where we talk about those stories ... we want to invite and engage people who already have a nuanced understanding of their particular corner of the world (or community) and allow them to drive the narrative.[10]

[10] Robert Hernandez, "In 'The Stream' with Al Jazeera English's social media news show", *The Online Journalism Review,* 3 May 2011, http://www.ojr.org/in-the-stream-with-al-jazeera-englishs-social-media-news-show/.

All the episodes analysed were divided into two parts: the first 20-25 minutes broadcast on television, followed by a 'post-show' of 10-15 minutes that was only visible online. The topics discussed include both stories spread through social media, as well as stories centred on social network platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Reddit, Linkedin, Pinterest and Storify. The show is aired from Monday to Thursday at 19:30 GMT, in full British prime time, while it is early afternoon in the Washington studio where it is recorded.[11] This choice seems to target primarily a European public, even though there are also three daily replicas, more friendly to other time-zones (14:30, 04:30, 08:30 GMT).

[11] After the opening of Al Jazeera America, in 2013, another parallel version of The Stream has been appositely designed for the US public. Here we will consider only the first, 'international' version of the show.

This article considers twenty episodes of the show, selected from 2011 to 2014. Ten of them cover a wide range of topics, and were selected randomly; the other ten were chosen because of their relation with guests and issues related to 'the diaspora'. First, a few aspects that all of the episodes have in common are considered; a focus on the episodes centred around 'the diaspora' will follow.

2.1 *The 'stream' of social media into the television 'flow'*

In The Stream, some members of the 'online community' appear in a television show, though comments, posts and short video slots, as the specific convergence between the televisual flow and the social media stream is at the core of the programme contents and aesthetics. Most of the visual strategies of the show, in fact, seem to be based on the attempt to select and transform some of the online exchanges into television language. At the same time, as to emphasise a modernization of the classical TV experience, the television show reproduces some of the aspects determining the perceptive and cognitive experience of 'being online'. As one of the producers explains:

> what makes this show different is that it feels like the experience of being on the Web. There is no giant touch-wall, we don't have crazy animations. We are individuals who use the Web like anyone else and the show is a reflection of that experience. It's more true-to-life, I think that's something that has been lacking in television news treatments of social media.[12]

[12] Hernandez, "In The Stream".

In the first episodes, the experience of 'being on the Web' was mainly recreated

through a studio designed as a domestic space, with a mix of dark and warm colours, the use of natural light, and an informal distribution of the guests. After one year of broadcasting, the studio's style was overturn, giving room to light and cold colours, to one big table around which the host, the producer and the guest(s) are sitting, and to a big screen showing the online contributions. The 'being on the Web' effect from that point on has been based on a non-domestic, nakedly-digital setting, where an empty space is dominated by the megapixels on the wall.

Apart from one or two guests in the studio, the participants are usually connected via Skype and Google+, while the other contributions are selected live from Twitter and Facebook by the 'digital producer'. The tone of the conversation is generally relaxed, linguistically controlled and politically correct; far from the informality of most American talk shows but still accessible to a large public. As another producer argues, "...the show has the space to be serious. We're covering important topics and taking the time to air them out".[13] A fair amount of time is indeed dedicated to discussing topics not immediately appealing to an international public, such as the destiny of the Tamil minority in Sri-Lanka, the Oromos in Ethiopia or freedom of speech in Vietnam. These discussions often seem to be even longer, compared to the average of those on television talk shows, if we consider that most of them are mediated by Skype or Google+, with low-fi, amateur aesthetics[14] paradoxically contributing to reinforce the authenticity of the testimonies from 'the community'. This definition, as it is used by the programme's presenters, corresponds to a temporary combination of users of different social media platforms, overlapping around topics of discussion which are eventually generating some written and visual outputs contributing to the television show.

In sense The Stream can be seen as a television show going "beyond the setting of traditional broadcasting", incorporating other media languages as well as other modes of interaction.[15] This new configuration is not too far from what Felix Guattari envisioned in the 1990s as a 'post-media' assemblage: "The digitisation of the television image will soon reach the point where the television screen is at the same time that of the computer and the telematic receiver. Practices that are separated today will find their articulation".[16] More generally, to borrow the terms of Sreberny and Mohammadi, the combination of satellite-TV and social media formalised by The Stream sees the interplay of 'small' versus 'big' media, or, in the words of Lazzarato, the 'centrifugal', pluralistic force of the Net and the 'centripetal', normalising effect of the mass-media, coming together in a digital 'convergence culture'.[17] In this strategic partnership, if the Internet is considered to be the place for the expression of (political and cultural) difference, satellite TV can select, amplify and deliver some of these contents to a much larger audience, by adding the authoritative, established framework characterising 'the old media'.

According to the programme's creators, in The Stream social media enable a series of functions rather than providing a form: "Al Jazeera's New Media team has always been looking for ways in which to use technology and social media to

[13] Hernandez, "In The Stream".

[14] Robrecht Vanderbeeken, "Web Video and the Screen as Mediator and Generator of Reality", in Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles, eds., *Video Vortex Reader II* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2010).

[15] William Boddy, "'Is It TV Yet?' The Dislocated Screens of Television in a Mobile Digital Culture", in James Bennett and Niki Strange, eds., *Television as Digital Culture* (Durham: Duke U. P., 2011).

[16] Félix Guattari, "Towards a Post-Media Era", in Clemens Apprich et al., eds., *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology* (Lüneburg, PML Books, 2013), 27.

[17] Annabelle Sreberny and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Maurizio Lazzarato, *La politica dell'evento* (Cosenza: Rubbettino, 2004); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York U. P., 2006).

[18] Hernandez, "In The Stream".

[19] Al Jazeera Press Office 2009.

[20] Since the beginnings of 2014, with the new website layout, these numbers are unfortunately not visible anymore.

[21] Viola Sarnelli, "Tunisia, Egypt and the Voices of the Revolution in Al Jazeera English", *Journal of Arab&Muslim Media Research*, 6.2-3 (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013).

[22] "Bahrain: The social media battle continues", accessed 11 August 2011. http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201108112054-0 012881, accessed January 2014; "Libya's uncertaintime future", accessed 23 August 2011; http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/libyas-uncertain-future, accessed 22 February 2012; "Saudi journalist faces trial over tweets", http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/saudi-journalist-faces-trial-over-tweets-0022055, accessed March 2013.

[23] "Are foreign investors colonising Africa?" (25 October 2011), http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/are-foreign-investors-colonising-africa-0021551, accessed February 2012; "The Ogoni vs oil giant Shell", 8 March 2012, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/ogoni-vs-oil-giant-shell-0022089, accessed February 2013.

[24] In January 2014, searching for the term "diaspora" in the official web page of The Stream, yielded 19 episodes related to the term. Among them, I selected 8 in which the "diaspora" assumed a central role in the debate, and to these I added another two episodes not resulting from this search but still thematically connected with it.

achieve a function rather than a form. It isn't about the polish but about the product and why you are using this medium and what the real power of these tools are with regards to producing, sharing, or highlighting important information, quickly".[18]

Among the different strategies used to give significance to this temporary aggregate of users defined by the presenters as the 'online community', there is that of making its members visible through short videos inserted in some of the episodes. In these brief presentations, the contributors say their name, their job and location, and end with the same sign-off: "... and I am in The Stream". Such presentations appeared in seven out of twenty episodes, and among them there was a documentary film-maker based in India; a blogger from Yemen; a human rights activist from Bahrain; a society administrator from the US; a university professor from the US; a journalist from Nigeria; a Chinese researcher based in the US. While previous data showed that most of the website's users are from North America and Europe,[19] these 'voices' (four men, three women) seem to confirm a wide geographical variety characterising the programme's 'online community'.

One of the functionalities adopted from social media is the use of quantities such as numbers of likes, shares, and tweets. These numbers shown on every episode's web page provide a measure of the success of the single topics discussed and an indication of how important its online community is to The Stream.[20] One could expect for instance that episodes related to the politics and society of Arabic countries had more success than others, given the success of the network in 2011 as a 'bridge channel' between the MENA region and an international Anglophone public.[21] While this is the case for the episode on the protests in Bahrain (617 likes on Facebook, 405 tweets on Twitter), the same cannot be said for similar subjects, such as the future of post-Gaddafi Libya (376 likes, 72 tweets) or freedom of speech in Saudi Arabia (210 likes, 264 tweets).[22] Among the episodes considered, the most successful online was the one on land neo-colonialism in Africa (1000 likes, 594 tweets), confirming the rooting of the channel in the sub-Saharan region; but the same success is not shared by the story of the legal battle of the Ogoni people in Nigeria against Shell (92 *likes*, 212 *tweets*), despite it fitting ideally into The Stream narrative – 'giving voice' through the social media to the battle of a 'subaltern' community against a powerful Western corporation.[23]

3. The 'Diaspora' in the Media Stream of Al Jazeera English

In the study I carried out on The Stream, ten out of twenty episodes were selected because of their connection with the 'diaspora'.[24] This choice was motivated by noticing how this category was presented as one of the keywords capable of mobilising a large part of the 'community' of viewers the channels is addressing, both online and through the satellite feed. This community is 'imagined' as in the classical definition of Benedict Anderson; but contrarily to his definition does not

share the belonging to the same national dimension.[25] While the bonds connecting the viewers of a channel like Al Jazeera English are generally quite loose and unstable, compared to the ones uniting the audiences of national channels, the 'diasporic' category allows the television show to capitalise on a wide trans-national network of already well-established cultural, political and historical bonds. These 'diasporic networks', capable of supporting and redirecting flows of people, money, information from each of the motherlands to the new places of residence, are mobilised across the episodes through the use of the social media platforms. In this way, 'diasporic communities' become a part of the discussions promoted by The Stream, and a substantial component of the 'online community' following and fuelling the show. In fact, in the episodes selected, a familiar, informal use of the term 'diaspora' can be noticed, raising the question of how it is used to indicate or represent a particularly meaningful category for its audience. One result seems to be the normalisation of a traditionally 'problematic' category (questioning the unity of the host country, of the motherland, of the national public), now legitimised by its mediated appearance and interaction with other social actors.

As Rogers Brubaker argued, the term 'diaspora' in recent years experienced a dispersion of meanings and uses, not only in academic writing.[26] What is included, then, in the contemporary meaning of the 'diaspora', as it appears in the media and in many collective self-representations?[27] Some emigrant groups, defined by Benedict Anderson as 'long-distance nationalists', have been presented as diasporas because of their involvement in homeland politics; in other cases, the term also includes labour migrants maintaining emotional and social ties with their homeland.[28] Even linguistic or religious communities have been conceptualised as 'diaspora', as Tölölyan noticed long ago.[29] The risk, according to Brubaker, would be that "If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so".[30] Still, this lack of specificity of the term, or better its 'dispersion', also allowed for its use as a key category to conceptualise our 'postnational world', as Appadurai wrote, in which "diaspora is the order of things and settled ways of life are increasingly hard to find".[31]

In order to discriminate in this large semantic field, Brubaker suggests three core elements as constitutive of the diaspora. The first is dispersion in space; the second, orientation to a 'homeland'; and the third, 'boundary-maintenance', "involving the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society".[32] This last definition, however, depends on how identity itself is intended: as determined by cultural traditions, or as an unpredictable, on-going process. In the second case, following the well-known formulation by Stuart Hall, "The diaspora experience ... is defined, not by essence or purity...; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.[33] This powerful vision of the diasporic subject, combined with a poststructuralist and postcolonial perspective, as Syrine Hout argued, "complicate

[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983).

[26] Rogers Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' diaspora", *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 28.1 (January 2005), 1.

[27] Ibid., 4.

[28] Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, South-East Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998); Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[29] Khachig Tölölyan, "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface", *Diaspora* , 1.1 (Spring 1991), 4.

[30] Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' diaspora", 3.

[31] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 171-172.

[32] Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' diaspora", 5-6.

[33] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235.

[34] Syrine Hout, "The Last Migration", in Layla Maleh, ed., *Arab Voices in Diaspora* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 147.

[35] Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy, "Thinking Experiences: Transnational Media and Migrant's Minds", in James Curran and David Morley, eds., *Media and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 86-87.

[36] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[37] Robins and Aksoy, "Thinking Experiences", 87-89.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

notions of nation, location, and identity in an age of globalization".[34]

Also in the field of communication, from the 1990s onwards, the category of 'diasporic media' has been used to indicate how new media technologies help to transcend the distances separating diasporic communities from their 'communities of origin'.[35] In their study on Turkish immigrants in London, Kevin Robins and Aku Aksoy argued for the need to go beyond concerns over 'bonding' and 'belonging', considering individuals more than their 'imagined communities'.[36] By focusing on "how they think, rather than how they belong", they criticise the idea of the 'diasporic community' itself and the media consumption related to this collective, elusive subject.[37] In their study, transposing the television 'use and gratification' theories from a national to a transnational context, a disconnection emerges between the personal and social dimension of TV viewing. If, as they wrote, "Television makes a difference because it is in its nature – in the nature of television as a medium – to bring things closer to its viewers", for the transnational audience this closeness is frustrated by the impossibility to interact with the world on the screen, creating a double displacement, from the homeland and from the place of residence.[38]

Seen in this light, a channel like AJE goes beyond the idea of 'diasporic media' because of its hybrid, multicultural identity, not connected to any specific community of viewers. For channels like AJE and similar others, created to address an international public united only by the knowledge of a 'lingua franca', in a perpetual 'hetero-lingual address', the displacement is a starting point, and the challenge is instead to promote new cross-category bonds.[39] Among the variety of online and offline communities constituting the channel's audience (with contrasting education and economic level in different areas of the world), the 'diasporic communities' seem to hold a key position, because they reflect some of the main features of the channel: interculturalism, hybridity, transnationalism. Far from the material conditions related to the diasporic movements in the past and in the present, that of The Stream's participants appears more as part of a post-diasporic scenario, where diasporas and migrations are treated as a given fact, as a part of our modernity. More than connecting 'diasporas' and 'homelands', The Stream promotes exchanges between individuals that are part of different, overlapping communities (online, geographic, ethnic, religious, etc.). In this sense, to borrow Robins and Aksoy's expression, the 'thinking' of the public – as a temporary aggregate of individuals, and more specifically of social media users – has already been integrated in the structure of The Stream.

4. The 'diaspora' episodes and voices

In the episodes considered, participants identified as belonging to a variety of 'diasporas' mainly took part in three different ways: to denounce and criticise the policies of the homeland; to contribute to discussions related to the homeland,

along with other local and international observers; or to promote 'social change' and better living conditions in the homeland, and to develop a more transcultural society.

As television guests, the 'diaspora members' are usually defined by the collective dimension of the ('imagined' or concrete) communities they belong to. As such, they take part in the formation of alternative 'diasporic public spheres' and they are invited to perform their role as a 'counterpublic', often within the framework of the host-country political discourse, as in the case of The Stream.[40] At the same time, in the show an emphasis is also placed on the individual dimension of the 'diaspora' guests, and to their personal contribution. As Myria Georgiou and Roger Silverstone suggested, "Diasporic identities are not others to the mainstream. They are not *contra*. These identities are essentially plural".[41] As such, their belonging to one community is non-exclusive, as it is their potential participation in multiple public spheres in their daily lives, speaking for the 'community' but also for themselves. What follows is a short account of the role played in The Stream by multiple diaspora communities, corresponding to multiple homelands, given the transnational reach of AJE. This richness of cultural and geographical variety is often emphasised by the channel as one of its trademark, exhibited as a significant difference with other established English news channels, which are culturally and geographically centred in the West.

4.1 *Diaspora as a counter-voice against the 'homeland' policies*

An essential role is played by 'the diaspora' within The Stream's 'community' when discussing critical issues related to the homeland, e.g. the lack of civil or political rights for a minority or the whole population. The discussion usually takes place between someone still living in the country (typically a state with an authoritarian government) and some part of its 'diaspora', mostly political refugees living in the West, denouncing these abuses in front of an international audience.

Such condemnations can also point to violence committed long ago that is still affecting the present. In "Sochi's indigenous on the sideline", the episode is centred on the 'NoSochi2014' campaign, launched to raise awareness about the mass killing and expulsion of the Circassians by Russian forces in the Nineteenth century, on the same land that in February 2014 hosted the Winter Olympics.[42] To debate the question "Should history be revisited or is it time to move on?", four guests are invited: the co-founder of the campaign; a Circassian journalist of Voice of America; an American professor of Russian Studies; the director of the Russian Institute for Democracy and Cooperation. In a heated debate where 'Circassian' and Russian perspectives are opposing each other, it is particularly the young and attractive American-Circassian Tamara Barsik, the co-founder of 'NoSochi2014', who is vocal in claiming justice for her people:

[40]Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, cit. in Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics", *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88.4 (November 2002).

[41] Myria Georgiou and Roger Silverstone, "Diasporas and Contra-flows beyond Nation-centrism", in Daya K Thussu, ed., *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow* (London: Routledge, 2007), 44.

[42] 'The Stream' 5 February 2014, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201402050032-0023446, accessed February 2014.

> Nine out of ten Circassians live in diaspora today ... In 1864, our life changed forever.... This idea of genocide has never stopped ... because when I get on the phone with my family in Syria and they're telling me about ten Circassian villages being decimated, about two members of my family being killed, I think myself 'seems like the genocide is still happening'. And I'll tell you why: because of Russian policy towards Syria and Russian policy towards our people living in diaspora: we have no rights to return to our nation, especially in times of crisis... Our question to the world is, what's going to happen to the Circassian people...?

In other cases, like in the "Crackdown on Vietnam's voices" episode, the debate specifically investigates the possible role of the Vietnamese diaspora in international disputes over civil rights.[43] The week before this episode, several activists, bloggers and journalists were sentenced to prison in Vietnam for attempted subversion. To debate freedom of speech in Vietnam the former director of the Vietnamese Service at Radio Free Asia, a station founded by the USA, and the chairman of Viet Tan, a US-based Vietnamese political organisation, are invited. However, the main points are actually made in the video-messages from adolescents of Vietnamese origin. One boy brings up a personal topic: his father, an activist and American citizen, is currently detained in Vietnam. "His trial is coming up in one week, and my question is, if he has to receive a very long sentence, for something that is considered a natural right in most countries, how will the international community, and especially the American government react?". Another open question comes from Don and Vivien, Australia: "What can youth outside Vietnam do to support their cause?". This interplay between the inside and the outside of the motherland seems to be one of the key features of the 'diasporic' episodes in The Stream, where the television show offers an artificial common ground mediating between the two levels.

Also in the episode "Oromos seek justice in Ethiopia", Oromian diasporic subjects denounce the political oppression and economic marginalisation of the Oromos in the homeland, in the hope that the Ethiopian government will finally change its policies towards the larger minority in the country.[44] While the main guests are an Oromo rights advocate from Ethiopia, a representative of the Oromo Liberation Front based in the US, and an Oromo journalist based in New York, the definition of the role and mission of the diaspora careful again about using this term in a too generic way comes again from a girl's video: "Living in a country like Australia as a young Oromo I think it's important that we continue to rise awareness about the plight that our people face, I mean we have the opportunity ... to identify as Oromo without being persecuted, and that really challenges an entire system".

Similarly, in the episode "Does Eritrea have a dictator?", the debate is centered on the oppressive government led by Isaias Afewerki. From Asmara, the voice of Rahel Weldehab, from the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, fills the studio.[45] She patiently rejects all the accusations of Mussie Zenai, from the

[43] 'The Stream' 16 January 2013, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201301160009-0022483, accessed January 2014.

[44] 'The Stream' 25 June 2013, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201306250132-0022854, accessed January 2014. These government policies were documented also in a United Nation Report on Ethiopia (2009), http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ET/A_HRC_WG6_6_ETH_3_E.pdf, accessed February 2014.

[45] 'The Stream' 3 August 2011, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201108032051-0011925, accessed January 2014.

association of Eritrean refugees in Indiana, US, about the conditions of the youth in Eritrea – forced into endless military service and unable to find other jobs, resulting in desperate mass migrations through the desert. Although the tone is highly confrontational, the 'diaspora' spokesperson is recognised by a government representative: as Zenai insists in the beginning, "I would like to thank the government regime for being willing, for the first time in history, to talk with the opposition".

4.2 *'Diasporas' members as participants in the debate on the 'homeland'*

In contrast to the cases above, the issues in the following episodes are not new for most of the international audience of the channel, which can thus contribute more actively.[46] These concern unsolved complex political matters, lacking a unique counterpart opposing 'the diaspora': refugees or immigrants discuss with journalists, scholars and residents in other countries about the origin and scale of the problem, its various aspects and possible solutions.

The episode "Turkey confronts Kurdish separatists", comes after a discourse held by Turkish prime minister Erdogan in the home region of the Kurdish minority, urging unity against 'terrorism'.[47] The episode becomes an occasion to discuss the long-denied political rights of the Kurds as well as the Turkish policies towards 'terrorism' in general, particularly confronting Erdogan's attitude in foreign politics. As one of the tweets from the public claims, "Erdogan recognises rights for Palestinians – pity he doesn't respect rights of Kurds in his own country". While the real 'opponent' for the Kurdish diaspora would be the Turkish government, in this case, to represent somehow the Turkish nation, there is a balanced, sensible Turkish intellectual. Thus, the discussion takes the shape of an open debate about the present and past of Kurdish cultural identity in Turkey. As Kani Xulam, from the American Kurdish Information Network, underlines, "we don't want to be Turks, we want to remain Kurds. We need a policy of tolerance… The struggle is to be equal".

In the episode on the conditions of Palestinian refugees in Arab states ("Discrimination in the diaspora") the focus is also about the lack of civil rights, suffered by the Palestinians not only in their motherland but also in the supposedly friendly neighbour countries.[48] Although many Arab governments refuse citizenship to the Palestinians living in their countries claiming that this would go against their 'right of return', a tweet from the 'community' states: "I hold Jordanian passport but I am a Palestinian…. I didn't lose identity when I gained passport". To testify to the denial of simple rights like travel documents there is the Palestinian blogger Laila ElHaddad, living in the US. "My husband and I often joke that we have the most difficulties to travel as a family in the Middle East … they see Palestinian refugee, Palestinian documents, and they reject your visa". Another tweet asks: "is it fair to say that the plight of Palestinians in Arab countries is the

[46] According to AJE's official figures, the channel reaches more than 260 million households in more than 130 countries. "Facts and Figures", http://www.aljazeera.com/iwantaje/2010321821108 72987.html, accessed January 2014.

[47] 'The Stream' 19 September 2011, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201109191922-0 016796, accessed January 2014.

[48] 'The Stream' 19 April 2012, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201204191929-0 022181, accessed February 2014.

defining failure of pan-Arabism?".

In "Somalia's global diaspora", the episode is specifically dedicated to determining the political and economic weight of the Somalian diaspora on the homeland.[49] After two decades of civil war, drought and famine, an estimated one million Somalis currently live in Europe, the US and the Middle East and, according to a tweet from the 'community', "diaspora remittances were more effective than aid agencies". To discuss the issue there are two Somali women, Sadia Ali Aden, co-founder of the US-based Adar Foundation, and the journalist Idil Osman from the UK. Apart from the homeland, there are also matters concerning the Somalian diasporic community itself: Osman mentions the widespread identity crisis in the Somali diaspora youth, living between two different worlds, pushed by extremist organisations to choose only 'one side'.

> This is probably something that the diaspora committee can take an active lead role in, in terms of generating this ... awareness among the youth that they can be Muslim, and Somali, and Western at the same time; the fact that they are a new culture, a new generation that is coming up, that has sprung about from ... the civil war basically.

4.3 'Diaspora' as a promise of social change

Finally, in some of The Stream episodes, the 'diaspora' members also assumes a central role in discussing new possibilities for 'social change'. As in the discourse of the Somalian journalist, the 'change' mainly concerns the younger diasporic or post-diasporic generations that are expected to reinvent their identities and cultures in new, hybrid, conciliatory ways.[50] If the previous episodes portrayed the 'diasporic guests' in a way closer to what Castells defined as a 'resistance' identity building model, associated to the communal defensive reaction to a condition of minority, in these case is the full realisation of the subject and his/her 'project identity' to be connected to the transformative change potentially affecting the rest of society.[51] This allows not only political issues but also more nuanced questions related to diasporic identity, belonging and culture to be included in the debate.

The historical premise for the episode "Will youth lead the way in Bosnia?"[52] is that twenty years after the Bosnian war, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks in the country are still deeply divided. The participants in the debate are all young representatives of NGOs, three based in Bosnia and one in the U.S.A., trying to answer the key question posed by the host: "Is there a generational difference in how people think about ethnicity?". A video comment from a girl originally from Srebrenica and now resident in the U.S. answers affirmatively: "We must ... root out this divisive behaviour from our future generations, so that we can end the perpetual circle of segregation and hatred".

Many guests also express their faith in technology as a driver of social and economic renovation, as clearly illustrated in "Africa's tech challenge".[53] The

[49] 'The Stream' 24 January 2012, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201201242032-0022000, accessed January 2014.

[50] Mohamed El Nawawy and Shawn Powers, *Mediating Conflict: Al Jazeera English and the Possibility of a Conciliatory Media* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2008).

[51] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Chirchester: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 7-9.

[52] 'The Stream' 3 April 2012, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201204031951-0022151, accessed February 2014.

[53] The Stream 8 November 2012, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201211080137-0022392, accessed January 2014.

episode explores the concrete roots of the hype on tech start-ups in Africa, and its relation with real opportunities. As a tweet notices, "Africans have got the innovations and skills but the capacity to sustain world scale tech projects is still lacking". To discuss this concepts the founder of a communication company in Tanzania and a new media strategist from Nairobi are connected via Skype, but the main guest, sitting in the studio, is Teddy TMS Ruge, an expert in new technologies originally from Uganda and now residing in the US and Canada, who in 2011 awarded the title 'White House Champion of Change'.[54] In the episode he appears as the co-founder of "Project Diaspora": "an online platform for mobilising, engaging and motivating members of Africa Diaspora in matters important to the continent's development".[55] Although it went offline shortly after the episode, the project still remains the best example of how, in The Stream narrative, diaspora – as a social, cultural, symbolic category mediated by the channel – is incorporated in the 'social change' passing through technology.

The 'social change' discourse can also pass through the possibility of using, reclaiming and creatively reinterpreting traditional cultures in the diaspora, as in the episode "When traditions become trends".[56] Here, the discussion starts from the case of the Urban Outfitters brand selling a dress identical to a traditional Ethiopian and Eritrean one, without mentioning its origin. As explained by Lolla Mohammed Nur, the Ethiopian-American girl who started a petition online against the firm, "This dress is something that you wear on significant occasions, it does have a lot of meaning... and so to see it on an Urban Outfitters model, without any culturally appropriate labelling... I just found it to be very disrespectful". A positive example, presented by its founder Mac Bishop, is Nativex.net, where pieces of 'authentic Native American design' are sold, crediting the originators. The point, as the New York based Sikh musician and writer Sonny Singh argues:

> it's not about being cultural nationalistic or something like that.... I am a musician myself, I play music that is a blend of lots of different styles, I'm drawing a lot of music from South Asia but also a lot from other states, but ... when we live in a society that is a capitalist society, where white supremacy pervades all of our institutions and our interactions everyday, sharing becomes a little bit more complicated.

5. Conclusions

This article explored how a transnational media like Al Jazeera English uses the convergence between television and social networks to bring together different geographical areas and topics, particularly through the category of the 'diaspora' guests in a show called The Stream. In the episodes considered, a variety of 'diasporic communities' was represented by several kinds of guests taking part in discussions related to their homelands, either to criticise, contribute along with other voices, or to encourage 'social change' and cultural appropriation.

[54] *Tmsruge.com,* http://tmsruge.com/who-me/, accessed February 2014.

[55] *Tmsruge.com,* http://tmsruge.com/project-diaspora-going-offline/, accessed February 2014.

[56] The Stream 2 April 2013, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201304020053-0022650, accessed January 2014.

In The Stream, as a result of the combination between a television format and some functionalities of the social media, the 'online community', as often referred to by the presenters, converges with the category of the 'diaspora' in creating a space where singular diasporic experiences can be made visible. Trying to counter the hegemony of US and European voices in transnational communications, the show contributes to the creation of a mediated 'diasporic' space – between television and online networks, beyond the space of the nation and the US-Euro dominated world. At the same time, this space also shows its limits and tensions. Looking at these episodes, it can be noticed that almost all the 'diaspora' guests and political refugees appearing in the show are based in the US. This could be partially explained by the fact that the program is recorded in Washington DC, making it easier to have guests living in the US, and that the format of Al Jazeera English favours English speakers. Another reason might be the fact that, despite the geographic variety of the channel's audience, its online following is for a big part located in the US.[57] Still, for a programme emphasising the geographic and cultural variety of topics and 'voices', this homogeneity might be problematic – even more so if we consider that another edition of The Stream aired by Al Jazeera America since 2014 is already totally US-centered. The pervading presence of US foreign policy is openly discussed only on a few occasions, like in the episode on "Parazit – Voice of America or voice of the people?", a programme for the Iranian public written by two Iranian authors, but broadcast and paid for by the US government.[58]

In general, the representation of the 'diaspora' in the show seems to contribute to the normalisation of a supposed 'contra-' category, fully legitimised as one of the multiple social and even political actors taking part in international debate. The price to pay for this role, though, is the pressure deriving from belonging (or opposing) to one nation-state, bringing the debate back into an inter-national framework more than into a cosmopolitan or post-national one. As Georgiou and Silverstone suggested:

> The diasporic condition unravels some of the key characteristics of cosmopolitanism, but it does so from a distinct position which might be *beyond* nation-centrism but not *outside* the national. Diasporas do not exist outside the authority of nation-states. ... The complexity of the diasporic condition is often reflected in communication practices that are diverse, contradictory and unstable.[59]

Which 'diaspora', then, is displayed in The Stream? One made of complex subjectivities resulting from international migrations or temporary re-localisations, following flows of people, goods, cultural models still mainly confronted by Western formats and political frameworks, more than among different extra-Western areas.[60] It could be argued that a channel like AJE operates in what is left by the historical diasporas of the last centuries, and deals with a higher-profile of

[57] Al Jazeera English, "Facts and Figures": "Approximately 50 percent of the Al Jazeera English website traffic comes from the United States and Canada". http://www.aljazeera.com/iwantaje/2010321821108 72987.html, accessed January 2014.

[58] 'The Stream' 17 November 2011, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201111171940-0 021872, accessed March 2012.

[59] Georgiou and Silverstone, "Diasporas and Contra-flows beyond Nation-centrism", 46.

[60] Herbert Schiller, "Not yet the Post-imperialist Era", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication,* 8 (1991).

diasporic, or rather 'post-diasporic', cosmopolitan individuals. Even though 'mass-diasporas' of migrant workers and political refugees are certainly still part of the present, the members of The Stream's diasporas are mostly NGOs members, activists, journalists, writers and designers, taking seriously the task of "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew".[61] If, as Georgiou and Silverstone wrote, "Diasporas are cosmopolitans of a different kind to the high-flying, jet-setting cosmopolitans in control of global capitalism",[62] it is difficult to state to which one of these two categories The Stream community belongs. Perhaps to a third one, at the crossroads between social media marketing, civil rights activism and cultural complexity: a 'diasporic space' within which different conditions of displacement can be combined, to create short-term, multimedia narratives.

[61] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 235.

[62] Myria Georgiou and Roger Silverstone, "Diasporas and Contra-flows beyond Nation-centrism", 45.

Oana Parvan

Beyond the 'Arab Spring'.
New Media, Art and Counter-Information in Post-Revolutionary North Africa

Abstract: The 'Arab Spring' possesses an unexplored discoursive dimension made of stratified stereotypical approaches and assumptions linked to the 'Arab' world and its horizons of political agency. In the aftermath of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, in a period of renewed censorship and instability, multiple actors coming from citizen journalism and activist/artistic backgrounds collaborate in experimenting post-revolutionary counter-power.

The drive to re-appropriate the revolutionary narrative and give continuity to its legacy in the 'transitional'/post-dictatorship period is marked by an all pervading intertwining of art and counter-information, in collectives focusing on media (such as the Egyptian Mosreen), street art (such as the Tunisian Ahl al Kahf), journalism (Inkyfada) or theatre (Corps Citoyen) projects, as well as for the emerging independent video-makers (such as Ridha Tlili). My article intends to interrogate their interaction with the dominant representation of the uprisings.

Keywords: *Arab Spring, Tunisia, Egypt, revolution, resistance, new media*

Introduction

In the context of the waves of dissent that marked the year 2011 at a global level, the so-called 'Arab Spring' and its representations carry a double potentiality.[1] They can present yet another 'revolution of the Other', mediated by an Orientalist reading of the events on behalf of the Western cultural industry or, on the contrary, they can open up an active process of listening to the 'Arab' collective practices of resistance.[2]

The term 'Arab Spring' is commonly used to indicate a series of regional anti-governmental protests which seems to have little in common. The term is thus used to refer to a number of heterogeneous events involving different nations (lumped together on the basis of a vaguely linguistic criterion): Tunisia and Egypt ('successful revolutions'), Libya and Syria ('revolutions' turned into civil wars), as well as Yemen, Bahrein, Jordan and Morocco (the 'revolutions' forgotten by Western and regional media).[3] What is implied is that all countries involved in the so-called Arab Spring share some common features. In order to deconstruct this simplified point of view and suggest an alternative reading, this article will mainly focus on the case of the Tunisian revolution, which inaugurated the series of regional uprisings (after the mass protests started on 18th December 2010) while also taking inspiration from the critical practice and theory promoted by Egyptian thinkers. Political events such as the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings should thus

[1] As this essay goes to press, I find myself to have to account for how, on the 18th of March and the 26th of June 2015, two tragic attacks on European civilians in Tunisia seem to have irreversibly shaken the hope for a peaceful democratic transition of the country, strongly influencing a rising pessimism around the outcomes of the so-called 2011 'Jasmine revolution'. This radicalization somehow seems to me to be the consequence of a dismissal of the revolutionary demands, hence the importance of not flattening the debate on the revolution under the 'threat of terrorism'. Despite the enforcement of the police state, security cannot be expected unless social justice becomes a priority. Meriem Bribri, a Tunisian activist working with the Support Committee for the Martyrs and the Wounded of the Revolution describes the post-revolutionary situation, which, in her opinion, has nurtured the radicalization of many young Tunisians after 2011: "There was no evolution at a socio-economical level and the power has remained highly centralized with the same neoliberal modalities which exclude a national and popular development" (Meriem Bribri, "Tunisia. Nessuna sicurezza senza giustizia sociale", *OsservatorioIraq.it,* 6 July 2015. My translation, http://osservatorioiraq.it/voci-dal-campo/tunisia-nessuna-sicurezza-senza-giustizia-sociale?cookie-not-accepted=1).

[2] From the Western viewpoint the revolution has been enacted by the exemplary other of the post-9/11 era, namely the 'Arab'. From the local, Tunisian viewpoint, the disregarded agent of the revolution is an equally criminalized category, namely the 'underclass' (constituted of the unemployed and underemployed inhabiting the poor cities of Tunisia and the peripheries of its richest urban centres). Tunisian undocumented migrants and 'terrorists' also originate from this category.

[3] Augusto Valeriani, "La Primavera Araba e il web come forma culturale" (2012), http://barbapreta.wordpress.com, accessed 12 September 2013.

be able to influence "the categories through which we view such changes", since "new subjectivities and new singularities demand new frameworks, both of understanding and of solidarity".[4]

Therefore, this article aims to expose the rhetoric of the revolution behind the 'Arab Spring', making visible the hegemonic discourse around it and the way particular spaces of cultural production have countered it. The argument of this article is that specific areas of cultural production (mostly experimental art and counter-information connected to new media) can be considered the starting point for a post-revolutionary counter-power, concerned with both writing its own contemporary history (thus challenging both local and global dominant narratives) while fostering "alternative ways of imagining and organizing our societies".[5] Because of their dissident nature, these spaces have traditionally and are still heavily fighting state censorship and control before and after the revolutionary transformation.

With the outburst of the uprisings and the temporary suspension of censorship, Tunisia and Egypt have both seen an explosive evolution of informal and citizen-based journalism. Yet after the electoral victory of Islam-inspired parties in both countries (after the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolutions), censorship returned under a different form and radical freedom of expression often seemed to be limited by new criteria. This is why art, although often contested by radical Islamic supporters, appeared to be a privileged refuge zone for those wishing to express dissent, but also exercise civic imagination, beyond the threat of religious and state persecution.[6]

New media emerged, thus, as an environment of resistance to a hegemonic discourse, but, most importantly, as the ground where the memory of the revolution and its continuity in current practices was being played out. This research understands new media in a broad sense, referring to cultural practices and products related to IT platforms, interactivity and citizen journalism, but also looking at the interaction between traditional artistic means and new media, such as the merging of theatre and video-art and experimental forms of expression, such as mixed techniques of street art (collage/painting/stencils).

Rather than a tool, then, new media has become a "new public sphere", one saturated with information, around which the main goal of resistant practices becomes that of deconstructing stereotypes and determining an "empathic perception of the presence of the other" while activating "networks of solidarity outside the sphere of the economy and of representative democracy".[7]

The 'Arab Spring' and the New Media

After the emergence of Islamic parties and armed struggle groups the 'Arab Spring' term has been perceived with an increased nostalgia and skepticism, even when referred to the so-called "successful revolutions" in Egypt and Tunisia. Its usage

[4] Anthony Alessandrini, "Foucault, Fanon, Intellectuals, Revolutions", *Jadaliyya*, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17154/foucault-fanon-intellectuals-revolutions, accessed 1 April 2014.

[5] Philip Rizk, Shuruq Harb, "Interview with Philip Rizk", *Tabula Gaza*, 18 June 2013, http://tabulagaza.blogspot.it/2013/06/interview-with-philip-rizk-by-shuruq.html

[6] As in the cases of religious protests against galleries illustrated by Anthony Downey, "For the Common Good? Artistic Practices and Civil Society in Tunisia", in Anthony Downey, ed., *Uncommon Grounds: New Media and Critical Practices in North Africa and the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 53-69.

[7] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, "The Paradox of Media Activism: The Net is not a Tool, It's an Environment", in Downey, *Uncommon Grounds* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 39-46.

(based on Western precedents such as the 'Spring of Peoples' in 1848 or the anti-Sovietic 'Spring of Prague' in 1968) suggested an unexpected 'Arab Awakening' to democracy, opposed to the post-9/11 paradigm largely focused on depicting the so-called 'Arab' peoples as 'naturally' authoritarian.[8]

Often disregarding the history of contestation and the social motivations of the peoples animating the 'Arab Spring', Western writers initially focused on providing a journalistic description of the different mobilizations in the Middle East (perceived as a quasi-homogeneous whole, while privileging, at the same time, the technological aspect as a democratizing facilitator).[9] Scholars with a certain proximity to the Middle East and North African context provided deeper readings of the events, in terms of their political specificity and relevance for the relationship between Western and non-Western political imaginaries.[10]

Alongside these orientations, a series of thinkers from Arab countries have engaged in critically questioning the dominant narrative of the 'Arab Spring' (such as the already mentioned Rabab El-Mahdi, and Philip Rizk,), by situating themselves in a post-Orientalist and post-Leftist theoretical ground.[11] These positions were also supported by independent political and artistic collectives such as Mosireen in Egypt and *Ahl Al Kahf* in Tunisia.[12] This article will mainly focus on the Tunisian post-revolutionary setting, except for a reflection on the Egyptian Mosireen collective, because of the high relevance of their practical and theoretical interventions. These accounts pose a strong critique of the narrative construction of the 'Arab Spring' simplified as a youth-led, social media centered revolution against local dictatorships, eventually dubbed as 'failed' after the electoral victory of Islam-inspired parties (Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) and the outburst of military violence (in Egypt) and terroristic attacks, later on in Tunisia.[13]

According to this critique the focus on the youth and social media "lumps together the contradictory and often conflictual interests of 'yuppies' with those of the unemployed, who live under the poverty line" and who have constituted the mis-represented radical actors of the uprisings.[14] Despite the toppling down of the dictator and the electoral victory of the Islamists, the Tunisian revolution is neither perceived as ended nor failed, rather as an "ongoing process" or a "revolutionary becoming", aimed at confronting social inequality and state violence, beyond the mere ousting of a dictator.[15]

I will privilege these interpretations of the events because they are produced by what (employing a Gramscian term) could be called a new form of "organic intellectuals" or artists, engaged in keeping their ears on the ground, listening, "spending time with the people that make up this revolution", but mostly "questioning their ideological packages for the sake of reality on the ground", as opposed to the more disengaged views of Western observers.[16]

These critiques express a different narrative of the Tunisian revolution, one enacted by the large category of unemployed or underemployed citizens, whose

[8] Rabab El Mahdi, "Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising", *Jadaliyya*, 11 April 2011, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising, accessed 11 April 2011.

[9] Lin Noueihed, Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring* (Yale: Yale U. P., 2012), Fawaz Gerges, ed., *The New Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2014); Robert Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere* (London: Verso, 2012).

[10] Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (California: University of California Press, 2013); Samir Amin, *The People's Spring: The Future of the Arab Revolutions* (Oxford: Fahamu Press, 2012).

[11] Others have engaged in collective critical works on the 'Arab Spring' such as Bassam Haddad, Rosie Bsheer and Ziad Abu-Rish, eds., *The Dawn of the Arab Spring: End of an Old Order?* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

[12] The work of the Mosireen collective is available on their official website mosireen.org/.
The *Ahl Al Kahf* collective have made some of their work public on their official Facebook profile, available here:
https://www.facebook.com/pages/أهل-الكهف-ahl-alkahf/115175015229496?sk=info&tab=page_info.

[13] *The Economist,* "The Arab Spring. Has It failed?", accessed 13 July 2013.

[14] Rabab El Mahdi, "Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising", *Jadaliyya*, 11 April 2011.; Philip Rizk, "2011 Is Not 1968: An Open Letter from Egypt", *Roar Magazine,* 25 January 2014.

[15] Leila Dahkli, "A Betrayed Revolution? On the Tunisian Uprising and the Democratic Transition", *Jadaliyya,* 5 March 2013.
See also the *Ahl Al Kahf* collective in a 2013 interview available at http://www.workandwords.net/uploads/files/Ahl_Al-Khaf_interview_FRANCAIS.pdf.

[16] Rizk and Harb, "Interview with Philip Rizk".

[17] Eric Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin between Riots and Social Movement: Meaning and Significance of a Protest Movement in Ben Ali's Tunisia", Institut de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman, 2010. Working paper. https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00557826.

desperation had already exploded in the previous uprising of the Gafsa mining basin in 2008.[17] The push for change came from the poor cities and the urban peripheries of Tunisia, articulated by an apolitical, non-ideological category, yet demanding a radical redistribution of the country's wealth with its cry for "bread, freedom and dignity!". My analysis will seek to sketch the modalities employed by new media and art in delineating critical cultural practices able to enhance the radical content of the revolution and promote it in the unstable post-revolutionary society, despite ongoing forms of censorship.

The new media landscape taken into consideration was publicly born on January 14th 2011, when the Tunisian president Al-Zibidine Ben Ali announced the demise of his policy of Internet censorship (colloquially labeled "Erreur 404"), a few hours before fleeing the country for Saudi Arabia. Before this date, mediactivism in Tunisia was massively hindered and repressed. For this reason the few who engaged in it before the revolution generally shared a certain political awareness and a significant will to take risks (as in the case of the citizen journalism practiced by platforms such as Nawaat or bloggers such as Lina Ben Mhenni).[18]

[18] Nawaat is an independent journalism project started in 2004, available at http://nawaat.org/portail/. Lina Ben Mhenni is the most famous Tunisian blogger. Her blog is available at http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.co.uk.

It can be said that just like the revolution represented a rebirth of mass politics after (at least) 23 years of active efforts of depoliticization by the state, in the same way citizen journalism represented the rebirth of information after decades of debilitating censorship. The first concern of Tunisians who now had the chance to bypass the media controlled by the regime after the fall of censorship was to employ their social media profiles and blogs to expose the brutality of state oppression, thus producing an initial focus on police brutality, torture, repression of protestors and state corruption.

My argument is that new media is one of the environments that certain media and art techno-collectives partially inhabited when developing their resistance to the dominant narratives on the Tunisian revolution. At the same time they have, in this way, produced and disseminated "imaginations for resistance", thus "playing a part in the contestation over the narrative of a global battle over how we want to live our lives".[19]

[19] Rizk and Harb, "Interview with Philip Rizk".

The activity of these collectives marks the possibility of post-revolutionary counter-power in as much as they provide an independent alternative to both the local state discourse (which institutionalizes the memory of the revolution and its struggles) as well as the dominant global one (which dismisses the revolution as failed). In doing so, they focus on specific concerns and feelings which animate the Tunisian society and are often disregarded by hegemonic discourses. Especially after the fear of terrorism has monopolized the debate (as has happened in the summer of 2015), considering approaches which provide a critical understanding of the revolution while also fostering resistant cultural practices is more relevant than ever.

The following brief examples have been chosen because they each reveal ignored aspects of how the revolution has been lived and perceived by the

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Tunisians. At the same time they show through their practices how media and art can contribute to intensify the struggle against oppression: be it by countering dominant narratives or unequal and repressive states (whether pre- or post-revolutionary).

Furthermore, the new media environment (for what concerns both information and art) is also relevant in terms of gendered participation, since it blurs the boundaries of the public space (both media- and politics-wise) that many Tunisian girls and women feel excluded from. What is produced, in this way, is a new space of debate, fueled by numerous women bloggers, activists, actresses, artists, and journalists. When considering the girls' and women's production of new media connected discourses, however, we also have to consider a few elements. Firstly, that the usage of Internet communication technologies (ICT) which goes beyond the maintenance of social media profiles – involving more complex skills such as journalistic writing, acting, editing – is still limited to middle-class categories, which have had the chance to attain education. This doesn't mean that girls and women of the lower social classes have not participated in the revolution of 2011 and the ongoing democratic transition. In fact, "for decades [women] have been active members in trade unions, political opposition parties and more informal networks and organizations that were all instrumental in the recent political developments".[20]

Therefore, new media connected information and art just integrate the modalities girls and women had employed so far in order to bring about social change: from direct action and support groups for the unemployed, the martyrs and the dispersed migrants to new articulations of feminist sensibilities through art and media related activism.

Philosophers and Ants: "To create is to resist"

In 2011, not too far away from the Republic Square in the Tunisian capital, several boys and girls start vivaciously decorating an old wall in bright white and red stencils, producing mysterious iconographic portraits, short cryptic quotes and an apparent invasion of ants coming out of a hole. The recent revolution apparently suspended censorship and authoritarian control, nevertheless this creative appropriation of a public wall appears highly audacious. A policeman stops and interrogates the artists, afraid they might be drawing something subversive. Just "philosophers and ants", they answer.

The young men and women are members of the *Tunisian Ahl al Kahf* ('the underground people') artistic-political collective. The 'philosophers' depicted above the stream of ants are the controversial Moroccan novelist, Mohamed Choukri, Antonio Negri, Edward Said and Gilles Deleuze. Their quotes in Arabic symbolically mark the strivings of the young artists in the immediate aftermath of the revolution: "I'm writing in order to be banned" (Choukri), "Power can always be broken somewhere" (Negri), "Intellectuals have to witness the badness of using

[20] Nadje Al-Ali, "Gendering the Arab Spring", *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communications,* 5, 2012, 26-31.

history" (Said), but mostly "To create is to resist" (Deleuze).

My understanding is that the *plethora* of cultural practices contesting the hegemonic Arab Spring discourse as well as the institutionalisation of the revolution on behalf of the local governments is a little bit like *Ahl al Kahf'*s invasion of ants: underground, parasitic and continuous. Whereas the hole in the wall, which allows the ants to storm in the picture, could be read as a metaphor of the initial opening up of the public sphere, most visibly through citizen journalism, a temporary fault in the monolithic censorship system of both Tunisia and Egypt, in the process of currently re-articulating itself. In this sense, the following examples will be exploring the expressive possibilities granted by the relative liberation of the public sphere and the ways Tunisian and Egyptian techno-collectives have fostered new expressive sensibilities.

An impressive and critical employment of new media in Tunisia is Inkyfada, a digital journalism platform written in French launched in June 2014 and animated by young journalists, developers and graphic designers (some previously involved in larger independent information projects such as Nawaat).[21] A project of the Tunisian NGO Alkhatt, Inkyfada is very concerned with reflecting on the newly acquired freedom of speech and with establishing creative connections between traditional investigative journalism and new media. Such a project reveals the thematic area of interest of a rising generation of journalists in the post-revolutionary period. Among the first published articles, many deal with different aspects connected to the phenomenon of terrorism (terrorist attacks chronology and maps, anti-terrorist law, media and terrorism), while others attempt to frame the post-revolutionary burden of waste collection, against the backdrop of a State apparently failing to maintain order. Inspired by the ideals of human rights and civil engagement, Inkyfada's journalists express a widespread sense of concern, connected to the post-revolutionary identity of the state and the potentiality of its efficient organization. Most importantly, it represents an important opportunity of experimentation since its production is mostly focused on deep investigations carried on by teams of different professionals working on both the contents as well as the best digital form of dissemination.

Such highly participative and relatively small intellectual environments – where women journalists and designers represent at least half of any team – allow for the articulation of an independent critical debate on themes which have never been discussed in previously state-censored media and are more difficult to develop on larger news-focused platforms. Inkyfada thus becomes a safe space where to critically approach delicate issues such as sexuality, post-revolutionary torture, smuggling and attempting to make sense of the phenomenon of Tunisian terrorism, free of any pressure from local or global agencies. Such platforms allow for a successful challenge to hegemonic discourses on the Tunisian society, while disseminating a highly analytical and critical thought (even beyond the Tunisian borders thanks to the employment of the French language).

[21] Http://inkyfada.com/, accessed 1 October 2014. Some of its creators were previously involved in the Nawaat journalism project http://nawaat.org/portail/.

In this sense, contemporary theatre appears to reach even a larger audience, thanks to the employment of performance-centered practices and the integration of videos. Like in the case of the show produced by the *Corps Citoyen* ('citizen body') collective, *Mouvma – Us, who are still 25 years old,* released on 4th July 2014.[22] What the 'three comedians and citizens' (Aymen Mejri, Rabii Brahim and Soussen Babba) enact on the stage is "not a story but pieces of collective experiences of a revolt which has created a new relationship with life, a different understanding of the world, but, most of all, the need of a continuous interrogation".[23] The anonymous videos, which punctuate the images and affects of the Tunisian revolutionary experience, like a privileged locus of memory inscription, are omnipresent on the stage, projected on the actors' bodies and repeatedly enacted by their gestures. The theatre show exposes the unseen affective landscape produced by the revolutionary experience: the euphoria and explosive energy pervading the synchronized bodies in front of the forces of order, electrified by the fear of death and the necessity to shout their rage, but also the solitary dimension of anxiety and depression, connected to frustrated revolutionary expectations.

Corps Citoyen plays on the border between collective struggle, which they enact thanks to the videos projected on their bodies, and solitary suffering – the same one that sparked the initial uprisings and is now kept under control by a feeling of 'happiness' imposed from above. Beyond the eulogic presentation of the revolutionary youth, they engage with the latent, hidden aspects of the revolutionary experience, namely depression and suicide, nurtured by a post-revolutionary frustration and poverty. What the young artists suggest is that after the revolution a certain pressure was practiced by the new establishment on acting 'happy' and putting an end to all revolutionary claims or any form of complaint, which they expected to disappear with the toppling down of the dictatorship.

The young actress and actors of *Corps Citoyen*, directed by the Italian Anna Serlenga, use their bodies to narrate the revolutionary drama with its passage from fear to liberation and the eventual articulations of post-revolutionary depression and anxiety. On the theatre scene, the performers of *Corps Citoyen* connect the pre-revolutionary self-immolations of the young unemployed with the post-revolutionary ones of the same people, after having experienced the climax of mass mobilization. The actors employ very intense affective tools in order to expose a controversial though largely shared conviction. Namely that even after what is perceived as the end of the revolution, the social solidarity must propel an ongoing struggle for a dignified life for everyone, otherwise the spectre of suicide will return.

Another collective, the Egyptian Mosireen, is also engaged in deconstructing the mainstream representation of the revolution and fostering solidarity for a further transformation. *Mosireen* (literally 'we are determined') is an independent video collective that believes in the visual medium as a site of action rather than a representational tool. Many of its young highly skilled members have political or

[22] Their Facebook profile is availabe at http://www.facebook.com/corpscitoyen?fref=nf.

[23] From the synopsis, available at http://www.tekiano.com/2014/07/02/lmouvma-nous-qui-avons-25-ansr-1er-projet-theatral-du-collectif-lcorps-citoyenr-07-juillet/, accessed 1 October 2014.

[24] Their activities and works are available at http://mosireen.org/, accessed 1 October 2014.

[25] Omar Kholeif, "Re-examining the Social Impulse: Politics, Media and Art after the Arab Uprisings", in Downey, ed., *Uncommon Grounds*, 222.

[26] Philip and Harb, "Interview with Philip Rizk".

[27] The Maspero massacre regards an episode occurred in October 2011, when the army crushed a demonstration carried on by Egyptian Christian Copts, aimed at denouncing the indifference of media to Copts' persecution by protesting in front of Cairo's Maspero television building. The intervention of the army caused 28 casualties and injured more than 200 Egyptians. Sarah Carr, "A firsthand account: Marching from Shubra to deaths at Maspero", *Almasyr Alyoum*, 9 October 2011.

[28] Philip and Harb, "Interview with Philip Rizk".

[29] Ibid.

[30] From the *Ahl al Kahf: founder Manifesto* (11 November 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/-أهلالكهف-ahl-alkahf/, accessed 1 October 2014. The name alludes to the 'People of the Cave' myth contained in all monotheist sacred texts, about young people escaping from a dictatorial regime and falling asleep in a cave for hundreds of years. With this name the artists are suggesting – among other things – that they possess an autonomous temporality.

artistic backgrounds.[24] Since October 2011 the collective has produced more than 250 short documentaries and has built a vast open archive of material on the Egyptian revolution. Many of its members, like Ahmed Hosni and Philip Rizk, have majorly contributed to challenge the 'narrative of dominance' surrounding the Arab Spring, not only with their audio-visual practices, but also with theoretical reflections. Mosireen is undoubtedly one of the most admirable subversive tools of the Middle East, also because it is situated outside of the market, state, and major NGOs circuits (while managing to self-fund itself). As Omar Kholeif has pointed out, Mosireen suggests "a representational revolution fostering a revolutionary culture in content and form".[25]

Mosireen only employs new media platforms as one of the spaces of dissemination, but most of its work takes place on the streets of Egypt. As the members of the collective explain, much of their work is "a form of counter-propaganda, whereby [they] intend to subvert the rhetoric of the authorities".[26] Video-making thus supports the exposure of brutal state violence (as in the case of the video of the Maspero massacre) and seeks to provoke people's rage around issues such as sexual state torture and denounce the dramatic consequences of Western-driven privatizations (with films such as *Out/In the Streets*), giving voice to those Egyptian citizens that the authorities have never listened to.[27] These shorter or longer materials, many of which expose video-makers to high risks, are then screened in reachable sites such as squares, parks, streets, fields (thanks to initiatives such as 'Tahrir Cinema' organized by the collective) and virally spread through any means from hard drives to CDs, USB keys or Bluetooth. The screenings (which occasionally involve performances) become an excuse for animated popular debates and collective discussions, in the attempt to overcome the "hermetic filmic practices". Mosireen challenges the ownership of images (by screening censored ones, producing and spreading its own) as well as that of skills – thanks to itinerant free workshops which teach activists across Egypt basic film-making and how "to disseminate videos for revolutionary purposes".[28] Most importantly, Mosireen are driven by the "responsibility to disseminate images of protest in an attempt to enhance the dissemination of imaginations for resistance" while fostering "alternative ways of imagining and organizing our societies".[29]

A similar dissident collective (although bearing many different features) has been active in post-revolutionary Tunis. With its members coming from both artistic and trade unions environments, the *Ahl al Kahf* collective (literally 'the people of the cavern'), self-proclaimed itself as a "multitude of terrorist networks that fulfill and spread aesthetic terrorism".[30] They are a group of heterogeneous artists, mostly practicing street art with subversive messages on the walls of the poor areas of Tunis and other cities. Intellectually inspired by thinkers such as Edward Said, Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri, their artistic methods are influenced by the Situationists, the Dadaists and very strongly by the practices of Ernest Pignon.

These artists have been intensely involved in the revolutionary practice; in fact, they have been born as a group during the first occupation of the Kasbah, a massive protest gathering the unemployed youth of the poor Tunisian areas. They have occasionally carried on their 'artistic terrorism', with additional means, such as video and radio. Their ephemeral works on the Tunisian walls promote art as a means of resistance to the dominant thought and often criticize the detachment of an institutionalized image of the revolution from the contingency of the ongoing struggles of the poor Tunisians.

Faithful to the strong background of Tunisian social movements, *Ahl al Kahf* have intensely rejected the punctual definition of the '14th of January revolution' concentrated on the day of Ben Ali's resignation, as opposed to a still unfolding duration, whose demands are inspired by the massive struggles of the past (for social justice, work, equality between regions and against state violence).

The independent film-maker Ridha Tlili aka Ayan Ken (from Sidi Bouzid) has broadly depicted the street art movement in Tunis with his documentary *Revolution under 5'* (2011) – initially just a collection of short videos on the street actions of the *Ahl al Kahf* artists right after the 14th of January.[31] In his works around the revolution, rather than about it (especially *Jiha, Revolution under 5'* and the latest *Controlling and Punishment)*, Tlili avoids the related 'prostitution' and the 'mythical spectacle' connected to it, enacting a conscious gesture of resistance to hegemonic representations: both Western Orientalist representation (the 'failed revolution') and the Tunisian institutionalizing one (according to which the revolution has been achieved and should be considered completed).[32]

The feeling of frustration for this forcedly ended revolution is broadly explored in *Revolution under 5'*. Mohammed Ltaif, one of the founders of the collective, thus states that:

> We had a revolutionary horizon, but the day we wanted to raise the stakes, imperialism or the empire or the so-called international community told us, directly or indirectly, "be with the Tunisian army, with Tunisian media, with the stupid intellectuals, with the artists and the Tunisian people who believe that the revolution ended with the departure of Ben Ali.[33]

Thinking beyond the 'departure of Ben Ali' in political terms means accounting for the movement, which put an end to Ben Ali's repressive rule, while supporting the ongoing struggles for social justice. In this sense, one of the main debates depicted by *Revolution under 5'* is the question of independence and autonomy of thought, connected to economic independence and freedom from censorship. What the artists denounce, shortly after the climax of the Tunisian revolution, is that censorship works in a different, but equally pervasive way. This is why anonymous actions during the night and the public space of the street offer perfect conditions for their art, since, as they explain, "all the other spaces are private,

[31] His project and trailers are available at http://www.ayanken.net, accessed 1 October 2014.

[32] "Films 'Jiha' et 'Thawra ghir draj' de Ridha Tlili: Deux ondes autour d'une révolution", *Nawaat,* 1 February 2012, http://nawaat.org/portail/2012/02/01, accessed 10 October 2014.

[33] Ridha Tlili, *Revolution under 5'* (Sidi Bouzid: Ayen Ken, 2011).

[34] Ibid.

controlled and have standards".[34]

Their critique inevitably invests the question of appropriation and ownership of images of resistance, as a dispositif of control connected to their proliferation and circulation in digital networks. According to the artists, the past regimes would sell images of resistance (like the Berbers opposing the Tunisian central state) to colonial France, whereas current images are directly sold to French associations by the journalists themselves, making it hard for Tunisians to have access to and interpret those images which have recorded the transformation of their society.[35]

[35] This is what the interviews with the artists reveal in Tlili's documentary, *Revolution under 5*.

[36] All female participants to the artistic actions have been anonymised by the director, suggesting an ongoing fear or retaliation and the vulnerability of gendered art and activism in Tunisia.

[37] Tlili, *Revolution under 5*.

Furthermore, Tlili engages in an interesting dialogue with one of the female artists of the group, who denounces the limited visibility of women in the Western and Tunisian accounts of the revolution.[36] When interviewed, the young woman sees street art as a reaction to the exclusion from other spheres (mostly media representation and politics) and declares "we have more freedom on the street where we can use everything that surrounds us".[37]

Animated by the duty of remembering the martyrs of the previous struggles (especially those occurred in the Gafsa mining basin in 2008) the artists position themselves in accordance with a very lucid class awareness.[38] *Ahl Al Kahf* points out that they have "contributed to the revolution by telling the people that revolution didn't complete its tasks".[39] Those who will complete the revolution, they claim, won't be the artists or the "elites who come out on special occasions to take pictures next to tanks", but, once again "the poor of Sidi Bouzid, Regueb, Thala, and Kasserine".[40]

[38] The protests that animated the Gafsa mining basin (in Central-Southern Tunisia) between January and June 2008 are also called the 'Gafsa Intifada' and considered the general rehearsal for the 2011 Tunisian revolution. They were a generalized reaction of the large under- and unemployed majority of the region, against the nepotistic hiring process of the Gafsa Phosphate Company, the only company employing the local labour force. The protest involved extensive riots and clashed with the police, including significant blocks of the production and commercial trasportation in three neighboring cities. The contestation lasted for six months, during which the cities were subjected to a siege by the military forces. Many protesters were arrested and detained. Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin between Riots and Social Movement".

[39] Tlili, *Revolution under 5*.

[40] Ibid.

Notes for a Future Guerrilla against Representation

In the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution, whose narrative features have been pervasively distorted and weaponized by both Western actors and Tunisian government, counter-representation is a form of resistance indicating a new phase of struggle, one played on the epistemic ground and influencing future collective perception but also the recollection of past and present courageous practices of resistance.

In an environment marked by increasing censorship and political instability, the democratic outburst of new media and citizen journalism is struggling to maintain its initial freedom of expression, especially when choosing to question the explicit prescription of the 'official story'. For this reason, and aware of the difficulties Tunisian radical struggles are now encountering, I chose to indicate this collection of critical practices and products as a departure point for a post-revolutionary counter-power, since it seems that the intertwining of art and counter-information offers both the necessary freedom of expressions not only to deconstruct, but also to imagine an alternative to dictatorship, terrorism and neoliberalism. What is meant by counter-power is a series of practices of knowledge production articulated in spaces of relative expressive freedom and independence (such as

media-activism, street art, new media connected information and art), which can disseminate critical thought and provide a participatory approach towards contemporary instances of resistance (whether from the past or ongoing). These critical cultural practices have a double operativity: on the one hand, they question and challenge hegemonic global and local discourse on the revolutionary events, while on the other hand they imagine and invent a new series of critical practices, both artistic and political. It must be pointed out that these collective experiments regard the period between the fall of censorship (14th January 2011) and the progressive narrowing down of civil rights under the pressure of the threat of terrorism (radicalized in 2015). The more repressive the state will become in its war on terrorism, the more these expressive dissident spaces will be limited. From the point of view of their critical content, all these examples strongly question the dominant narratives, on multiple levels, claiming the revolution to be an *ongoing processus*, initiated with the 2008 rebellion in Southern Tunisia and evolved due to a social sufferance that hasn't yet been eased. The agent of the revolution is the underclass inhabiting the urban slums and the rural areas, and, despite their invisibility, women have always sustained the resistance and are still doing it. Unlike the techno-optimistic interpretations of the revolution, privileging the role of social media, they could be considered nothing more than an additional environment where the resistance has unfolded, rather than its agent.

On the other hand, the productive structure of all these cultural resistance practices mostly seems to derive from the inaugural moment of opening up of the public sphere (spring 2011), when censorship systems fell. Their creative production is almost always intended in a collective and participative form, both as a political choice and self-defence strategy against possible persecution. For the same reason, in some cases artists chose to remain anonymous in order to protect their freedom of expression.[41] These cultural artifacts mostly obey a fragmentary aesthetics, as opposed to a unitary narrative, and sometimes make up their own open source archives (like in the case of the Egyptian Mosireen collective).

Furthermore, the interventions of the collectives and artists merge theory with practice, always irreversibly altering the matter and subjects they are engaging with, be it the memory of the revolutionary events or the struggles of the disenfranchised in Tunisia and Egypt.

Finally, a central feature of the examined phenomena is that they have sparked out of the urgency to address certain aspects of the post-revolutionary period, the urgent need to remember, question or reflect. Therefore, they perform an autonomous space of expression, free from the impositions of the market, state politics, or interests of the major Western NGOs. For this reason, many of the examined initiatives rely partially or entirely on voluntary work and self-funding.

It appears as though, despite the resistance to the dominative narratives around them, these revolutions are always destined to fail (as Deleuze once said) thus resulting in a post-revolutionary blues currently characterizing Tunisia and Egypt.[42]

[41] Like in the case of the Tunisian cartoonist -Z- of the *Tunisie Debat* blog (www.debatunisie.com/), or the female street artists interviewed by Ridha Tlili.

[42] Gilles Deleuze, "G comme Gauche", in *L'abecedario di Gilles Deleuze* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2005).

Nevertheless, the revolutionary experience also carries a transformative potential that these technocollectives have creatively built upon. No matter how depressive the failure feels like, as Berardi and Wu Ming 4 recently observed (regarding the French revolution):

> Taking part to the revolutionary movement means understanding that your life is not written in the plans of power, but that it can be you writing it.
> ...
> Once you have acquired this awareness no one can take it away from you, no matter how the revolutionary event ends up. Having made the revolution means having made history as an actor not an extra, means having written one's own script. And this will stay with you forever as it will stay with whoever has lived such an event.[43]

[43] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, "La storia come follia e come rappresentazione", reviewing Wu Ming's last book *L'armata dei sonnambuli,* http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/?p=19045, accessed 10 October 2014. A comment of Wu Ming 4 to Berardi's review is available at http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/?p=19045, accessed 10 October 2014 (my translation).

Giuseppe De Riso

Gaming Gender.
Virtual Embodiment as a Synaesthetic Experience

Abstract: Cultural and Post-Colonial Studies have long identified ocularcentrism, or the privilege of vision in culture and thought, as one of the prime causes behind the tendency to manipulate and categorize matter, bodies and meanings. This paper examines the power of computer-generated images to produce a kind of digital interaction which upsets gendered visual and listening conventions, such as those traditionally experienced in cinema. The article will take into consideration Valve's *Portal* (2007), a first person videogame which proposes a 'topological' way of seeing relying on the synaesthetic working of the human sensorium. Images do not simply represent objects and places, but allow for countless configurations of space. The visual effort to confront with images of pure potential brings about an affective intensification of sensory faculties, especially of the senses of touch and hearing. As a consequence, images are endowed with tactile qualities which make possible the absorption and propagation of sound stimuli. In the game, the 'haptic' quality of images works together with acousmatic resonances of female voice in order to recreate a hybrid embodied condition which dissolves the male-female binarism and, in so doing, challenges gendered cultural assumptions and established spectatorial positions.

Keywords: *body, performance, affect, female voice, digital interaction, ocularcentrism*

> If we could rediscover within the exercise of
> seeing and speaking some of the living references that assign
> them [their] destiny in a language, perhaps they would teach us
> how to form our new instruments, and first of all to understand
> our research, our interrogation, themselves.
> (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*)

A new visual paradigm

The focus of this article is *Portal*, a videogame published in 2007 by Valve Corporation, which I suggest provides a digital audio-visual experience capable of disrupting the convention of representation of gendered identities as identified by feminist film scholars such as Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, and Barbara Creed.[1] These critical theorists have particularly focused on the fetishistic role assigned to women's bodies in Western cinema. By referring to coeval developments in psychoanalysis and post-colonial studies, such thinkers have shown how the female body has been visually deployed in an economy of male desire where a certain concept of 'womanhood' could emerge and be exported as a cultural universal.[2]

[1] I list here some of the fundamental texts by these authors which have helped define the theoretical field of inquiry referred in the article: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, 6 (1975); Kaja Silverman, "Dis-embodying the Female Voice", in Patricia Erens, ed., *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1990 [1984]), and *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1984), and *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1987); Barbara Creed, "Feminist Film Theory: Reading the Text", in Annette Blonkski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg, eds., *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia* (Richmond: Greenhouse Publications, 1987), and *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2005).

[2] Bill Ashcroft, "Intersecting Marginalities: Post-Colonialism and Feminism", *Kunapipi*, 11.2 (1989), 23-43.

[3] See Roy Ascott, "Behaviourist Art and the Cybernetic Vision", in Randall Packer and Ken Jordan, eds., *Multi Media: From Wagner to Virtual Reality* (New York and London: Norton & Company, 2001) 104-120; Friedrich V. Borries, et al., eds., *Space Time Play. Computer Games, Architecture, and Urbanism: The Next Level* (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag AG, 2007); Marcos Novak, "Eversion: Brushing Against Avatars, Aliens and Angels", in *AD Hypersurface* II, 69 (1997), and "Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace", in Packer and Jordan, eds., *Multi Media: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*.

[4] For a discussion on the cultural processes of bodily inscription see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Reoutledge, 1993); Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), and *Writing Machines* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2002).

[5] See, above all, Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1993); Abigail Bray and Claire Colebrook, "The Haunted Flesh: Corporeal Feminism and the Politics of (Dis)Embodiment", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24.1 (1998), 35–67; bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke U. P., 2003), 9; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[6] See, for example, Lisa Nakamura on race and digitalization in *Race, Ethnicity, and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

Videogames have also been described as embodying a patriarchal visual unconscious while also embracing the dream of incorporeal transcendence from the physical body.[3] Crucial to the present reflection will be the notion, largely based on 'affect theory', that the game manages its visual experience not through the supposed disembodiment of the player but, on the contrary, by heavily investing in the synaesthetic flow of multi-sensory perceptions afforded by the player's embodied condition. The essay asks, on the one hand, how this synaesthetic flow challenges the model of visual pleasure emerging out of the study of cinema and, on the other, whether an anomalous videogame such as *Portal* can be said to challenge the dominant regime of gendered visual power within the domain of digital games.

The critical debate around gendered regimes of visual power is crucially concerned with the representation of the human body. The latter has been described by authors identified with cultural and post-colonial studies as a kind of text bearing the marks of power, a battleground for the formation of subjectivities as mediated by language and representation and enacted through performativity.[4] As such, the body has also proved to be a fecund site for cultural criticism aiming to expose the complicity of representation with patriarchal structures of power which typically rely on essentialist claims about gender, race and class.[5]

The study of the representation of gender in videogames has mostly continued this scholarly tradition of critique, while also hailing 'disembodiment' as one of the supposedly distinctive features of computer interaction. Disembodiment thus allowed digital media to insert the body into the metamorphic matrix of interconnected networks and virtual worlds. Roaming in the emancipating vagueness and nebulous un-specificity of the electronic domain, cultural meanings would be erased from the flesh, and subjects effectively freed from the normative constraints of scopic regimes, under which bodies are made to bear all the weight and traces of culturally charged prejudices, stereotypes, as well as all related forms of domination or repression. At the same time, others have shared their fears that such a process of 'liberation' may also lead to disastrous consequences.[6] Having the materiality of the body disappear from the field of epistemological enquiry could, in fact, also make cultural categories so unstable, changeable and protean as to put the very notion of culture into a crisis, thus foreclosing agency.

And yet at the same time, the persistence of the topos of disembodiment in digital cultures, and specifically in video and computer gaming, has somehow also produced a shift away from a primary concern with representation and signification towards a focus on affect. As Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig De Peuter have put it:

> [T]he experience of play cannot be comprehended in terms of the "manifest content (narrative, symbolic, emotional or otherwise)" of a game, but that it has

dimensions of affect – the "feel" or intensity of a game which is synesthetic, involving auditory, kinetic and tactile dimensions.[7]

At the turn of the 21st century, the 'turn to affect' invested literary theory, cultural studies, media studies, but also science and architecture. As Lisa Blackman has recently argued, this approach emphasises how the ability of the human body to 'make sense' of the world cannot be ascribed to meaning or signification alone.[8] Bodily affects, on the contrary, are widely regarded as pre-subjective, pre-conscious or non-intentional forces often referring to the autonomous functioning of neural activity.[9] In looking at a videogame such as *Portal,* which presents us with an anomalous representation of gender embodied through a voice rather than through a visual representation, affect appears as an effective means to discuss embodiment and gender in the domain of digital media.

The affective turn is generally traced back to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's reading of American psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins' interrogation on the primary character of emotions in the mid 1990s. Tomkins had questioned whether emotions mainly operated on a physiological basis or depended on the workings of cognition.[10] The deployment of Tomkins' work was meant to counter the tendency of cultural theorists, to take into account differences among cultures and cultural categories by distancing their critical efforts as far as possible from biology.[11] For many, anti-biologism represented the most secure bulwark against the risk of essentialism. This anti-biologism was rejected by Sedgwick and Frank as well as by influential theorists of affect such as Patricia T. Clough, Vinciane Despret, and especially Brian Massumi.[12] The anti-biologist prejudice fundamentally ruled out the body and flattened its sensory activities, often reproducing a discursive determinism which paradoxically ended up reinforcing those mechanisms of cultural construction or 'etching' they tried to unveil or criticize.

This article draws on Brian Massumi's theory of affect based on his reading of Gilles Deleuze, who was in his turn inspired by the work of Baruch Spinoza.[13] In this approach, affects' ability to expand and alter the drive system[14] causes them to be seen as an intangible, yet vital, component connecting body and psyche, biology and culture. Affect thus becomes a necessary means to get to what precedes (which by no means equals priority or superiority) cognition, the domain of emotions as innate processes of the brain built directly into its neuronal networks and their relation to the brain and the autonomic nervous system. Such a view excludes any simplistic, clear-cut materialistic dichotomy "between mind and matter".[15] As Vivian Sobchack suggested, embodiment "necessarily entails both the body 'and' consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*. Thus we matter and we mean through processes and logics of sense-making that owe as much to our carnal existence as they do to our conscious thought".[16] Cognition and affect will not be regarded here as totally separate systems. On the contrary, affects,

[7] Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Videogames*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[8] Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2012).

[9] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke U. P., 2002).

[10] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham and London: Duke U. P., 1995).

[11] Marianne Liljeström and Susanna Paasonen, eds., *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

[12] Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham and London: Duke U. P., 2007); Vinciane Despret, *Our Emotional Makeup: Ethnopsychology and Selfhood*, trans. by Marjolijn de Jager (New York: Other Press, 2004).

[13] See Brian Massumi, *A Shock to Thought: Expression After Deleuze and Guattari* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), and the already cited *Parables for the Virtual*.

[14] The cluster of indicators produced by bodily needs such as sex, hunger, pleasure, preservation from suffering. See Carroll E. Izard, *The Psychology of Emotions* (New York: Plenum Press, 1991).

[15] See Ruth Leys, "Turn to Affect: A Critique", *Critical Inquiry*, 37.3 (Spring 2011), 434-472.

[16] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 4.

emotions and sense will be always considered in the way they combine or are imbricated with a series of culturally-charged fantasies, anxieties and fears which, in turn, interfere with our perceived needs, wishes and convictions. As Sobchack's phenomenological investigations demonstrate,[17] even though our bodily "technologies of perception" are a necessary mediation for the constitution of social and historical assemblages, such formations produce cultural and psychological resonances which contribute to qualify the sensory activity that set them up in the first place. In Sobchack's words:

> ... direct experience is not so much direct as it is *transparent*: that is, although phenomenology begins its descriptions with an experience as it seems directly given in what is called the 'natural attitude', it then proceeds to 'unpack' and make explicit the objective and subjective aspects and conditions that structure and qualify that experience as the kind of meaningful experience it is.[18]

Dealing with affects, from this perspective, means taking into account those immaterial aspects and non-representational forces involved in cultural communication, thus fostering a new collaboration between the humanities and natural sciences which may prove especially suited to tackle the 'new' ontologies of subject formation emerging with the advent of cybernetics, digital virtual realities, and social networks assemblages. Indeed, the notion of affect is seen by some as particularly apt to describe the way we are 'touched' by a videogame. James Ash, for example, has recently noted that the affective capacity of the players' body is widely exploited and considered during the process of game design and testing:

> ... videogame designers actively manipulate spatiotemporal aspects of the game environment in an attempt to produce positively affective encounters for users (by which I mean encounters which increase the body's capacity to act and produce associated positive senses of intensity).[19]

Deleuze and Massumi thus unhinge the sense of vision from its privileged position in Western culture, in order to foreground the synaesthetic working of the human sensorium.[20] By synaesthesia we refer to the simultaneous working of all the human senses, even when only one is directly stimulated. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's affective ontology, Brian Massumi argues that synaesthesia is, in fact, the only and proper mode through which vision operates. To see something also means to synchronically perceive what is invisibly connected to it. In Massumi's words:

> Form is full of all sorts of things that it actually isn't − and that actually aren't visible. Basically, it's full of potential. When we see an object's shape we are not seeing around to the other side, but what we are seeing, in a real way, is our *capacity* to see the other side. We're seeing, in the form of the object, the *potential* our body holds to walk around, take another look, extend a hand and touch.[21]

[17] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U. P., 1992).

[18] Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 5.

[19] James Ash, "Architectures of Affect: Anticipating and Manipulating the Event in Processes of Videogame Design and Testing", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28.4 (2010), 653-671.

[20] For an in-depth analysis of synaesthesia consult Lynn C. Robertson and Noam Sagiv, eds., *Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2005).

[21] Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 42.

De Riso − *Gaming Gender*

Since human senses "ripple into each other", the act of vision always implies the abstract (that is virtual) perception of all the affects and qualities which sight triggers from the other senses 'as if' they were directly stimulated. To think 'with' or 'through' the sight of an object refers to our ability to potentially relate to it, to range across the nuanced spectrum of its potentials with the support provided by the other senses. Massumi quotes Deleuze to maintain that: "the abstract is lived experience ... you can live nothing but the abstract".[22]

Liquid architectures

The visuality in *Portal* unhinges the sense of sight from its privileged position in order to foreground its synaesthetic dimension.[23] The game begins with the avatar's eyes gradually opening, rendered as gentle light which gradually turns into full radiance. Such images suggest that somebody has just woken up, yet they do not allow to establish exactly whom. Since the world is seen through a first-person perspective, vision is totally identified with the avatar's sight. Only what the avatar is seeing at any one time finds its place on the screen. Vision is embodied: authorial editing, cinematic cuts, or arbitrary jumps do not interfere with what is offered to the player's attention, thus breaking with the cinematic convention. The point of view is human, yet it prevents any stable identification with a particular sex. The absence of an external point of view with respect to the body, as well as of a mirror or any reflective surface, does not provide the subject with an image in which to identify. Moreover, the avatar always stays silent, without uttering a single word with its own voice which, as Roland Barthes noted, contains the 'grain' of the body.[24]

The dullness of the environment, too, conveys a state of neutrality which considerably adds to the uncertainty. All around, transparent screens and plain tiles enclose the avatar's horizon making up walls, floors and ceilings coloured in milky white and pale greys. Such images follow one another in a series which conveys a sense of monotony, dread, and gloom. The emptiness of space, which does not include details that could allow for some kind of cultural identification, exerts an altogether alienating effect. The avatar's body could even belong to a cyborg, since, as the player learns later in the game, mechanical appendices have previously been attached to the avatar's calves in order to facilitate its movements.[25]

At the outset of the game, a voice abruptly greets the player reverberating through the air via a sound-amplifying system. It sounds like a woman's, yet the coldness in its tone betrays an unnatural quality. The voice seems to be detached, aloof, or, to use Simon Reynold's expression with regard to the female voice in electronic music, "curiously unbodied".[26] The connotation of the voice suggests that it could have been synthesized by a computer. Besides the avatar's body, the player is also uncertain as to the kind of nature to assign to the voice. Does it

[22] Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, the quotations are respectively on page 76 and 43.

[23] On the synaesthetic dimension of sight see Martin Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism", *Poetics Today*, 9.2 (1988), 307-326.

[24] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

[25] Please note that these games are usually designed with male players in mind.

[26] Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-Punk 1978-1984* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

belong to a machine or to a woman in flesh and blood? Doubt persists till the end of the game, and even intensifies during its development.

A further effect of disorientation is produced by the fact that the voice does not address the avatar by name. The latter is interpellated through a generic 'you', while every other personal reference is carefully avoided. The only deduction which can legitimately be made at this stage is that the avatar is taking part, voluntarily or not, in a research project led by Aperture Science, a powerful company which the player gradually learns is committed to the production of hi-tech devices. The avatar's task involves the successful overcoming of what the voice defines "test-chambers". These chambers consist of a series of environments to be traversed with the skillful use a particular tool which bears a likeness to a futuristic gun. The weapon has no offensive power, yet it can 'cut' images in order to fill a gap between two distant surfaces within the tridimensional space. The discontinuity or porousness of digital space makes it possible to establish a visual and physical connection between two different places. The weapon must be employed not as an instrument to achieve domination within a given space, as *on* space itself. The scope of the kind of visuality experienced in the game is topological rather than imitative. It prompts the player to find paths, establish new relations between the objects and forces present in a vast network of possible ramifications and intersections.[27] The represented space is non-Euclidean in the sense that is capable of folding in upon itself, of defying the properties of perspective and its emphasis on the solidity and continuity of its visible elements. This sort of space is close to what Deleuze defined as "any-space-whatever", or "a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations ... so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible".[28] Space, in this sense, can be said to be indeterminate inasmuch as it is made up of the potential of the innumerable connections possible in it. Moreover, only the gun allows the player to 'cut' the image in such a way as to bring the body of his avatar within its own sight and discover that it has the likeness of a woman.

The effort to visually relate to a space capable of an endless number of configurations causes the body to intensify its sensory capacities. Indeed, the decentering of sight activates what Mark Hansen, drawing on Bernard Cache, has called a "longitudinal" comprehension of space.[29] Players must see 'through' and 'with' the bare blocks which pave the architectural structures in the environment in search for new connections and hence must take into account the invisible properties which make up the image. The image's distinctive feature here does not point to its truthfulness or mimetic power, but to its ability to synaesthetically empower the faculty of vision through the abstract support of the other senses in order to expand and widen its reach.

Among these, touch and proprioception[30] play a primary role. The visual experience in *Portal* is one dominated by contiguity in the sense that it actively

[27] For a broad overview on the subject, see the special issue on "Topologies of Power", *Theory Culture and Society*, 29.4-5 (July-September, 2012), with an introduction by Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova.

[28] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 109-110.

[29] Mark Hansen, *Bodies in Code* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), 185.

[30] Proprioception refers to the muscular awareness a body has of the objects surrounding it. For an exhaustive description of the body's proprioceptive capabilities please refer to Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual.*

invests the relationship between representation and bodily experience in order to 'foreground' what is hidden to sight or escapes it. Superficially circumscribing or dividing what is shown on the screen simply on the basis of properties suggested by the eye would not be enough. The images shown are neither merely, nor primarily a representation of solid surfaces and contours, an ensemble of objects and borders in a clearly delimited tridimensional space. Images here can be referred to as 'haptic'[31] in that, like skin, they work as flexible and porous surfaces. The space represented by such images is elastic and versatile. It can be compressed or expanded in new configurations and requires the player to proprioceptically perceive the ways in which the image can hold, accommodate or contain those confronting it. Such environment constitutes a post-visual figure, to use an expression employed by Mark Hansen, "a flexible, topological form capable of infinite and seamless modification ... immune to the laws governing the phenomenology of photography, cinema, and video".[32] The impossible architecture hosting the avatar requires a visceral participation, in this sense longitudinal, offering the player images which resist the tendency to 'frame' bodies which is typically associated to pre-digital media. This has significant implications for the ways in which such a game subverts the coded domain of gendered representation with its reliance on the visual representation of the female body in a Euclidean, three-dimensional space.

Portal's images produce what James Ash calls a 'complication' of the way in which the screen is used which occurs "by producing interactive images in which users' bodies become an active component in the framing of what is on or off screen, a capacity that is absent in 'older' technologies of the cinema and the photograph".[33] The primary difference between the images of the game and those generally experienced in cinema thus consists of their ability to articulate new spaces.

Hansen observes that such a condition has an effect similar to what is known as psychasthenia, a disorder in which an organism perceives itself as one and the same with the surrounding space. Lost in the immense domain of possible interconnections in which one feels enveloped or wrapped, the psychasthenic subject is incapable of delimiting boundaries between his or her own body and the world.[34]

Female voice and acousmatic listening

This condition whereby the invisible forces of sense-making and perception are employed to 'register' an inherently porous visual experience is further rendered as a field of trans-subjective interference, through a powerful investment in the experience of voice-hearing. The disorienting visual effect in *Portal* is amplified by a peculiar use of the voice which not only does dissolve the boundary between self and other, but also between human and non-human. The female voice

[31] The use of the term 'haptic' in this article is indebted to Deleuze's books on cinema (which, more recently, served as an inspiration to Laura Mark's *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke U. P., 2000). The French philosopher borrowed it from art historian Alöis Riegl, who employed it in contrast to 'tactile'. Whereas the latter refers to the sensations derived from the actual act of touching, the former points to the abstract perceptions related to the sense of touch.

[32] Hansen, *Bodies in Code*, 230.

[33] James Ash, "Emerging Spatialities of the Screen: Video Games and the Reconfiguration of Spatial Awareness", *Environment and Planning A*, 41.9 (2009), 2105-2124.

[34] Celeste Olalquiaga, in her book *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), associates the disturbance whereby the spacial coordinates of the subject's own body are confused with the surrounding environment to the experience of living in the contemporary technosphere.

commenting the avatar's actions shares the latter's condition in that it does not come from a body which can be directly observed, or which finds plain representation in the images. It seems to come from an unknown elsewhere with respect to the avatar. The source of the sound, the place of origin of discourse, language and meanings, is concealed to sight, in a way 'exceeding' the image.

In *The Voice in the Cinema* (1980), Mary Ann Doane notes that two kinds of voice can be singled out in cinema: the voice-over and the voice-off. The former refers to a voice which narrates or comments the events from a position of detachment, a gap which will be never filled by the protagonists of the movie.[35] It is the case, for example, of a narrator recounting an invented story or past events. The place from which sound impressions are originated is remote, inaccessible to the camera eye, and consequently to the spectator. In challenging the pre-eminence of sight, the transgression of audio-visual synchronization frees the voice from the restrictions and constraints of space, placing it in a privileged position with regard to both the events shown and the spectator. Kaja Silverman observes that this kind of disembodied voice is generally male,[36] as it allows the subject to achieve a position which in psychoanalytic terms is the equivalent of the pure phallus: non-localizable, all-powerful, all-knowing symbolic authority. The invisible speaker is instinctively credited with transcendent faculties of hearing and sight, and seems consequently capable of knowing everything, an impression which justifies his discursive authority in the mind of the spectator.

As to the voice-off, such vocal expression exceeds the frame of the image (since it still belongs to a character not present on screen), but not diegesis. The speaker occupies a place which can be potentially reached, if not by the characters, at least by the eye of the camera. The separation between voice and image is thus only relative or temporary. In classic cinema, Silverman points out, this second kind of voice generally belongs to a woman.[37]

In *Portal*, the voice carries out an original synthesis of the two cinematic uses just described. Even though the voice's place of origin is unknown, it is always perceived as part of the diegesis, participating to the events in progress. The voice comments on them as they happen, and appears to be often surprised by the avatar's actions, which it can directly influence by shifting the tiles and panels around the avatar. The voice seems tied to the gigantic building by a peculiar bond which causes the latter to be perceived as a living organism in which the avatar is confined, a huge body or envelope made up of steel and cables.

After finally getting to the place from which it is produced, the player[38] eventually finds out that it belongs to a computer, whose appearance reminds that of an embryo in a fetal position, placed in a funnel-like cavity or recess. The player realizes that the voice is the software governing the research complex, and thus that its condition is intimately disembodied. Though the voice is internal to the diegesis, it still manages to preserve a status of fundamental irretrievability within the images, in as much as the avatar is not allowed to associate it to a body. *Portal*

[35] Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space", *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 33-50.

[36] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1988), 48.

[37] Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 63.

[38] The player, while sharing some common features with the 'spectator' generally discussed in Cultural Studies, is nonetheless fundamentally different from the latter for ability, through bodily movements, to actively participate to the chronological development of images. See Bernard Perron and Mark J. P. Wolf, eds., *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009); Jay Bolter and Richard D.Grusin, eds., *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001); Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, eds., *theNewMediaReader* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003).

manages thus to merge the two uses of voice generally employed in cinema, voice off and over, because of the way it is perceived as present by the player and yet irreparably absent or unrecoverable.

According to Silverman, when personification is incomplete or unfulfilled, the voice preserves an aura of invulnerability, an almost magical power. For all these reasons, the most appropriate adjective to describe the quality of the voice in *Portal* appears to be 'acousmatic'. The adjective 'acousmatic' comes from Greek, and has been theorized in the field of cinematographic theory by Pierre Schaeffer[39] and Michel Chion[40] to refer to a sound which is heard but which forecloses any visual perception of the cause or source of its production, thus creating "a mystery of the nature of its source".[41] The emphasis of acousmatic listening is therefore not on meaning, but on its potential effects, the evocative power and the personal fascinations which sound in itself is capable of exerting on the one listening. In particular, acousmatic sounds produce an uncanny state of fear or tension because they are instinctively associated to an entity, or event, which the listener perceives as superior to him- or herself, whose characteristics are almost magical or supernatural. The resulting state of alert makes the body prompt to better grasp "new aspect[s] of the object, towards which our attention is deliberately or unconsciously drawn".[42]

As such we could argue that the disembodied, female voice of the operating system in *Portal* evokes the maternal voice and the way it is also intimately tied to antenatal and infantile conditions. Such voice has commonly been characterized as a sonorous 'blanket' covering the fetus or the newborn baby.[43] In the words of French psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato, for example, the maternal voice is "[a] sonorous envelope ... [that] surrounds, sustains, and cherishes the child".[44] Rosolato saw this condition as one infusing a reassuring sense of plenitude and bliss. While accepting this view, Michel Chion thought that the female voice also makes the baby feel entrapped in a state unconsciously associated to the condition of imprisonment and powerlessness, both motor and discursive, experienced inside the darkness of the maternal womb. The maternal voice surrounds and confounds the baby, for whom it seemingly comes from anywhere and nowhere in particular.

Feminist scholars such as Kaja Silverman reckon that such uneasy feelings persist in the adult male subject, sparking a process of compensation by which he unconsciously wishes that the female body take the place of the baby. The way in which the patriarchal unconscious finds actualization in arts and social practices would help to explain the tendency to relegate, in the dominant cultural imaginary, the female subject to a status of verbal and physical constraint. In the case of cinema, for example, women are often found in a situation of verbal or motor limitation, or even confined in a safe place waiting to be recovered at some point in the story. Such recovery or rescue means returning the woman's body in the auditory and visual domain of the male protagonist.

[39] Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objects musicaux: Essai intersisciplines* (Paris: Seuil, 1967).

[40] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1994).

[41] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 72.

[42] Schaeffer, *Traité des objects musicaux*, 94.

[43] For an in-depth analysis on this subject see Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1989).

[44] Guy Rosolato, "La voix. Entre corps et langage", *Revue Francaise de psychanalyse*, 1 (1974), 81.

Allowing a female character to be seen without being heard would subtract her to the deterministic aspirations of male activity. Conversely, to allow a woman to be heard without being seen would be even more dangerous, Silverman maintains, because it would allow her to subvert the regime of gender specularity on which the dominant imaginary relies. The female body would be placed beyond the fields of visual and discursive authority of man, with the added benefit of freeing her voice from the linguistic and expressive obligations that submission requires. That's why, Silverman argues, in mainstream cinema women's voice is generally synchronized to their image. Even when it is heard as voice-off, the separation is only temporary. The female body is always recoverable, eventually coming within male reach, or at least his gaze.

Portal's condition of listening has many points of contact with the one afforded to a fetus. Echoing through mostly empty spaces, the female voice seems to envelop the player from all directions, foreclosing any chance of locating its place of origin. Like the infant or fetus, the player can listen to what the voice tells him, but is unable to answer to what is being said. The female voice is heard in ways that re-awaken and strengthen the ambivalent perceptions, at once positive and negative, felt by the baby in his or her condition of confinement and helplessness which, as has been said, persist in the male subject's unconscious.[45] The quality of the acousmatic voice rouses a vague sense of danger that, in the words of Alfred North Whitehead, affectively and emotionally permeates the surrounding space as a "negative prehension".[46] The philosopher refers to a kind of threat which is learnt negatively, that is not announced or represented, but abstractly and vaguely perceived as a "low-level"[47] background.

Subverting filmic audio-visual conventions, the female voice in *Portal* is not placed outside of the images' frame to eventually reduce the speaker to impotence. The feminine is here given exclusive control. As the player discovers in the sequel to the game, the voice belongs to a woman now deceased. It continues to live after her memory was transferred into a computer. The place of woman, moved into cyberspace, can thus remain inaccessible and untouched by the male, his expectations unfulfilled. Unlike mainstream cinema, in which woman's helpless body undergoes various forms of subjection so that the male protagonist can be gratified with the affirmation of his superiority on her, in *Portal* this expectation is frustrated. The non-localizable voice retains its radical otherness, as well as her superior faculties of seeing and knowing. Framing the immense structure that hosts the avatar as the new cyborg-body gained by the female, her voice rises to the position of symbolic and physical mastery over the child in his early stages of life.

Such a condition of discursive autonomy develops in parallel to another fundamental violation of women's role in dominant visuality: the control of language is also paired with absolute vision. The Aperture Science complex is littered with a large number of cameras that lend their vitreous eyes to the voice governing it, putting in place an efficient surveillance system which nothing can

[45] As stated before, the male subject alone is being considered in this analysis for expedient reasons.

[46] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 41-42.

[47] Brian Massumi, *Politics of Everyday Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 24.

evade. Every action of the player is constantly monitored, every movement is persistently framed and recorded in a structure which reminds one of Foucault's panopticon.[48] There is no way the avatar's body can be concealed from the voice's supposed gaze.

Whereas in conventional forms of visuality the male is often placed in a position of privilege, capable of watching without being watched, in *Portal* he is embodied in what appears to be a voiceless female body and is seen without being able to see one who sounds like a woman. The player is embodied in a female body and experiences the confusing condition (if lived by a man) of being watched, spied upon without possibility to return the gaze. This game appears as an exception to the conventions of both cinema and game design by denying male aspiration to invisibility. The entire scopic regime thus seems to force male identification with an unpleasant subjectivity. The female occupies a position of auditory, visual and discursive autonomy, all the while still being able to operate within the boundaries of diegesis.

However, such a reversal of the stereotyped positions between male and female is only apparent. The game interface undermines this ostensible inversion, too, dissolving the binary hierarchy generally observed in cinema.

The acoustic mirror

If what one sees and hears in the game were structured in advance and directed only to the 'outside' (the audience), as in the traditional cinematic vision, *Portal* could be considered an extravagant experiment based on the inversion of gender stereotypes. What this article aims to highlight is the way in which *Portal* employs a strategy of acousmatic listening that thrives on the intensification of seeing produced by longitudinal comprehension, thus creating, in turn, new conditions for watching. As such, it represents a potential of virtual enviorments and gaming worthy of further exploration.

Firstly, images folding back on themselves allow the player to experience a condition of hybrid observation made possible only by the computer. The spatial links that can be established in *Portal* allow the player to expand the visible horizon on an area of the environment projected backwards, which can end up including even the avatar itself. In this context, what the player looks at is not a reflection of himself on a surface, but his actual body, or rather his digital incarnation moving through the simulated space. This is emblematic of the potential of the electronic gaze, where the player is not a detached observer, but in a relationship of mutual involvement with the image.

In *Portal*, not only does the player never look at his own reflection, but s/he finds her/himself in a radically different condition from Lacan's mirror stage.[49] The player can watch his/her body from above, from below, from one side or from behind, but rarely does he have the chance to face and look at himself exactly

[48] The panopticon, a prison archietcturally designed to allow an onlooker placed in a central tower to see all the inmates of the cells without being visible to them, is used by Foucault as a metaphor of a diffused, incessant, unidentifiable system of power and survellaince. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

[49] The expression refers to the recognition, on the part of the infant, of being one with the mother by looking at their simultaneous reflection in a mirror, as well as to the identification with the image reflected as an 'out there' external to the self. See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977).

head on, in his/her own eyes. This kind of watching is not suitable to be conducted from a position of stillness, it almost always happens on the move, while the body acts. Moreover, even when a player intentionally decides to stop and look at her/himself, s/he does so in ways which are completely different from those of dominant visuality.

Each time the player stops to look at his/her avatar, in fact, he can be said to be caught watching her/himself watching her/himself. In other words, he does not

Fig. 1: The player watches himself while getting ready to pass through the 'eye' (the portal which gives its name to the game) cut through the image (the image is taken from the sequel to *Portal*, ©Valve Corporation).

recognize himself in the body represented in the image as if it were a mirrored, and therefore illusory, reflection of her/himself; instead, he experiences a kind of hybrid point of view at once embodied and transcendent. Based neither on identification nor specularity, vision here works at all times as a reversed *mise en abyme*: it is not the image that contains a part of itself, but the gaze (at once both human and digital) swallowing itself up. If, on the one hand, the player can recognize her/himself in an image on the screen, on the other s/he is also one and the same with the digital 'eye' of the virtual camera. In this regard, on more than one occasion the voice calls into question the humanity of the player, suggesting that s/he is behaving like a cold machine, insensitive to the otherness it represents: "The difference between us is that I can feel pain. You do not even care, do you? Did you hear me? I said you do not care. Are you listening?" Of course, the interface will never allow the player to answer that question.

Once such a contact has been established, one based on the encroachment between body and image, the player in this game can no longer be considered the passive receiver of the visual and aural impressions of the game, but the

constitutive part of an ongoing event. The audio-visual interaction, in *Portal*, takes the player to such a close proximity to the digital apparatus that the avatar is not so much a character as a vehicle for the perceptions experienced in the game. The images generated by the computer feed on the affects brought about by the proximity between player and machine, in such a way that the ambivalence experienced by the former can be effectively turned also against the latter, as well as the asymmetries it apparently conveys. The condition of hybridity in which the player sees and moves in the game reveals, then, startling implications and has in the voice its most formidable instrument.

Guy Rosolato observes that, like all other sounds, the voice consists of elastic longitudinal waves which propagate through space at very high speed.[50] At the very moment it is produced, the voice makes a double motion: one of outward expansion and one of return. This represents the origin of the fundamental ambivalence of the human voice, for which projection and introjection coincide. With a few exceptions, during verbal communication it is not possible to speak without listening to what one is saying, the act of speaking makes one a listener as well. The duplicity of the double acoustic motion makes it difficult to locate the voice, to place it precisely within or without the self, inside or outside one's body. The voice is the ubiquitous sound *par excellence*, it is distinguished by an aural or acoustic undecidability capable of dissolving the boundary between interiority and exteriority. Rosolato makes recourse to the expression 'acoustic mirror' to define this quality of the voice, underlining its potentially destabilizing effects on subjectivity: "The voice ... [has the property] of being at the same time emitted and heard, sent and received, and by the subject himself, as if, in comparison with the look, an acoustic mirror were always in effect".[51]

While the peculiar communicative context in *Portal* appears to place the player in a condition of total auditory, ocular, and discursive subordination with respect to the voice, a more in-depth examination shows how interactions assign the player a role much more complex and vital. In *Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion* (1986) Barbara Johnson describes the "fetal personhood" as a kind of subjectivity who 'dialogues' with a silent interlocutor who is physically distant, yet affectively present (like a fetus or a lover could be).[52] In such a discourse, which is the same experienced in *Portal*, the voice is a condition of possibility projected backward. In other words, the fact that the player is not allowed to answer or reply to what is being said actually makes him an invisible interlocutor within the digital apparatus, functioning as an acoustic mirror which reflects sounds back to their source. Even though the audio-visual conditions of the game seem to present the female voice as the only one speaking, as a side effect they also make her the addressee of what she says. The voice is compelled to listen to its own discourse and, thus, seems the object of her own words. For example, she sometimes poses questions to which, due to the silence of the player, she tries to give an answer herself.

[50] Rosolato, "La voix", 79.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion", *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 28–47.

The liminal visual conditions between player and digital apparatus cause the voice to undergo itself the profound ambivalence that she exerts. The voice seems to come from the outside but also from the player, it appears to inhabit the player's chest as well as to fill the emptiness of the test-chambers in which the former moves. The voice resounds not only as if it stemmed from an elsewhere concealed from sight, but also from the player himself, participating to a process of intersubjective creation in which the feminine is retroactively invested of the fantasies which it reawakens in the player. Through the voice, the player is placed on the threshold between enunciation and listening, playing at once the role of speaker and listener. In other words, the voice makes: "the speaker more or differently possible, because she has admitted, in a sense, the importance of speaking for, as, and to, two: but only under the condition, and illusion, that the two is really (in) one".[53]

Within psychoanalythic theory, interiority has come to mean discursive dependency, while exteriority refers to its contrary, that is power and authority.[54] Cultural theory maintains, however, that both associations are the effect of processes of subjectivation, and not conditions which are genetically associated to masculinity and femininity by nature. In *Portal*, images and sounds expose precisely this situation. By affirming the permeability of the line which separates interiority from exteriority, in *Portal* images and voice are not employed in the creation of places both internal or external within which to establish the dominion of one gendered subjectivity over the other. The digital medium is used to create porous images in which the free passage from one place to another is not only possible, but unavoidable. It is never clear who occupies what position at all possible level of the interaction: visual, auditory, and diegetic. The player is at one time observer and observed, listener and speaker, contemporaneously inside and outside the space of diegesis. The complete reversibility between auditory and visual positions works in a completely different way from the ocularcentric regime and its propension to congeal bodies, practices and spaces.

The bond established between voice and image becomes thus an example of the kind of "non-localizable liasons"[55] which Deleuze and Guattari described in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The proximity between body and image in this game allows the player to experience an embodied condition radically 'in-between' not only among cultural categories, but between human being and machine as well. Indeed, the interactive conditions do not allow to determine who is inside or outside, and the attribution of a gender is made problematic as well. The automatic transferral of signification from image to sound is frustrated, undoing the illusion generally conveyed by cinema that masculine and feminine occupy different positions.

What this kind of gaming experience achieves is a 'broken' identification, whose contrast to gender stereotypes usually seen on film produce absolutely uncanny effects. Both gender categories are deterritorialised, not in consequence of simple reversal of roles, but thanks to the disquieting overlapping, proximity and

[53] Laura Berlant, "Cruel Optimism", in Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke U. P., 2010), 145.

[54] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 54.

[55] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 446.

coexistence of opposite qualities. The result is a mode of audio-visual fruition especially apt to express and question the tensions active in the process of gendered subjectification. The player is offered an experience of audio-visual instability capable of disrupting the predictability of gender binaries and fixed hierarchies in order to create hybrid conditions of watching and listening whose effect is powerfully − and uncommonly, even for virtual environments − disorienting. According to Hansen, "the experience of incommensurability resulting from the failure of identification with the stereotyped ... image sparks a movement beyond habitual feeling networks into an affective confusion".[56] The affective confusion/diffusion opens new lines of flight, creates new opportunities of confrontation with the images, territories of reconfiguration for selfhood rooted in the potential to feel and perceive of the body in its entirety. By suspending the subject in a condition of radical liminality and hibridity, in close contact with what is new or uncanny, *Portal* provides both an impossible space of intersubjective agency and representation, as well as a phenomenologically stimulating interference in the notion of authenticity.

[56] Hansen, *Bodies in Code*, 157-158. Hansen is talking here about British artist Keith Piper's multimedia archival synthesis *Relocating the Remains* (1997).

Federica Caporaso

Alien Evolution(s). Race, Cyber-Sex and Genetic Engineering in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy

Abstract: Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-1989) offers the reader a far-sighted vision of a shocking encounter between humanity and a bio-technologically advanced race of aliens called Oankali. This article analyses how the aliens modify the established modalities of sexual coupling with the aim of mixing with humans and giving birth to a new, queer and multiracial species that is explicitly echoed in Donna Haraway's theorization of the "cyborg". The figure of the cyborg was, for Haraway, strongly intertwined with the history of women of colour, who can be themselves seen as cyborg identities. In this respect, Haraway stresses how cyborg writing is, for women of colour, strongly related to the action of "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (Haraway 1991).

Specifically, Butler's cyborg trilogy focuses on the Oankali, who introduce a completely new modality of mating akin to bacterial and cyber-sex, all by operating from the standpoint of an anti-racist evolutionary science. By drawing on Luciana Parisi's notion of "abstract sex" (2004) and by referring to Gloria Anzaldúa's figure of the "mestiza" (1987), this article examines how Butler's futuristic world gives posthumanism an anti-racist founding myth. In the post-human universe invented by Butler bodies are able to connect to one another and exchange flows of genetic information. Furthermore, mates are united by strong, indissoluble chemical bonds that, ironically, prove to be much stronger than traditional marriages: this article especially focuses on how the new, post-human hybrid race changes the given modalities of sex in order to create a utopian, feminist and antiracist vision of sexual pleasure. This article examines how the Oankali create a new world in which a post-human race can develop and how the Ooloi, special genetic engineers, challenge any idea of racial purity. The article focuses on how the new modalities of sex they introduce mobilizes a feminist, queer desire, also by exploring the interrelation among natural and sexual selection as analysed by Elizabeth Grosz (2004), placing a special attention to the relation existing between technology, science and race.

Keywords: *afro-futurism*, *cyborg*, *race*, *gender*, *pleasure*, *evolution*, *post-human*

Introduction

Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-1989) narrates the formation of an utterly new species resulting from the mixing of humanity with an extraterrestrial race called Oankali, endowed with a superior knowledge of biotechnology and genetic engineering and a natural nomadic drive towards the discovery of different places and species. Specifically, Xenogenesis narrates how, after a nuclear worldwide war that caused the destruction of a great part of the planet Earth, the Oankali rescue humanity from extinction with the aim of creating a hybrid race, half human and half alien that will eventually colonize not only Earth, but also other uncharted places all over the Universe.

By ironically subverting one of the most important founding myths of Western culture, Butler substitutes the biblical figure of Adam with Lilith, an African-American heroine whose name recalls Adam's first wife, eventually repudiated as a consequence of her refusal to unconditionally obey her husband's will and desires.[1] Lilith is the black woman the Oankali choose to be the progenitrix of the new race, a race destined to put into question all the traditional dichotomies of patriarchy. The challenge posed by the Oankali to human understandings of gender is evident since her very first encounter with the aliens:

> Lilith glanced at the humanoid body, wondering how humanlike it really was. "I don't mean any offense" she said, "but are you male or female?". "It is wrong to assume that I must be a sex you're familiar with", it said, "but as it happens, I'm male".... "You should notice", it said, "that what you probably see as hair isn't hair at all. I have no hair. The reality seems to bother humans".... "Oh God", she whispered. And the hair, the whatever-it-was, moved.[2]

After the first meeting between Lilith and Jdahya, a member of the Oankali community, the most taken for granted human distinction between the sexes and genders begins to unfold. The boundaries between a familiar humanity and a surprisingly new extraterrestrial reality melt by mixing together two worlds that will fuse themselves into what C. Peppers calls an "alien humanity":

> As an origin story, this trilogy tells about the genesis of an alien humanity, of a humanity which will survive not, as Donna Haraway puts it, by "recreat(ing) the sacred image of the same", but because Lilith, the African-American heroine of the first novel, will become the progenitrix of the new race of "constructs (children born of Oankali and human parents)".[3]

If "we are all chimeras, theorized hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs",[4] Butler provides the reader of the 20th century with a powerful origin story of posthumanism. In the Xenogenesis trilogy the becoming "other" of mankind is mediated and regulated by the Ooloi, the Oankali's third gender and natural genetic engineers who are able to manipulate DNA as naturally as humans "manipulate pencil and paintbrushes".[5] In the Oankali language, ooloi means "treasured stranger, bridge, life trader, weaver, magnet".[6] Ooloi represent the bridges humanity crosses in the process of becoming a "post-humanity" or, as Braidotti calls it in her work *The Posthuman*, an "electronically linked pan-humanity",[7] by merging with technology and by being modified and re-thought through genetic engineering. The Ooloi, as a matter of fact, modify all the traditional modalities of sexual coupling and re-think reproduction by blurring the limits of the human bodies so as to anticipate the unknown potentialities and marking what Luciana Parisi calls "the emergence of cyber-sex":

[1] Janet Howe Gaines, "Lilith: Seductress, Heroine or Murderer?", *Biblical Archeology* (2012), http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/lilith/, accessed 23 November 2013.

[2] Octavia E. Butler, *Dawn* (London: VGSF, 1988), 12.

[3] Cathy Peppers, "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's Xenogenesis", *Science Fiction Studies* (1995) http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/65/peppers65art.htm, accessed 24 November 2013.

[4] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.

[5] O. Butler, *Dawn*, 175.

[6] Octavia E. Butler, *Imago* (New York: Popular Library, 1990), 6.

[7] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 186-187.

> Sex is no longer a private act practiced between the walls of the bedroom. In particular, human sex no longer seems to involve the set of social and cultural codes that used to characterize sexual identity and reproductive coupling.... Human sex has now entered a cyberspace of information where every-day bodily contacts and sexual encounters have given way to long distance rendezvous. The emergence of cybersex defines a new prosthetic extension of human sex, the prolongation of sexual pleasure outside the limits of the body.[8]

[8] Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire* (London and New York: Continnum, 2004), 3.

In fact not only are the Ooloi metaphorical bridges that link humanity to its next evolutionary stage, but they are also physical bridges able to connect several bodies to one-another so as to let genetic material and pleasure flow through assemblages of up to five bodies that can communicate among themselves. Far from creating an embodied version of a masculinist, disembodied cyberspace, as Katherine N. Hayles remarked, Octavia Butler provides the reader with an utopian view of sexual pleasure which, instead of going along with the patriarchal utopia of separating the mind from the flesh, involves an enhanced form of embodiment characterized by the possibility of experiencing a multiple-body resulting from the connection of more bodies that communicate with each other in a way that Cathy Peppers compares to an "embodied version of the internet".[9]

[9] Peppers, *Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities.*

Octavia Butler's post-apocalyptic world in which bodies can connect to each other like machines and untouchable patriarchal pillars such as traditional motherhood are completely re-thought, gives post-humanity a powerful founding myth, starting from *Dawn* (1987) – the first book of the trilogy which represents the gestation of the new species – passing through *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989) – in which humanity becomes "other" through a never ending metamorphosis that leads to a conception according to which the most evolved state of a living being is represented by its abilities of transformation.

Oankali Architecture: Maternal Spaces and the Invention of a New Species

The dawn of humanity as it is narrated in the Bible has its starting point in the divine breath of God. There is no gestation, no passage, there are no interstitial places in which the shaping of human beings takes place. Octavia Butler's genesis on the contrary starts with a long, liminal phase that takes place in a futuristic living spaceship made of flesh. With the irony and blasphemy that characterize Donna Haraway's cyborg,[10] Butler overturns the biblical story of creation by locating the first moments of life of her post-human species in the recesses of the uncanny space of a maternal body.

[10] Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto,* 149.

The first chapter of *Dawn* (1987)*,* first book of the trilogy, is as a matter of fact called *Womb* and starts when Lilith, the main character of the trilogy, wakes up naked, in foetal position in a dark environment where the normal phenomenological experience of time and space is altered.

> Awakening was hard, as always. The ultimate disappointment. It was a struggle to take in enough air to drive off nightmare sensations of asphyxiation. Lilith Iyapo lay gasping, shaking with force of her effort. Her heart beat too fast, too loud. She curled around it, fetal, helpless.... The room did not only seem dim, it *was* dim. At an earlier Awakening, she had decided that reality was whatever happened, whatever she perceived.[11]

[11] O. Butler, *Dawn*, 3.

Lilith finds herself in a pre-natal state which not only marks her second birth, but reflects also a return to the depths of a primitive state of humanity which finds itself compelled to return to an embryonic phase, to return to the pre-verbal in deep contact with the unconscious, with the dark space in which everything starts again before the establishment of a patriarchal social structure. Butler's "genesis of the other",[12] thus begins from one of the most inaccessible psychic areas that represents an original space that precedes civilization and nullifies the removal of the most instinctive impulses:

[12] Peppers, *Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities*.

> The womb is conceptualized as a place where gender has yet to be crystalised, and auto-eroticism flourishes. In such an intrauterine space bodily memories are separated from a masculine desire and absorbed in a 'thetic moment when the preverbal and the symbolic meet'.[13]

[13] Catherine B. Silver, "Womb Envy: Loss and Grief of the Maternal Body", *Psychoanalytic Review*, 94.3 (2007), http://catherine-b-silver.com/docs/womb_envy.pdf, accessed 18 March 2014.

Unlike the Garden of Eden, the setting of Butler's Xenogenesis is strongly connoted as feminine. The environment in which Lilith awakes and takes her first step towards her transformation into a post-human being is, as an Oankali explains to her after her last awakening, a living spaceship made of pulsating flesh:

> The hole in the wall widened as though it were flesh rippling aside, slowly writhing. She was both fascinated and repelled. "Is it alive?" She asked. "Yes", he said.... "What is it?" She asked. "Flesh. More like mine than like yours. Different from mine too. It's... the ship.[14]

[14] O. Butler, *Dawn*, 30-31.

The architectural spaces within the womb-like spaceship are extremely simple as the boundaries between the 'inside' and the 'outside' are constituted by simple walls that can be erected by the Oankali with a simple touch (and by some humans once they are genetically modified by the aliens) . The walls normally enclose very simple, unfurnished spaces, in which there is nothing more than a couple of platforms that serve as tables and beds, like in the case of the room in which Lilith awakes:

> The walls were light-colored-white or gray, perhaps. The bed was what it had always been: a solid platform that gave slightly to the touch and that seemed to grow from the floor. There was, across the room, a doorway that probably led to a bathroom.... There was another platform perhaps a foot higher than the bed. It could have been used as a table, though there was no chair.[15]

[15] Ibid., 4.

Like a territory which stands in a relation of counterpoint to the living organisms that inhabit it,[16] so the 'houses' of the humans within the Oankali spaceship reflect their embryonic status, their phase of metamorphosis that precedes their becoming another species. Their architecture recalls Elisabeth Grosz's description of the relationship between art, territory and the body.

> Art is of the animal to the extent that art is the consequence, the unexpected, unpredictable effect, of the coupling of a milieu or territory with a body, and the extraction of qualities, whether sonorous, visual or tactile, framed through the constitution of a (history of) form.[17]

For Grosz, architecture is the form of art through which 'nature' becomes a territory and, in particular, the act of raising walls, that is limits, boundaries, frames, means to create a stage, a space in which seduction, and therefore art, creation and re-production, takes place. Thus for Grosz,

> The first artist, for Deleuze, is the architect, the one who distinguishes inside from outside, who draws a boundary.... This boundary is not self-protective but erotico-proprietorial: it defines a stage of performance, an arena of enchantment, a mise-en-scène for seduction that brings together heterogeneous and otherwise unrelated elements.[18]

The living flesh-made walls that the Oankali Architect builds around humans configure themselves as the ideal stage for a totally new performance of gender and race. The structures of patriarchal society are replaced with walls made of flesh that mark a re-birth, a return to the womb in order to be re-shaped and a view of gender and race which privilege the fluidity of pleasure with regards to the rigidity of binarisms and social boundaries. The coming of age of the new species coincides with a fantasy of going back to the maternal womb in order to be re-shaped in a fluid environment in which pleasure, sexual orientation and the emergence of new instincts substitute the most rigid beliefs of patriarchal cultures.

The idea of building spaces, of dividing the inside from the outside, the domestic from the social, the hidden from the visible is intertwined with the mise-en scène of the unconscious. The walls mark a womb-like environment in which a new act of creation is possible, a re-thinking of the self. The Oankali create a stage for post-humanity to create its performances, enabling the construction of a new society in which there are no fixed limits but only blurred boundaries of flesh that can be created, opened and destroyed with a touch. The main actor in this process is the Ooloi, an Oankali sex which is neither male nor female and which escapes any attempt of definition based on gender binarism. If the Oankali are the architects of a post-racial post-humanity, the Ooloi can be defined as the genetic engineers that shape bodies as naturally as human beings breathe. With *Dawn*

[16] See Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2008), 43.

[17] Ibid., 45.

[18] Ibid., 48.

(1987), such new *p*ost-humanity is provided with a stage, with a territory in which it can move its first step. As Grosz puts it, there is no creation without a frame that encloses affectivities, sensations and impulses so as to take them out of chaos.[19] The frame par excellence, the womb and the vagina, are represented by the space-ship made of flesh from which everything will begin again. What emerges from the archaic mother, the mythical frame from which life begins, is to the Ooloi like marble to the sculptor. These futuristic genetic engineers play with genes, flesh and bones to create a new species while giving humans the gift of an unprecedented sexual *jouissance*.

[19] Ibid., 8.

Post-Human Sex: When Pleasure Meets Genetic Engineering

During sexual intercourse, the Ooloi functions as a bridge between those who participate in the sexual act. While having sex in the Oankali way, the male and the female members of the multiple sexual encounter never touch each other, but connect to the Ooloi and get into contact with each other through direct neuronal stimulation:

> I linked into their nervous system and brought them together as though they were touching one another. It was not illusion. They were in contact through me. Then I gave them a bit of illusion. I 'vanished' for them. For a moment, they were together, holding one another. There was no one between them.[20]

[20] Octavia E. Butler, *Imago* (New York: Popular Library, 1990), 122.

The Ooloi functions like a computer to which whoever participates to the sexual intercourse can connect through a simple USB-like device. Pleasure flows freely through bodies regardless of any physical boundary, and the meeting between the body and the alien's superior bio-technology results in the discovery of new modalities of pleasure made possible by the becoming prosthetic of the body, which is a characteristic typical of post-humanity:

> The post-human view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born.... the post human view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the post-human, there are no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.[21]

[21] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3.

The post-human body is therefore an open organism in which flesh merges with technology, in which the body is not closed and 'given' but is open towards an infinity of possibilities. In Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis,* the Ooloi incarnates the modern, uncanny figure of the genetic engineer who has the power of manipulating flesh as if it was made of clay. The Ooloi stores D.N.A. so as to open

the path for cloning and for the overcoming of death as it is conceived in human society and opens the human body to contamination, to an unprecedented exchange of bacteria and genetic material. The body becomes thus a site of passage:

> This is not simply an alien penetration of the pure organism. Her body is caught in the middle of a passage, a genetic trade proliferating inside her body as much as coming from outside.[22]

Lilith's body is a borderland in which contamination among species occurs not only through the ordinary, heterosexual relationship, but through the recombination of D.N.A., bacteria but also social and cultural elements that merge together giving birth to an utterly new humanity. New modalities of sex are created, so that the traditional sexual relations are substituted by modalities akin to what Luciana Parisi calls "abstract sex":

> Expanding upon the feminist politics of desire, abstract sex brings into question the pre-established biological possibilities of a body by highlighting the non-linear dynamics and the unpredictable potential of transformation of matter. ... Abstract sex points to the non-linear coexistence of the biophysical (the cellular level of the body-sex defined by bacteria, viruses, mitochondrial organelles, eukaryotic cells); the biocultural (the anthropomorphic level of the human body-sex defined by psychoanalysis, thermodynamics, evolutionary biology and anatomy in industrial capitalism); and the biodigital (the engineering level of the body-sex defined by the information science and technologies such as in vitro fertilization, mammal and embryo cloning, transgenic manipulation and the human genome in cybernetic capitalism) layers of the virtual body-sex.[23]

By portraying a scenario in which, in order to achieve its goals of pleasure, the human body is able to open itself to contamination and to become a site of passage, Octavia Butler foresaw in her stunningly far-sighted trilogy the emergence of a humanity which is not at all far from our contemporary reality, as Joi Ito argues:

> The web will enter our body in other ways, for instance through synthetic molecular biology: bacteria that go into the body, scan for things and send information.... We're making robots that create biology; biology that creates robots; and hybrids of all of them – and they need to communicate.[24]

When the humans and the Oankali encounter each other, the human bodies are opened to a wide range of possibilities. Thanks to alien genetic engineering the human body becomes able to connect not only with other bodies, but also to the environment in which it lives. The boundaries between the body and the 'outside' are blurred, and the species reproduces itself not only through sexual relationship but also through contamination, through the migration of genetic material from

[22] Luciana Parisi, *From Pleasure to Desire. Involution and Anti-climax in Octavia Butler's Dawn* (Virtual Future, 2012), http://virtualfutures.co.uk/archive/papers/pleasure-to-desire/, accessed 18 March 2014.

[23] Parisi, *Abstract Sex,* 10-12.

[24] Joi Ito, "1989-2039: A Living, Evolving Organism", *Wired UK* (March 2014), 95.

one being to another without necessary involvement of sexual contact. In opposition to the patriarchal dream of disembodiment and the white supremacist notion of 'pure' races, Octavia Butler's Ooloi are able to create an interstitial space in which humans and aliens can "meet" in the form of sensations, memories and information by creating loops of feelings they experience in a deeply embodied and utterly new way.

> Her greatest enjoyment would happen when I brought her together with Tomàs and shared the pleasure of each of them with the other, mingling with it my own pleasure in them both. When I could make an ongoing loop of this, we would drown in one another.[25]

[25] O. Butler, *Imago*, 155.

The Ooloi represent the possibility of an enhanced, fluid sexuality that escapes patriarchal rules by allowing the abandonment of a male model of pleasure in favor of a queer stream with no aims or endings, a ceaselessly flowing liquid matter that, having no shape at all, can expand itself across connected bodies communicating with each other. In contraposition with a male, linear conception of pleasure, this strongly embodied form of sexual coupling brings humanity back to its queer, liquid origin and takes this primordial state as the starting point of a new, cyborgian species whose origins look back at that "woman thing" described by Luce Irigaray:

> Continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conducible, diffusible ... that is unending, potent and impotent owing to its resistance to the countable ... it enjoys and suffers from a greater sensitivity to pressures; that is changes – in volume or in force, for example – according to the degree of heat....[26]

[26] Luce Irigaray, "Fluid Mechanics", in *This Sex Which Is not One* (New York: Cornell U. P., 1985) 111.

Irigaray's view of a queer femininity finally liberated from the constraints of patriarchy, of strict definitions of identity and sexuality, resonates with the new modality of sex emerging from the contact between humans and Oankali. As Luciana Parisi points out:

> Irigaray opposes the Freudian theory of entropic pleasure to multidirectional flows escaping the constancy of reproduction and exposing the turbo-dynamics of a matter-matrix, a feminine sex outside all claims of identity. Fluid dynamics defines a body not by its achieved forms and functions (identity) but its processes of composition and transformation that exhibit the metamorphosis of fluids able to acquire any shape. This metamorphic body-sex is not regulated by the cycle of accumulation and discharge, but displays a ceaseless flow of desire that leaks out of genitality and genealogy.[27]

[27] Parisi, *Abstract Sex*, 33.

In this context, a normalized femininity undergoes a deep change which mobilizes a queer cybernetics:

The matrix ship is not the womb of the woman, but a wondering womb in a body. It delineates a hysterical zone of desire never fully repressed by the biology and culture of the organism. It is therefore evident that Dawn embraces the cybernetic revolution.[28]

Post-Human Evolutionary Science: Multiracialism and Camouflage

Lilith's abduction in the Oankali spaceship and the theft of any kind of control over her own body operated by the aliens is akin to the deportation of African slaves to America, which recalls dystopic Afrofuturist science fiction scenarios in which technology becomes one of the most powerful means used to tame black bodies:

> African-Americans, in a very real sense, are the descendants of alien abductees: they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but not less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their moments: official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and teasers come readily to mind).[29]

When Lilith realises that she has ended up in the hands of an alien race endowed with a very advanced bio-technology, she is overwhelmed by the feeling of loss of control of her body. The condition of African slaves, abducted and deprived of control by the slave-traders, is transposed by Butler in a dystopian post-apocalyptic world in which the destruction of humanity as it was conceived before the "apocalypse" passes through the loss of control that humans exercise over their bodies. When Lilith finds herself completely helpless among the Oankali, her fantasy of surgical – bio-technological manipulations of her body runs wild:

> Was that what she was headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate motherhood? Fertility drugs and forced "donation" of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth....[30]

Nevertheless, the scenario in which Lilith and the Oankali give birth to the new, post-human species is both dystopian and utopian. Human beings are manipulated as if they were animals (often, throughout the trilogy, Lilith compares herself to guinea pigs or domestic animals) and lose every control of their own bodies. Deprived of their dignity they are often punished by their captors who, instead of using the infamous whips that slave-owners employed on their slaves, use hyper-technological ways of annihilating human dignity. The most common Oankali punishment, is to abduct humans who don't behave according to their rules and take them to a space ship in a state of semi-consciousness.

[28] Luciana Parisi, *From Pleasure to Desire: Involution and Anti-climax in Octavia Butler's Dawn* (Virtual Future, 2012), http://virtualfutures.co.uk/archive/papers/pleasure-to-desire/, accessed 18 March 2014.

[29] Mark Drery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate and Tricia Rose", in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham: Duke U. P., 1994), 181.

[30] O. Butler, *Dawn,* 62.

We never thought we were in danger from Pascual because its people knew better than most resisters what happened to anyone who attacked us. Their village, already shrunken by emigration, would be gassed, and the attackers hunted out by scent. They would be found and exiled to the ship. There, if they had killed, they would be kept either unconscious or drugged to pleasure and contentment. They would never be allowed to awaken completely. They would be used as teaching aids, subjects for biological experiments, or reservoirs of Human genetic material.[31]

Although Butler's post-apocalyptic world seems to be nothing but a waking nightmare, the opening of the body to contamination and contact with other species marks the coming of age of a multi-racial species echoing African American mixed genetic heritage such as drawn on by Donna Haraway's cyborg. [32]

Moreover, even though the Oankali have a very paternalistic attitude towards humans (they treat them as if they were children and they take away from them any decisional power over their lives etc.), the attitude of the first constructs is completely different.[33] The members of the hybrid species find themselves struggling with their human and Oankali essences that seem to be in contrast with each other. Very often they find themselves helpless in a world reduced to a huge frontier area in which two different species face each other, leaving them in the middle of the clash. The constructs *are* the frontier, they bear on their bodies the signs of their hybridism and in their mind the struggles that they did not decide to face. Jodahs for instance, the main character of the third and last book of the trilogy, is the first construct Ooloi, and his birth marks a new beginning in the evolution of the post-human species. Being Ooloi means, above all, being natural genetic engineers. Giving birth to a new kind of Ooloi, never experimented before, means to endanger the whole species, as Ooloi are able to make crucial, genetic changes in the environments and in living beings. The fear that Jodahs could be flawed leads the Oankali to isolate and exile him. Feared and marginalized, Jodahs embodies the struggles of a frontier that is both external and internal. Butler's new race of constructs situates itself in the interstitial spaces that insinuate into boundaries such as male and female, human and animal, heterosexual and queer, and represents the blurring of dichotomies in favour of a heterogeneous, stronger species. Evolutionary theory is thus given a strong antiracist inflection by means of its rejection of racial purity and its embrace of mutations and differences. As Gloria Anzaldúa argues, the "mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool";[34] Anzaldúa's 'mestiza, as a matter of fact, embodies the cohabitation of apparently opposite qualities:

I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos:* the coming together of opposite qualities within.[35]

[31] O. Butler, *Imago,* 48.

[32] Through her heroines, Butler challenges and relativizes masculinist notions of power. She redefines power and agency by theorizing a feminist, woman-of-color subject emblematic of Donna Haraway's cyborg. 'Catherine S. Ramírez, "Cyborg Feminism: The Science Fiction of Octavia E. Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa", in M. Flanagan and A. Booth, ed. , *Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2002), 383.

[33] See O. Butler, *Imago,* 44.

[34] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The new Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 99.

[35] Ibid., 19.

Jodahs, the post-human genetic engineer, is a "mestiza" of outer-space, the embodiment of the infinite possibilities given to a living being in a state of metamorphosis and camouflage. He passes through boundaries and frontiers insinuating through the interstices as if it was made of water and possesses the ability to change shape in order to please its potential mates. It can look human, animal (when it feels lonely, its body tends to disintegrate and to become liquid at the point of looking like a sea creature), male or female. The new, post-human species theorized by Butler does not seem to follow the rules of Darwinian 'natural selection', which is regulated by the principle of the 'survival of the fittest'. Rather it evolves through sexual selection which, according to Grosz, does not aim at mere survival but at the fulfilment of sexual desire:

> Sexual selection, the ability to attract sexual partners (which is not itself to be conflated with successful reproduction: the aim is sexual relations, even if the most measurable form for sexual success is the generation of offspring), not only works in cooperation with natural selection but at times functions in conflict with it, placing individuals and species in potential danger to the extent that they attract partners.... Species are no longer natural collections or kinds developed to survive and compete, they are also a posteriori and ultimately incalculable consequences of sexual taste, appeal, or attraction. Perhaps sexuality itself is not so much to be explained in terms of ends or goals ... as in terms of its forces, its effects ... which are forms of bodily intensification.[36]

[36] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art,* 29-33.

The ultimate aims of the Butlerian, post-human genetic engineer seem to be the enhancement of sexual pleasure and the construction of a queered feminine modality of sex that privileges fluidity over the fulfilment of pre-determined goals. The most stunning upheaval brought by the Oankali is a revolution of sexuality that privileges 'abstract sex' over heterosexual mating favoured by theories of natural selection. The construct Ooloi, the hybrid genetic engineer turns the dystopian, post-apocalyptic world of the first two books of the trilogy into an utopian return to a fluid, queer essence in which sexuality is completely re-thought and in which love takes the shape of a chemical bond[37] that ironically proves to be stronger than any traditional marriage.

[37] O. Butler, *Imago,* 6.

Conclusions

From the depths of a pre-verbal, uterine and yet alien origin to adulthood, Butler's Xenogenesis tells a new antiracist story of post-humanity. In order to advance in the evolutionary line, the new species has to gain the ability of becoming fluid, malleable, able to cross given for granted boundaries such as those separating the 'human' from the 'animal', the 'male' from the 'female', the 'natural' and the artificial'. Passing through a queer conception of sexuality, the new species is able

to reproduce itself through contamination, to evolve by enhancing its abilities through the absorption of characteristics belonging to other species and to the surrounding environment. Post-humanity is mutant, feminine, liquid, queer and antiracist to the extent that it's able to take an infinite number of shapes, to insinuate itself in any interstice and at the same time undermine all notions of racial purity and natural selection. Jodahs, one of the most revolutionary creatures resulting from the encounter between humans and aliens, is able to change its physical appearance in order to please its potential mates. By changing its shape, it is able to pass through the frontiers unseen. He does not belong to any specific place but any place can, potentially, belong to it. Unlike its Oankali predecessor, it employs its abilities in genetic engineering to pursue the fulfilment of sexual and sentimental desire. The new, construct humanity is not regulated by the principle of 'the survival of the fittest' but it evolves according to sexual selection. The more a living being is able to change itself, the more its chances of be sexually and sentimentally fulfilled increase. A totally antiracist evolutionary principle which privileges the emergence of difference regulates the species of constructs of Butler's *Xenogenesis* which is all but far from our contemporary post-humanity, which is a multi-ethnic species endowed with prosthetics, technologically enhanced bodies. In Butler's Trilogy, instead of threatening an old-fashioned concept of humanity, bio-technology re-shapes the concept of a closed body into an open organism able to transform itself in order to mate and to evolve.

Stamatia Portanova

Postcolonial Epistemodiversity.
Reading Laura U. Marks' *Enfoldment and Infinity*
against the Geopolitics of New Media

A review of Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2010), 395 pp., ISBN 978-0-262-01421-2

Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay is a 21 years' old Indian poet and writer who was diagnosed with severe non-verbal autism in his early childhood. In *The Mind Tree*, a book he started writing at the age of eight and completed at eleven, he reveals to an astonished neurotypical audience that, as most autistic people, he has experienced *illusions* throughout his whole life. The autistic mind, we learn by reading the book, is constantly presented with things that are *unreal*, things that would be normally classified as *hallucinations*. English Professor Ralph J. Savarese, who has conversed extensively with Mukhopadhyay, has taught him literature and has written about his work, argues that the boundary between *imagining* and *experiencing* something is, for the autistic, a very delicate one, as that between *self* and *other* also is.[1] The biggest challenge, for Mukhopadhyay, is in fact a "boundary challenge" posed to him by his diverse proprioceptive sense, a neurological diversity which prevents him from feeling himself as an enclosed self identity, and gives him the strange but regular sensation of "being scattered" around. "Being scattered around" coincides with the hallucination of perceiving oneself as an arm, a voice, a mind detached from all the other parts, but also of diffusing one's own cognition into the other's mind. This definition of autism not as a relational dysfunctionality but as an insensibility to boundaries and borders (not least one's own boundaries and borders) is not a mere scientific clarification but has, as Savarese shows, important political consequences: "If proprioception … is an awareness of one's body in space, an awareness of the various parts in relation to one another and their constitution as an organized and dynamic whole, then we might imagine a figurative equivalent: a kind of political or ethical proprioception that not only contests typical arrangements of power and identity but reconfigures them as well. With this sort of proprioception, Tito's body challenges would be an advantage, for they would facilitate a different understanding of, and relation to, the world" (2010, 283). Without romanticizing the autistic condition, following Savarese it can be argued that Mukhopadhyay's proprioceptive failure in recognizing his own boundaries originates a sort of hallucinatory connectivity

[1] Ralph James Savarese, "Toward a Postcolonial Neurology", in *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 4.3 (2010), 273-290.

which becomes a privileged viewpoint. Under this light, entities are not seen as things to be mastered through classifications such as "me/you", "real/unreal", "normal/abnormal": rather, a sort of animistic perception refuses to allow vision, and then language, to "cut up the world", leading for example Mukhopadhyay to become, and to speak as, a banyan tree. Autism becomes in this sense another definition for extreme connection and empathy, revealing the rational isolation in which neurotypicals usually live, a revelation that subverts normative self-identitarian body politics and proprioceptive ethics.

While neurodiversity is generally considered as a sign of cognitive inferiority or shortcoming, contemporary culture presents us with multiple more dimensions of social stigmatization, for example when "The south of the world is framed, not only conceptually enclosed, but also falsely accused of failing to respect a modernity being triumphantly pursued elsewhere".[2] At this point, we start to understand how the history of colonialism, and the semiotic construction of the *south* (or the *east*, or the *orient*, etc.) as cultural categories, are inextricably tied to the geopolitics of the brain which is involved in neurological discrimination. A kind of corporeal colonization is in fact enacted in the field of neurology, which takes the form of a presumed superiority of the left brain hemisphere (the rational logical part of the individual) on the more poetic and con-fused right side (the side which is still at work in poets, young children and pre-literate people). Similar dynamics are therefore at work in the human brain and world, where narratives of both national and personal development leave all immature or primitive perspectives behind. In this sense, it is possible to think of postcoloniality in neurological terms, as "the forces of history have moved inside the brain, and their impact is so much more significant than any simple social constructionism" (Savarese: 2010, 285). At the same time, as Savarese argues, it is possible to link medical patients to colonized peoples, the former's bodies having been rationally conquered, and their indigenous experience of illness having been completely disregarded. "The renunciation of "animist spirituality", whether conscious or unconscious, is a form of conquest, as is becoming an individual". In order to get beyond the perceptual and linguistic semiotics of power, and beyond the imposition of a model of rational, logical, *typically* Western individuality, what is needed are, according to Iain Chambers, "dense grammars of cultural immediacies" that can make "negated conviviality" and an "unrecognised communality" emerge between people and cultures (Chambers: 2015, 19-20). In the same spirit, Savarese's proposal for a postcolonial neurology models itself along the autistic drive to associate the human with non-human natural and material worlds, or a radically critical synesthesia. We could, in other words, think of postcolonialism and autism as two synesthetic expressions of the same critical sense and of the same connective tendency. For this reason, "Troping autism as postcolonialism does not conflate "completely different" experiences; rather, it practices, at least potentially, the kind of "aroundness" that repairs division and the oppressive hierarchies it makes

possible" (Savarese: 2010, 288). The aim behind this introductory presentation of autistic neurodiversity, and behind Savarese's unexpected association of autism to the postcolonial, is therefore not to merely conflate two distant phenomena, but to show them as sharing the same political necessity for a perceptual shift.

One of the ways in which the colonial project reveals its discriminatory nature is through the predominance of a hegemonic point of view on the history and critique of science, technology and disciplines such as Media History, Media Studies and Media Art, considering the latter as intellectual prerogatives of advanced Western civilisation. Since the main image on which this discrimination is based is that of a fast-paced future-projected modern West, one possible counter-cultural and counter-perceptive strategy could be to make time more fluid, intensive and resistant, and to be able to dedicate a necessary amount of it to the rethinking of history, and of disciplinary histories such as those of media and new media. Such strategy is adopted by Laura U. Marks in *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, a book where, against what is recognised as a cultural given (in other words, the idea of science and technology, or Reason, as Western property), she deploys a different sense of possibility whereby she can invent (in the sense of the Latin "invenire", to find, to rediscover) a different, hidden history. Through this operation, the media scholar shows us the origins of contemporary new media art as lying in ancient Islamic thought and aesthetics, revealing the profound association existing between "us-West-now" and "them-East-then", and eroding some of the main boundaries of cultural proprioception in space and time. A different viewpoint emerges, based on connection rather than detachment, a privileged perspective that allows Marks to unfold the connections traversing the media field. On a parallel level, despite the aura of abstract techno-rationality that permeates the hegemonic view on Media, New Media and Software Studies, Marks notes that today's technologies still cling tightly to the living body. Exploring, as she does, the corporeality of technology is therefore one of the ways to trouble the vision of our mediated experiences as characterised by an abstract algorithmic nature. What is revealed by revelling in such corporeality is the "deep time" in which new media are folded – a deep physical involvement but also a deep history of medium-body connections that Marks excavates, until reaching some of the most ancient creations of Islamic art.[3] The very concept of an embodied aesthetic sense, she tells us, finds some of its first, most profound actualisations in the Islamic architecture of the 11th century, where domes invited a haptic look to move along their surfaces, inducing the beholder to experience mystical states. By synesthetically connecting (at least) two perceptual worlds, that of Islamic art and that of new media art, Marks performs a postcolonial operation, or what could be defined as an epistemologically *diverse* perceptual shift, connecting what is not usually connected from an epistemotypical point of view, presenting us with a cultural *un-reality* that, once we plunge more deeply into its fascinating folds, starts to look interestingly real. The whole operation results in an unmaking of

[3] For the notion of 'deep time', see Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2006).

boundaries and a liberation of the *brain* or the intellect of media and technological studies from the unilateral shortsightedness of its vision. Echoing Rey Chow's words, we can say that her work explores the "dynamics inherent in the encounter between the phenomenology of seeing and the emergence of epistemic ruptures".[4]

The Method: Deep Time

Enfoldment and Infinity draws a deep spatiotemporal diagram that provides its reader with the information and concepts needed to understand the diversity and plurality of media. What the book tries to argue is that Islamic aesthetics has from the beginning had a strong influence on Western art, and is therefore to be considered as one of the antecedents of new media art. From this point of view, *Enfoldment* can be considered as one of the most literal actualisations of Siegfried Zielinski's notion of "deep time": in Jussi Parikka's words, a methodology of research through which "the superficiality of media cultural temporality is exposed with antecedents, hidden ideas, ... inspiring paths of earlier experimenters".[5] Deep time is in other words a strategy of resistance against the linear progress myth of the West, a strategy through which Marks takes apart the narrative of modernity as a dispositif of Western knowledge, for example showing us how perspective was already present in 11th century's Cairo, and how Arabic theology and philosophy had their own rationalist currents. "Deep time" is therefore harnessed as a method for ripping open the black box of new media history, bringing to light many conceptual points of contact between Western and Islamic thought – notions such as "unity" (as the unity of God and also of the algorithm), "vector" (intended as "qibla", the direction towards the city of Mecca, and also as digital vector), or the "haqq" (truth) and "haqiqa" (reality) conceptual couple, "a historical precedent of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the virtual and the actual".[6] In this way, the book illustrates the argument that Islamic art and philosophy contain the deep sources of contemporary information culture.

Being particularly concerned with images as enfolding (rather than containing) information, Marks defines new media art as a series of works with a "basis in code, an algorithmic process, and a database-interface relationship" (Marks: 2010, 32). In order to discuss these works, she draws on Gilles Deleuze's work, in particular borrowing his theory of signs, where he describes two planes (the image and the infinite) as constantly unfolding and enfolding and re-forming the boundary between the virtual and the actual. Marks' own intervention in this theoretical dispositif is to insert the plane of information between images and the infinite. This addition enables her to introduce Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of a triadic relationship between the infinity of world/God, words, and perceptible images. This tripartite system can obviously directly correspond to the functioning of new media, with the dimension of information (the computer interface, the programming language) working as a bridge between the infinity of code on one

[4] Rey Chow, "An Interview with Rey Chow", *Social Semiotics*, 20.4 (2010), 460.

[5] Jussi Parikka, "A Call for an Alternative Deep Time of the Media", http://jussiparikka.net/2012/09/28/a-call-for-an-alternative-deep-time-of-the-media/, accessed 2 December 2015.

[6] Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genalogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2010), 14.

hand, and the finiteness of images on the other. But the real epistemological intervention of the book is to argue that this tripartite structure already appears in Islamic art, where images and artifacts are often composed of written words and correspond to the code of the Qur'an, which in its turn relates to a deeper, infinite truth. In order to better delineate this image/information/code relationship, Marks refers to a theoretical pool which is not limited to thinkers such as Deleuze and Felix Guattari or Gilbert Simondon, but includes Islamic thinkers such as Muhammed Arkoun, Abu al-Walid Muhammad Ibn Rushd (known in the West as Averroes) and Ibn Khaldun. Drawing on their thoughts, she can construct a way of approaching art based on the fact that everything we perceive is generated by an underlying code, and is the sensible presentation of an idea. Her work demands that we take seriously the claim that, in an image, what we do not see is more significant than what we do see. If art has always aimed at making visible the invisible, what characterizes today's new media is the dimension of *information* as a new, intermediary level of in/visibility. The same relation between the visible, the legible and the invisible has characterized Islamic art, to the point that the latter is, for Marks, the strongest parallel and the actual source of our information age. Indeed, as Marks herself does note, the very categorization of "Islamic art" is, like that of "New Media Art", quite problematic; but, she tells us, for the purposes of her book, the latter has been considered as "art made for Islamic religious and ritual purposes; motifs and themes developed in that art that spread to courtly, state, and popular art; and art that, while its purpose was not strictly religious, was produced in accordance with the Muslim religious mores of its particular culture" (2010, 31-32). This sort of bespoke categorization allows her to incorporate many works from the whole Islamic world (ranging from Morocco to Iran), and to examine them without becoming entangled in discussions about their religious or secular nature.

Marks' story begins as an account of the travels of two concepts she extrapolates from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, the concepts of "haptic space" and "abstract line", across time and space. These two notions, which the philosophers employ in several of their works to tell us about the aniconic nature of Gothic art and also about the modern art of Paul Klee, are interwoven by Marks with ninth century's Islamic thought, and then tracked down in the carpets which, in 15th and 16th centuries, travelled from the "far east" to Venetian and Dutch households. "Literally smuggled in rolled-up carpets, the abstract line bursts into flower on the Turkish and Persian textiles that decorated European homes;" (2010, 72) and then the line continues its travels, until it reaches modern visual art, and then cybernetics and generative algorithmic art. Throughout the account, Marks gives us some spatiotemporal points of contact: the birth of the algorithm in 830 in Baghdad and its influence on the Baroque tendencies of new media art and of some recent movies; the origin of the pixel in 1000's Baghdad and its entrance in the iconoclastic software art of the 2000's; the zoomorphic calligraphy flourishing

in 972 in Cairo as the first ancestor of concrete poetry; the earliest forms of virtual reality emerging in 1487 in Herat, where examples of infinitesimals and monads started to populate all kinds of images; and the seeds of artificial life in 1700's Karabagh, whose carpets already overflew with genetic life forms blurring the confines between nonorganic and alive, artificial and natural, mineral, vegetal and animal. As Zielinski himself writes in one of the book endorsements, "Chapter by chapter, it becomes evident that some of the most important modern paradigms like pixels, algorithms, morphs, or even virtual reality and artificial life have not been originally generated by the Occident, but through L'Age d'Or of the Orient".

An Example: Atoms, Letters and Pixels

The world of new media has an important genealogy in classical Islam and, as Marks shows, these works often express a sort of Islamic *Kunstwollen* (artistic will) that is immanent to computers themselves. The *pixel*, for example, appears in *Enfoldment* as a conceptual suggestion for thinking through both Islamic and Western atomism, which in their turn constitute the foundations of many art forms. Islamic atomism was a product of the rationalist theological theories of the Mu'tazila of Basra; while the Mu'tazila subdivided all existent things into atoms and accidents as the two emanations of God, atomism in modern Western philosophy (for Marks, mainly the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari) lacks any theological basis. "An aggregate of atoms", [Deleuze and Guattari] write, is a war machine, "a physics of packs, turbulences, 'catastrophes', and epidemics".[7] A physical emergence rather than a divine creation. And yet, even if subsumed to the will of God, the universe as the Islamic atomists conceived it was a smooth universe, for "one cannot rely on any form to persist in it, and everything is susceptible to change at any moment" (Marks: 2010, 196). An Islamic actualization of the atomist world vision is represented by the calligraphy of tenth century's Baghdad, where scribes paid attention to the singularities of each minimal written part. But the bureaucracy and religious leaders of the capital wanted to make sure that everybody got the same meaning from the sacred writings, and therefore imposed the use of a clear and legible script to everyone. For this reason, despite their stylistic efforts to write in their own ways, calligraphers had "established limits in which an individual's style could appear" (ibid., 199). This writing standardisation was based on multiples of the smallest calligraphic mark or atom: "the cross-section of a reed pen, as a point, rhomboid in shape". Being the basis of all calligraphic measurement, this point is the origin of the Arabic written line, which is in fact composed of a series of points, and the two (line and point) constitute the mother and father (or the *alif* and *beh, a* and *b*) of all writing, the field and source of all possible letters. But whereas, in letter *beh*, the point is actually visible as a belly button under a curving line, in all the other Arabic letters it simply functions as a diacritical mark: the point (*beh* also corresponding to zero, while *alif* corresponds to

[7] L.U. Marks, "Thinking like a Carpet: Embodied Perception and Individuation in Algorithmic Media", in A. Petho, ed., *The Cinema of Sensations* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 18.

one), is nothing in itself.

Tracking the atomist view in modern and contemporary art, Marks argues that the atomist aspect of experimental films and videos consists of the idea that they are composed of minimal parts, or atoms, that are their formal units. An atomist aesthetics of cinema is seen for example at work in *Last year at Marienbad* (Alen Resnais, 1961), a film based on the superposition of frames more than on a linear form of storytelling. Quoting film theorist Jalal Toufic, Marks continues by suggesting that what really interpellates the viewer of a film is not the image but the jump cut which "alerts him or her to his or her substitution by another, similar entity, and his or her annihilation into the one and only Subject". Since the 1960s, structural filmmakers have in fact been editing single video frames or sequences of frames, emphasising the handcraft of this creative process, shattering the audiovisual object into many crystals or fragments, and dazzling the viewer in the same way as the *muqarnas* (honeycomb-like repetitive units) covering the surface of Islamic domes also did. Atomism characterizes, as Marks tells us, the idea behind many contemporary films, where no causal laws seem to be given and no generalization seems possible. "Atomist films", in other words, are those with a very specific focus on some singularity, those that are fragmentary and organized according to a different, almost inexplicable logic – Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*, Julio Medem's *Lovers of the Arctic Circle*, Abderrahmane Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness*, Tom Barman's *Any Way the Wind Blows*, Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know*. Films that show us a world where no direct cause-effect relation, for example, manages to connect poverty and famine to global capital and political alliances. Until digital video appears, posing "a profound challenge to this manner of working", and simultaneously representing, with its pixellated nature, the best embodiment of atomist ideas (Marks: 2010, 197).

The void rhomboid points of calligraphy, for Marks, perfectly coincide with the void square pixels of the digital screen as the atomic basis of computers" visual standardisation. In order to function as operable units, computers all need to have the same uniform content, the same number of electrons that can make an electric signal signify *on*, and a pixel appear. Moreover, the large amounts of data required to generate pixellated images are the basis of proprietary imaging software, on which the centralized economic (and political) power of corporate empires is founded. In this sense, "It is not an overstatement that the pixel-based screen, like point-based writing, centralizes meaning and access in corporate powers" (ibid., 204). Not having an internal extension (or intensity), in other words not being an infinitesimal, the pixel is the atom or point where computers" standardisation finds its limit. For this reason, Marks reminds us that pixels, as minimal parts and not infinitesimals, "are capable of infinite extensions", and that "Like the point and line of standardized calligraphy, [they] can produce infinite iterations". The atom of both calligraphy and graphics works, in other words, as a function of power, capable of generating a quantitative infinity of controlled repetitions. In this

context, *Enfoldment and Infinity* acts like a call for a further materialization of digital atoms, because the only thing that can give meaning to the latter's tedious algorithmic journeys is *immanence*: "the materiality of software, hardware, programmers; the imaginative effort of humans" (ibid., 205), in the same way in which the strict standard styles of Ottoman calligraphy could become, through manual execution and imaginative power, the basis of fanciful and complex textual decorations.

The Protagonist: The Subject of Perception

In *Enfoldment and Infinity,* Marks continues the work already undertaken in her previous book *The Skin of the Film,* that is to discuss the subjective and embodied experience of art in intercultural contexts. The individual subject is in fact the real protagonist in Marks' book, a distracted, contemplative, imaginative, mystical subject alternatively identifiable with herself or with a Muslim worshipper kneeling in a mosque one thousand years ago. In particular, *Enfoldment* examines the ways in which the abstract algorithmic patterns of Islamic mosque domes and carpets, but also of modern Western paintings, audiovisual and computer screens, pass through the beholder's body, literally taking her consciousness out of herself, and inducing a particular subjective state. The final argument is that all forms of expression involve a subjective embodied perception, meaning that the artwork plays out in time, animating viewers as it enacts its algorithmic code. In the book, Marks also shows how early medieval Islamic thinkers had already developed theories of a simultaneously rational and subjective aesthetic response that were taken up by Western scholars, and that still find an echo in Henri Bergson's definition of the subject of perception. And yet, it is precisely this subjectively embodied perspective (more than Deleuze's own consideration of Islamic art as a space of statal and religious control) that makes Marks' adaptation of Deleuze's concepts at times quite problematic. As Michel Foucault already argued, we can never really reconstruct what people felt and experienced in the presence of objects. So how can we manage to make (as hoped by Marks) the logical depth of an ancient carpet or dome indicate us the experiences they gave to the people who lived with them in their early days? To stick with Deleuze and Guattari, we should recall that the abstract line and haptic space of art do not defer meaning to a subjective discovery of the viewer, but only to de-subjectified non-human sensations (what they define as *affects* and *percepts*).[8] Nevertheless, despite this conceptual offset, the engagement with phenomenological corporeality is key, for Marks, for understanding the relation between Islamic and Western art both in terms of their similarities and of their differentiations. This phenomenological approach allows her to explore how "Islamic aesthetics encourage certain subjective and receptive states", while also to suggest that new media art often seems to lack that very materiality and sensuousness.

[8] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (London and New York: Verso, 2003).

Drawing upon William Gibson's literary definition of the body as *meat* – an ironic claim more seriously echoed in much new media writing of the 1990s – Marks emphasizes that, differently for example from Sufist embodied meditation, the digital network or "virtual community" conceptualized by Howard Rheingold is "a disembodied community", as "cybernetic mysticism tended to disregard the body" (ibid., 145). At the same time, privatization, commodification and surveillance are, for Marks, the main ideas that the Internet, contradicting the world-changing aspirations that motivated the first entrepreneurs of the PC industry, has actually ended up reinforcing. Instead, in order to be fully comparable to the infinite sought after and reached by Islamic art's aspirations towards the divine, Marks argues that the "worldly infinite" of media networks "must be meaningful" (ibid., 148). What this acquisition of meaning entails, is that these networks "must open onto an infinite that is not a lame field of sameness, but struggling, alive, simmering with difference". If such networks indeed already exist, they are never entirely online and digital, and are made of relations that disrupt the homogenization of information through the production of lived particularities or singularities. Networked relations, in other words, must become in any case antagonistic, by diffusing individual corporeal subjectivity into social actions.

Refurbishing the Manor of New Media Art

Enfoldment and Infinity is a substantial book (both in size and conceptual richness), and in some ways, as already mentioned, it functions as a sort of further exploration of Marks' previous book *The Skin of the Film* (although still perhaps moving at a too brisk pace). The duo of books work well together, in the endeavor to realize the notion that intercultural movements imply a transformative force. They both tell us often unheard stories, stories of images that are blocked or lost in movements of cultural dislocation, stories of contact rather than separation. In *The Skin*, multisensory mnemonic images, or memories of the senses, are reenacted by diasporic filmmakers on the screen, against the oblivion of a distant past. Whereas in *Enfoldment*, the personal memories animating intercultural films are replaced by the recuperated traces of a collective history. The haptic visuality of the film skin gives way to what Marks sees as the enfoldment of Islamic aesthetics into the digital, a sort of indelible deep collective memory. In this sense, dwelling on the abstract artistic patterns that pass from the digital screen to the beholder's body is not a way to limit the aesthetic experience of new media to the present moment, but rather to highlight the profound parallels woven across this corporeal thread, between historically and geographically distant practices. Here, Marks' mobilisation of a deep, epistemodiverse vision acts as an important contribution to thinking through the lifecycles of art, and starts to function as a sort of postcolonial brake on Western accelerationist thinking, by emphasizing that no matter how fast humans go, art has its own temporality. Those expecting to find the usual

hegemonic, epistemotypical point of view on new media will therefore not find it here. What they will find are new theoretical tools with which to think through cultural contacts across time and space.

How does Marks herself conclude her reflections? Both the Internet user and the religious worshipper are/were helpless, she says, respectively in relation to the algorithms" and to God's commands. Starting from this presupposition, Marks' preference for "the creative lines of flight" that take Islamic art beyond its religious scope, sets a critical tone for new media. The superiority of the analog makes itself really felt throughout the whole book. Nevertheless, the book also does much to demonstrate that computer-based parallels to the infinitesimal worlds of floriated arabesques do exist. By emphasizing the teeming life of electrons pulsing inside each pixel, Marks avoids the usual critique of digital media on the basis of its extensive algorithmic finiteness, to instead pose a more challenging ethical question: even if a pixel can be seen as the smallest unit, to what extent is it irrevocably empty? Is any kind of subversive political critique tickling "the pixel screen of the digital universe?" And it is, in the end, a positive assessment that emerges, as she ends her book by describing the fascinating similarity existing between the creativity of Caucasian dragon carpets and the creatures of experimental biotechnology or AI: "Like the monsters produced by genetic algorithms, these carpets celebrate a will to form that is not constrained by its products; rather it continues to invent, as though for the joy of inventing" (2010, 313).

The possibility of a subversive political critique therefore can only spring from an inventive, morphogenetic force. At the close of *Enfoldment and Infinity*, Marks therefore dedicates some space to discuss these carpets: on their surface, animals losing their limbs and morphing into rosettes or palmettes, flowers becoming dragons and viceversa, produce the "truthful hallucination of a universe where all things are connected" (2010, 318). In this way, she also emphasizes the ways in which the creativity of this Islamic form of genetic art suspends action and judgement (as molecular biology also does), reminding us of the perceptual illusions emerging in what Deleuze defines as the "time-image" of cinema.[9] In the dragon carpets, "one does not know whether it is a question of flowers with wings or of birds with petals". Lingering on the description of these connective objects, she continues: "[they] elicit responses of nausea and disgust – responses, among which I include my own, whose violence verges at times on the hysterical. What is that fear but the fear of our own annihilation? If we do respond to the forms of carpets in an empathic way, rather as we might respond to the bodies-in-pieces of the sixteenth century grotesque [or, we could add, to the bodies-in-pieces of the autistics], then we fear for our own bodily integrity when the forms we are looking upon are monstrous or uncategorizable". These monstrous becomings of an ancient, marginalized aesthetics remind us not only of a biotechnology lab, as suggested by Marks, where a human can acquire equine genes, but also of Tito

[9] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

Mukhopadhyay's own vision, where teachers have tulips for faces, and where he loses his arms and becomes a tree. It is this self-dissolution, Marks claims, that "permits the atomized subject to become part of a larger force field", until arriving "to penetrate each atom, to descend to the bottom of matter, to *be* matter". A suspension and becoming that constitute the political significance of art, by defining a diverse proprioception that "reconfigures typical arrangements of power and identity".

We are now able to conclude our reading of *Enfoldment and Infinity* by returning to our intial parallel between postcolonial epistemology and the neurology of autism, on the basis of their common presentation of a diverse, *hallucinatory* or non-hegemonic field of perception, and of its discrimination or marginalisation. We ourselves could at this point think the postcolonial transformation of well-established fields of perception and knowledge in a metaphorical way: for example, as Chow does, as an operation of house-cleaning or a remodeling of disciplinary manors/manners. The epistemotypical geopolitics through which all disciplines proprioceptively manage their space or, in other words, think of their own field and history, in fact often tends to stigmatise or erase all *minor* knowledges through an appropriation of epistemological power. In the context of media studies, approaches go from the inclusion of media within the wider space of Western reason (an enlargement of disciplinary space), to theoretical restrictions limiting the analytical scope to the small perspective of specific problematics and methodologies (psychoanalytical, mathematical, sociological, technical, communicative etc.). Between these perspectival enlargements and restrictions, a complete disregard for *other* points of view persists, excluding episodes, works and concepts, such as the Islamic art examples which Marks attentively brings to light as precursors of modern media culture. Something similar happens when architects try to design and manage the spaces of neurodiverse people, and the proprioceptive peculiarity of autistic individuals induces them to provide their own solutions to the autistic's anxious inhabitation of space; solutions oscillating between the advocation of smaller or much larger volumes, while completely ignoring the point of view of autistics themselves.[10] So what if the marginalized were let to remodel their own space? Coming back to the new media manor, a simple refurbishment might reveal itself as more useful than any enlargement or restriction of disciplinary space. Echoing Chow's words again, we could ask: "What can be thrown out? What has been lying in the basement or in the attic that we have no use for, that is simply taking up space? What alternative arrangements of space and the intimations of time that come with such spatial rearrangements may be introduced? How do some odd pieces of furniture compel us to change the views of entire rooms, and why had we not done it before? What would such a change do to the demographics of the house, the folks who have been living there as though they were the rightful permanent owners and their offspring? Who should be the future occupants of the house, if it is being made over?" (Chow:

[10] Christopher N. Henry, "Designing for Autism: Spatial Considerations", in *ArchDaily*, 26 October 2011, acessed 2 December 2015.

2010, 462). In Marks' book, the new media house, freed from the hegemonic constructions of an Oriental backwards primitivism or religiosity still lying in the attic, is refurbished with a different set of ideas and images. From this changed place, the view on Islamic science, philosophy and art can finally provide a landscape or background for many technological and aesthetic developments, up to the digital age.

Tiziana Terranova

The (European) Posthuman Predicament.
Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* and the Future of the Humanities

A review of Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 229 pp., ISBN 978-0-7456-4158-4

Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* is most definitely not a book of "mainstream posthumanism", which might be defined, as another theorist of the posthuman put it, as the thesis that "the human is transformed and finally eclipsed by various technological, informatic, and bioengineering developments" – although it is a book that does consider science and technology to be important forces in the emergence of the posthuman condition.[1] Neither it is just a book that criticizes and exposes the ideological and discursive limits of mainstream or popular posthumanism – even as it takes issue with their reductive understanding of posthumanity. On the other hand, it is in the first place, a philosophical and political book which is as critical as it is affirmative. For Braidotti, undoubtedly one of the most influential contemporary feminist theorists, the situation "we" find ourselves in is a "posthuman predicament" which materializes at the point of convergence between three overlapping and interrelated crises: the crisis of the human as a species (threatened by global climate change); the crisis of European humanism as ethical and moral project (in Tony Davies" words "[i]t is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of humanity" (cit. p.15)); and finally also the crisis of the domain of knowledge associated with the human, that is the classical Humanities (Literature, Philosophy, History and such likes) as they are increasingly deemed to be irrelevant or a luxury in a context where research has to be shown to contribute directly either to economic growth or to social cohesion and stability – the two pillars of ordoliberal governmentality.[2] The risk which Braidotti can see is that the methods and frameworks of the natural sciences will simply be mimicked by the humanities in a desperate bid to appropriate dwindling public resources. This is already resulting in a rise, within the human and social sciences, of an anti-theoretical anti-intellectualism which is ultimately producing new "shallow forms of neo-empiricism" (4). Unlike Martha Nussbaum's project of a return to "classic Humanist norms", Braidotti argues that (European) humanism needs to take "the experimental path" in charting a "new robust foundation for ethical and political

[1] Cary Wolfe, "Bring the Noise: The Parasite and the Multiple Genealogies of Posthumanism", in Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xi-xxviii, p. xi.

[2] On Austrian ordoliberalism and its role in shaping European neoliberalism see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

subjectivity" (51). The crisis is thus, for Braidotti, an opportunity for thinking a new foundation for the humanities. The book is thus a contribution to "the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation" which we can use to chart what we are in the process of becoming (12). Only by doing this, what we might now call the *posthumanities* can hope to produce "socially relevant knowledge" (4). *The Posthuman* marks the definitive exit from postmodern anti-foundationalism by one of the most important contemporary feminist philosophers. As she claims, it is not enough to critique the human. What is needed, she argues, is a "strong affirmative stance". It is not enough to be merely anti-humanist, but "an altogether novel posthuman project" must be founded (38).

Braidotti's cartography usefully records different genealogies of the posthuman – external but also internal to the humanities. The first chapter "Posthumanism: Life Beyond the Self" takes us through the internal critique of Man pursued by the anti-humanism of the French post-structuralist Left in the 1960s and 1970s. These two decades are crucial to the emergent of anti-humanism within the humanities, following arguably the crucial historicization of Man performed by Foucault's "ground-breaking critique of Human in *The Order of Things*" (23). Post-structuralist anti-humanism also attacked the classical and socialist versions of humanism (26), but it is the anti-universalism of feminism and the anti-colonial phenomenology of the likes of Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire which gave the posthuman its political edge (46). Anti-humanist post-structuralists, anti-universalist feminists and anti-colonial phenomenologists converged in their critique of the "High-Humanistic creed", centered around "He, the classical ideal of Man" – as figured in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvius Man – and its "civilizational model" (13). This critique of humanism was aimed at its "restricted notion of what counts as human" (16) and implied "the empowerment of sexualized and racialized human others" in a process of emancipation from the dialectics of master and slave (66). Feminist anti-humanism or postmodern feminism can also be seen as a kind of critical post-humanism in as much as it claims that "it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about woman/natives and other marginal subjects" (27). This empowerment allowed for the emergence of a "critical post-humanism" to be found in the writings of Paul Gilroy and Edward Said, but also in a different way in authors such as Achille Mbembe and Iain Chambers. Critical posthumanism is "critical of humanism in the name of humanism (46-47), as when Paul Gilroy's notion of "planetary cosmopolitanism" is deployed to hold Europe accountable for its failures in implementing the ideals of the humanist Enlightenment (47). Critical post-humanism tries to conceive of a humanism without Eurocentrism, as "an adventure in difference" (152). The potential of critical post-humanism lies for Braidotti in the way it displaces "the unitary subject of humanism" allowing for the conceptualization of a "more complex and relational subject" (26) which will later in the book also find support in the post-anthropocentric thrust of science and technology. Braidotti clearly wants to return to the critical posthumanism of

postcolonial and feminist theory to counter the rise of what she calls "analytical posthumanism" within the social sciences. If critical post-humanism is associated with cultural studies, feminism, and anti-colonialism, analytical post-humanism involves Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) – approaches which have produced, from her perspective, a form of post-humanism which claims for itself "high levels of political neutrality" and, most crucially, one which lacks a focus on subjectivity. On the other hand, she argues, the highly politicized school of Italian Marxism (including authors such Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Franco Berardi and Maurizio Lazzarato) has a strong focus on subjectivity but does not really closely engage with contemporary science and technology.

This cartography of post-structuralist anti-humanism, anti-universalist critical post-humanism and analytic post-humanism allows Braidotti to construct her own affirmative position: radical posthumanism. Her radical posthumanism aims to refound the humanities, drawing on, but also going beyond, post-structuralist humanism. It also retains the affirmation of difference and situatedness of critical post-humanisms while rejecting the purely analytical stance of STS. This allows her to claim that her radical posthumanism is equipped for taking up the politically bankrupt critical and moral (European) project of Man and transforming it into a posthuman project – a new creative figuration.

The task of definining her radical posthumanism as a new foundation for the (post)humanities further unfolds in the second chapter: "Post-Anthropocentrism: Life Beyond the Species". If post-humanism involves "philosophy, history, cultural studies and classical humanism", post-anthropocentrism is shaping research in "science and technology studies, new media and digital culture, enviromentalism and the earth sciences, biogenetics, neuroscience and robotics, evolutionary theory, critical legal theory, primatology, animal rights and science fiction" (58) This chapter is probably the most challenging for the boldness by which Braidotti states the stakes and range of her posthuman project. The first step in this direction is taking the distance "from the social constructivist approach and the consensus around it" (2), which maintained the humanist separation between nature and culture by privileging the agency of the latter over the passivity of the former. Social constructivism is not enough in the age of the Anthropocene which is also the age of post-anthropocentrism. Paradoxically, in fact, the acknowledgment of the crucial role of the human species in determining new environmental conditions on Earth has lead to a crisis of *anthropos* – a socio-biological and political construction – as in Thomas Hobbes's *homo hominis lupus* or Desmond Morris' 'Naked Ape' – whom she pointedly describes as "the representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species" (65) probably doomed to extinction (a point that African American SF writer Octavia Butler also explored again and again in her writings, see Caporaso this volume). Like Butler before her, Braidotti calls for a "post-anthropological exodus" which, as the crisis of

[3] See Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

humanism did for its subaltern others, would free the "demonic forces of naturalized others" such as animals, viruses and insects (65). In fact, in the post-anthropocentric condition (as for Donna Haraway and Brian Massumi), the "human-animal relation" is a vector of "posthuman relationality" (84).[3] Furthermore, the posthuman subject which displaces anthropos bears the heavy burden of countering the toxic fallout produced by the widespread production of another model of subjectivity which also claims the soul of an endangered pan-humanity: the possessive individual or *homo oeconomicus*, constructed by neoliberal market forces (63). In as much as it continues to enforce and produce a possessive individualist model of the subject (calculative and rational), in fact, for Braidotti the global economy is post-anthropocentric in its very structure but not post-humanistic: its model of subjectivity is rational, calculative and competitive, but not relational and situated. Unlike the possessive individual, the critical posthuman subject is defined not by the possession of one's own self, but according to an ecosophy of multiple belongings: it is relational and multiple, differentiated and grounded, embodied and embedded (49). This "post-individualist notion of the subject" as an "expanded relational self" crucially implicates the existence of "a generative and intelligent vitality" (60). The exodus from anthropos thus takes us towards a vitalist-materialist, eco-sophic ontology which should constitute the new ground for the posthumanities and a new conception of the posthuman subject.

Displacing the binary of nature and culture through the notion of a "natureculture continuum", Braidotti calls for a return to Spinoza's monism: "matter is one, driven by a desire for self-expression and ontologically free" (56). One of the most audacious and deceptively easy leaps in the book is probably this: making Spinoza's monism of substance and expressionist philosophy the precursor and philosophical foundation of the sciences of self-organization (and in particular molecular biology). Is it enough to say that Spinoza's emphasis on the unity of matter has been "reinforced and updated by scientific understandings of the self-organizing and smart structure of matter?" (57) Isn't there a risk here that a kind of subalternity to the natural science is perpetuated by making in a way Spinoza's ontology a truth confirmed by science? In any case, it is clear that Spinoza's philosophy allows for the constitution of the embedded and relational but also vital materialist foundations of the posthuman subject as Braidotti's project comes to be defined by the conjunction of feminist, anti-racist and post-colonial cultural politcs with a vital-materialist ontology. The monistic, but relational structures produced by such intelligent vitality allows for the posthuman subject to become differentiated by the social coordinates of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race. Such social coordinates, however, are dramatically changed once difference is dislocated "from binaries to rhizomatics", from sex/gender or nature/culture to "processes of sexualization/racialization/naturalization" (96). The task of mapping this complex "nomadic subjectivity" evokes the notion of the posthumanities as a kind of "social branch of complexity theory" (87). And yet, the posthuman subject

cannot be simply known. In this sense, we might think of Beatriz (now Paul) Preciado's experiment with testosterone and writing or as in Johanna Hedva's feminist figuration of "Sick Woman Theory" as the kind of "empirical projects" that can show us "what contemporary bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of doing" (61).[4] At the core of radical posthumanism, then, Braidotti poses an expansion towards the non-human as zoe –that is a move from Foucault's biopower to a vitalist zoepower (97). Unlike Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's Marxist political vitalism (for whom the constituent biopower of living labor is opposed to the constituted power of biopolitics), Braidotti does not base her notion of zoepower in labor, but in the natureculture continuum.[5] Further from indicating passivity, essentialism and mechanicism, Braidotti's zoe displays traits of hybridity, nomadism, diaspora and creolization. Her "posthuman eco-philosophy" is "an attempt to rethink in a materialist manner the intricate web of interrelations that mark the contemporary subject's relationship to their multiple ecologies" (99). Her radical posthumanism thus comes to rest between the "oneness" of matter and the "not-oneness" and "non-unitary" composition of a subject based on ontological relationality (100) – with expressive processes of differentiation acting as a bridge. As a result, her conception of posthuman subjectivity sounds strangely paradoxical: it is characterized as nomadic and embedded, relational and diasporic, differentiated and communitarian. It becomes clear at this point that Braidotti's radical posthumanism arises out of the encounter between the anti-universalist and critical posthumanisms (difference) and an eco-sophic concept of zoe (oneness and relationality). The possibility of a new "virtual social ecology" is thus opened which renews Felix Guattari's differentiation between the "three ecologies" (environmental, social, psychic).[6] Posthuman societies, then, require a new form of ethics: a posthuman ethics as "micropolitics" and "ethics" of relations actualizing by means of transversality.

The explicit vitalism espoused in the second chapter is further specified in the third chapter "The Inhuman: Life Beyond Death" which records, by referring to Jean François Lyotard's homonymous work, "the alienating and commodifying effects of advanced capitalism on the human (108).[7] Here Braidotti returns to the "modernist inhuman" (its "heart of darkness" as we might call it) as "affect of modernization" (120): a "core of structural changeness or productive estrangement" or the "non-rational and non-volitional" force haunting the subject of humanism (109). What is the posthuman version of the inhuman, she asks? What are the "inhuman variables of the posthuman digital universe?" (113) What is the role of "illness, death and extinction" in the posthuman if radical posthumanist zoepower dispenses with distinctions between life and death? (115) Braidotti here wishes to account for the "posthuman Inhuman" in the new forms of necropolitics described by Arjun Appadurai and Achille Mbembe as a new "semiosis of killing" embedded in "necropolitical modes of governance" (124). The posthuman inhuman is linked to new post-anthropocentric weaponry such as

[4] See Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013); and Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory", *Mask Magazine,* January 2016, http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory, accessed 24 January 2016.

[5] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass: Bellknap Press, 2011).

[6] Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008).

[7] Jean François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 1992).

war robots and drones, which she names as "the perverse form of the posthuman constructed by capitalism" (9). Against such "posthuman death technologies" or "necro-technologies" (9), Braidotti deploys vital-materalism as a form of post-secular spirituality, where death becomes a form of transformation of matter endowed itself with "relentless generative powers" (121). A posthuman death theory should think, she claims, "with and not against death" (129) as vitalism sees death as "the inhuman within us which frees us into life" (134). It is in its encounter with the inhuman that the book is at its most visionary and lyrical as the vitalist materialist cosmic energy of chaos and impersonal absolute speed threatens to be too much intensity for single subjects swept by death as force of the virtual. The posthuman subject thus meets the capitalist inhuman by (more or less ominously) "self-styling one's death as an act of affirmation" (135).

Befittingly, the book closes with a chapter – "Posthuman Humanities: Life Beyond Theory" – which returns to the problem of the "identity crisis of the humanities" as the result of "high levels of technological mediation" and the "multicultural structure of the globalized world" (153). This is the chapter where Braidotti explicitly locates the site where her battle for the re-foundation of the post-humanities takes place: the university or better "the multi-versity" – a term deployed to define the effects on the old models of the University (Kant's and von Humboldt's especially) of the "explosion of taks and demands imposed on major universities" (178). Here we return to the pressing question of the corporatization of the university which risks reducing the Humanities to "luxury consumer goods": how to reverse this trend without returning to classical Humanism in a context where not the academic, but the administrator is the new central figure around which Universities are becoming re-organized? (178) Faced with these threats (manifesting themselves in the form of financial cuts), the risk is that those who once fought the disciplines might find themselves rescuing them to save them from institutional decline (146). For Braidotti, however, there is no need to fall into "cognitive panic" (155) as the post-humanities are for her already defined by an extraordinary vitality, which she associates not so much with the classical disciplines but with the alternative definitions of the human provided through the invention of new interdisciplinary areas which call themselves "studies" (gender, feminism, ethnicity, cultural studies, post-colonial, media and new media etc). Braidotti identifies in the so-called "studies" the rise of a counter-discourse, marked by "methodological inventions and a critical genealogical approach" – although one, it could be argued, not immune from the "shallow neo-empiricist" temptation. New "trans-disciplinary discourses" have thus already started to emerge around the edges of the classical Humanities and across the disciplines drawing on "enviromental evolutionary, cognitive, bio-genetic and digital" theories (146). The posthumanities call for poly-lingual universities where new fields can emerge (such as Humanistic Informatics or Digital Humanities and Cognitive or Neural Humanities, enviromental and sustainable humanities, and bio-genetic and

global humanities [184]). This "innovative interdisciplinary scholarship" is "an expression of the vitality of the field, not of its crisis" (155) and demonstrates that the humanities are already in part adapting "to the changing structures of materialism itself". New feminist scholarship (from Luciana Parisi and Patricia T. Clough to Elisabeth Grosz and Karen Barad) is called on as evidence of the creative reworkings of new concepts of matter as both "autopoietic and self-organizing" (158). Controversially, but appropriately, Braidotti here comes forward with a full-fledged new normative model for knowledge production, which she defines as the methodology of the posthumanities: cartographic accuracy, critique of power, non-linearity as method, combining creativity and critique, fostering an "ecosophical sense of community" and "embracing the multiple opportunities offered by the posthuman condition" (172).

The Posthuman is a courageous and ambitious book which not only provides important alternative genealogies for the crisis of humanism, but also proposes new directions for the (post)humanities by drawing on existing transdisciplinary knowledges. In reading the book I was struck by the strong emphasis on Europe as the origin and subject of humanism, which, as such, is dramatically affected by its crisis. It is befitting that Braidotti's embrace of situated politics should make her (central) European location a part of the position she speaks from. As a situated theorist, writing, like Haraway before her, from "the belly of the beast", Braidotti seems to me to speak particularly of Europe and to Europe: to its universities in crisis, to its dwindling departments of humanities, to its institutions and funding bodies, to its population of increasingly nomadic and precarious intellectuals. The decline of humanism, a European invention, as "ethical and moral project" strikes at the core of European identity and its relation to the world: its decline directly affects the political predicament of contemporary Europe caught in the terrible pincers of neoliberal market economics, xenophobic nationalism and terrorism (152). Braidotti's book can thus be interpreted as a call for a European intellectual movement which would combine a post-humanism of difference (as in Seyla Benhabib's notion of alternative cosmopolitanisms of migrants, "refugees and stateless people" [51]) and an ecosophic concern with natureculture or zoe. This will mean finding a new ground for an idea of Europe sitting uneasily between the old "blood and soil" nationalisms and new formations which emerge by questioning its boundaries (as for example in the notion of the Mediterranean as "mutable space" of crossings obscured by the European discourse).[8] Unlike modern humanism, furthermore, we can hardly claim for Europe a leading role in the conceptualization and practice of such ecological posthumanism of difference. What kind of difference would it make with relation for example to an African or Indian or Japanese posthumanism? Finally, if the posthuman is a "collective gesture of self-styling" what kind of subjectivities will it have to draw upon and construct in order to materialize its "shared dream" or "consensual hallucination" of the post-human (185)? How is it going to relate, for example, to new forms of

[8] Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2008).

mass intellectuality produced by the entanglement of social cooperation, competitive individualism and radical precarisation as they unfold in the European space?

I also find myself particularly challenged by her call for monist vitalist-materialism as a new ontological foundation for the post-humanities. Can we really pose vital-materialist monism as "the common basis for all posthumanities"? Is it possible or desirable to have one ontology defining the foundation of the post-humanities as a whole? Political vitalism, after all, has already been subject to critique, and it is far from being the only option for scholars wishing to engage in post-humanistic research.[9] Even within the most theoretical branches of the "studies", approaches based in phenomenology, historical materialism, speculative realism, pan-psychism, eliminationism, the "labour point of view" but also new "rationalist and abstract" feminisms seem to push in different directions.[10] The abstractions of mathematics but also a kind of neo-Leibnizian and neo-Whiteheadian genealogy of digitalization and computation also pose alternative ontologies for current research.[11] As sympathetic as I feel towards monist vital-materialism, I also think that the matter is far from being settled. It is not a matter of choosing one over the other (which we do anyway) or falling back into postmodernist relativism (which has become unviable), but acknowledging that anti-foundationalism is something that no contemporary science (either "hard" or "soft") can really completely do without. And yet, the danger of a vitalist-materialist orthodoxy taking over the Humanities seems remote when considering the much more concrete danger of the shallow neo-empiricisms Braidotti rightly warns about – or even sterile returns to a conservative humanism which also affect some feminist readings of biotechnologies. *The Posthuman* sets the pace for a hopefully infectious mood which reminds us that the crisis of Man does not need to result in a surrender to the hegemony of data-driven science and that there are many resources in the humanities which can help us to follow a different route. In this sense, this is a book that seems to me to point us to the right direction: in the posthuman predicament which the humanities find themselves in, lively "methodological inventions and critical genealogies" (such as Braidotti's radical posthumanism) are definitely to be preferred to the *rigor mortis* of disciplinary conformity.

[9] Alberto Toscano, "Vital Strategies: Maurizio Lazzarato and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Capitalism", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24.6 (2007) 71–91.

[10] On the labour point of view on our relationship with planetary forces see Mackenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015); on speculative realisms, panpsychism and eliminationism see Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); for a new formulation of a 'rational and abstract' feminism see Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation,* 2015 (http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/).

[11] Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, Space* (Cambridge, Mass., and Sidney: The MIT Press, 2013).

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Abstracts

Federica Caporaso
Alien Evolution(s): Race, Cyber-Sex and Genetic Engineering in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy

Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-1989) offers the reader a far-sighted vision of a shocking encounter between humanity and a bio-technologically advanced race of aliens called Oankali. This article analyses how the aliens modify the established modalities of sexual coupling with the aim of mixing with humans and giving birth to a new, queer and multiracial species that is explicitly echoed in Donna Haraway's theorization of the "cyborg". The figure of the cyborg was, for Haraway, strongly intertwined with the history of women of colour, who can be themselves seen as cyborg identities. In this respect, Haraway stresses how cyborg writing is, for women of colour, strongly related to the action of "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other". Specifically, Butler's cyborg trilogy focuses on the Oankali, who introduce a completely new modality of mating akin to bacterial and cyber-sex, all by operating from the standpoint of an anti-racist evolutionary science. By drawing on Luciana Parisi's notion of "abstract sex" (2004) and by referring to Gloria Anzaldúa's figure of the "mestiza" (1987), this article examines how Butler's futuristic world gives posthumanism an anti-racist founding myth. In the post-human universe invented by Butler bodies are able to connect to one another and exchange flows of genetic information. Furthermore, mates are united by strong, indissoluble chemical bonds that, ironically, prove to be much stronger than traditional marriages: this article especially focuses on how the new, post-human hybrid race changes the given modalities of sex in order to create a utopian, feminist and antiracist vision of sexual pleasure. This article examines how the Oankali create a new world in which a post-human race can develop and how the Ooloi, special genetic engineers, challenge any idea of racial purity. The article focuses on how the new modalities of sex they introduce mobilizes a feminist, queer desire, also by exploring the interrelation among natural and sexual selection as analysed by Elizabeth Grosz (2004), placing a special attention to the relation existing between technology, science and race.

Roberta Colavecchio
Eco-Art Machines: A Chaosmotic Perspective on Postcolonial Capitalism

Putting the complex debate about ecology (for which the essay will draw on the transversal and networked vision theorized by Félix Guattari) in dialogue with Rosi Braidotti's neomaterialist, postanthopocentric and zoepolitical perpective on contemporary posthuman condition, the article will attempt to reflect on the dynamics of contemporary postcolonial capitalism. The paper will propose a posthuman analysis of a series of works by the art collective Mongrel and its spin-off YoHa, which focus on hegemonic ecologies of power connected to mineral matters that are central to the assemblage of technological devices: *Tantalum Memorial* (Mongrel, 2008), *Aluminium* (YoHa, 2008), *Coal Fired Computers* (YoHa, 2010). The first an installation centered on telephone communication, re-cycling human voices in recorded bits of information; the second a graphic book and a video, compos(t)ing images and data debris of archival nets; the last one an installation of intra-acting human (lung), natural (coal) and technological (computer) matters, they all enact a process of framing, de-framing and re-framing, unfolding as re-cycling processes of human as well as non-human matter. This posthuman entangled matter shows a real as well as virtual complex economic, cultural and political eco-system where hegemonic dynamics of power unfold. In the light of the contemporary debate about art and the politics of ecology, drawing on Guattari's theoretical reflections on a new esthetic paradigm, traceable in Mongrel's and YoHa's art projects, how can we address the question of ecology so that it

could help not only the understanding of postcolonial capitalism but also its re-thinking in the frame of a *chaosmotic* vision of culture, where new, unprecedented subjectivities can arise and a practice of political regeneration can be enacted?

Giuseppe De Riso

Gaming Gender: Virtual Embodiment as a Synaesthetic Experience

Cultural and Post-Colonial Studies have long identified ocularcentrism, or the privilege of vision in culture and thought, as one of the prime causes behind the tendency to manipulate and categorize matter, bodies and meanings. This paper examines the power of computer-generated images to produce a kind of digital interaction which upsets gendered visual and listening conventions, such as those traditionally experienced in cinema. The article will take into consideration Valve's *Portal* (2007), a first person videogame which proposes a 'topological' way of seeing relying on the synaesthetic working of the human sensorium. Images do not simply represent objects and places, but allow for countless configurations of space. The visual effort to confront with images of pure potential brings about an affective intensification of sensory faculties, especially of the senses of touch and hearing. As a consequence, images are endowed with tactile qualities which make possible the absorption and propagation of sound stimuli. In the game, the 'haptic' quality of images works together with acousmatic resonances of female voice in order to recreate a hybrid embodied condition which dissolves the male-female binarism and, in so doing, challenges gendered cultural assumptions and established spectatorial positions.

Beatrice Ferrara

"A Mirror Permutation of the Nation": Technology and the Cultural Politics of Race in DJ Spooky's *Re-birth of a Nation*

On its 100th anniversary, D.W. Griffith's silent drama *The Birth of Nation* (1915) is still attracting critical attention, both as a masterpiece of cinematic technique and as an infamous racially biased account of the birth of US society. This article presents a critical reading of *The Birth of Nation* through its re-take performed by the African-American DJ and conceptual artist Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky between 2004 and 2008 in his audio-video practice *Re-birth of Nation*. Drawing from Cultural Studies and Media Theory, this article investigates the intersection between technique, practices of visual memorialization and racialization, and the politics of perception in both artworks. In the first part of the article, I present a critical analysis of *The Birth of a Nation* as a 'hegemonic narration', in which avant-garde aesthetical innovation is put at the service of a racialized account of history. In the second part of the article, I turn my attention to *Re-birth of a Nation*, by considering how experimental practices and the techniques of DJ culture may help transform 'History' (official history) into a series of (unauthorised) histories.

Oana Parvan

Beyond the 'Arab Spring': New Media, Art and Counter-Information in Post-Revolutionary North Africa

The 'Arab Spring' possesses an unexplored discursive dimension made of stratified stereotypical approaches and assumptions linked to the 'Arab' world and its horizons of political agency. In the aftermath of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, in a period of renewed censorship and instability, multiple actors coming from citizen journalism and activist/artistic backgrounds collaborate in experimenting post-revolutionary counter-power. The drive to re-appropriate the revolutionary narrative and give continuity to its legacy in the 'transitional'/post-dictatorship period is marked by an all pervading intertwining of art and counter-information, in collectives focusing on media (such as the Egyptian Mosreen), street art (such as the Tunisian Ahl al Kahf), journalism (Inkyfada) or

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theatre (Corps Citoyen) projects, as well as for the emerging independent video-makers (such as Ridha Tlili). My article intends to interrogate their interaction with the dominant representation of the uprisings.

Annalisa Piccirillo

A Mediterranean Matri-Archive: Choreographic Fragments of Emerging Corporealities

This paper aims to refigure the question of archive into a gender-critical perspective, and proposes the theorization of a Matri-Archive: an imaginary place of methodological analysis, a performance-zone which serves to retrieve the corporeal memories of women's creativity emerging from the liquid architecture of the Mediterranean sea. I rely on the philosophical-theoretical debate over the 'archive fever', which today still affects many voices of Dance and Performance Studies, in order to discuss the presumed ephemerality of a dance-event, and thus its (im-)possible archivalization. I envision myself an archivist who after experiencing the choreo-graphies produced by three female Mediterranean and postcolonial artists – N. Belaza; G. McMillen; N. Boukhari – attempts a series of archival exercises to argue the technical dissemination, and the poetical return, of their gestures in form of choreographic fragments. This writing virtually lands in Algeria, Turkey and Syria; from these Mediterranean edges, the three 'archons' begin to explore the multiple senses of 'what' a female corporeality can 'do/become' via the subversive power of dance language. A fragmentary consultation is here offered as an analytical and choreo-political practice, both to present some examples of female agency and eventually to state the urgency of acquiring alternative visions for alternative archives.

Stamatia Portanova

A Postcolonial Cybersemiotics: Moving-With Shobana Jeyasingh's Chaosmopolitan Choreographies

This article discusses the articulation of postcolonial thought through the expressive form of choreography, and its relation with a variegated geographic and cultural dimension. It analyses the works of Anglo-Indian choreographer and performer Shobana Jeyasingh, particularly focusing on her use of the Bharata Natyam Indian dance, a technique consisting of detailed hands and feet gestures performed while standing on a bent-knees position. By drawing on Charles S. Peirce's semiotics, on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy, and on the cybernetic theories of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, the article investigates how dance can be considered as a technique rather than a language: a movement technology producing sensations and meanings at the same time. By combining the classicity of Indian tradition with that of Western contemporary dance, Ruma Devi with Merce Cunningham, the purity of the dancing body with its mathematical patterns, and by incorporating video technology to the live performances, Jeyasingh's choreographies are able to suggest a cybernetic sense of sacredness, intended as a material connection between the dancing body and its (past and future) spatiotemporal enviroment(s).

Michaela Quadraro

Ghosting the Postcolonial Archive: Digital Technologies and Diasporic Visualities in Contemporary Black British Art

The essay focuses on the critical articulation of a black diaspora in Europe, through the investigation of two works of contemporary British artists: Keith Piper's digital video *Ghosting the Archive* (2005) and Sonia Boyce's exhibition "Scat" (2013). In his installation Piper intervenes materially in the gaps between the rigid limits of conventional and

systematised archives: he opens the boxes of Birmingham Central Library and develops a work that reactivates a concatenation of forgotten experiences of migration. In her exhibition "Scat" Boyce shows three pieces that refer to the unconventional improvisation in jazz and develop a critical dispersal of history: what her works have in common is an interest in the voice, in terms of authority and resistance, and in the reconfiguration of the archive as an aspiration for the future, rather than a mere preservation of the past. Challenging the consecrated reverence of institutionalised archival practices, Piper and Boyce elaborate alternatives devotional collections that are not relegated to a distant and unquestionable past. Enhanced by the digital forms of mediation and technology, their art projects open to the multiple movements of cultural identity and constantly remind us of the actual conditions of mutation, emergence and circulation of diasporic formations.

Roberto Terracciano

Coded Borderscapes: Locative Media, Memory and Migration in ManifestAR's *Border Memorial*

Augmented Reality technologies challenge the conception of the virtual as a transcendental elsewhere. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it, the virtual is immanent in the real (Grosz 2001). The article will take into account the Augmented Reality Art of Mark Skwarek and his so-called AR interventions designed for smartphones screens, in order to explore how the virtual and the real unbind each other and how matter releases its potential. Mark Skwarek's virtual interventions try to restore the seamlessness of the borderland and reterritorialize the border by means of topological distortion. In US/Iraqi War Memorial, the artist overlays a virtual necrogeographic map of Iraq designed by a network of burial sites of deceased Americans soldiers and Iraqi civilians during the Second Gulf War. In the Border Memorial: La Frontera de los Muertos, the traditional Mexican festivity El dia de los muertos has been uncannily translated into a memorial that unveils the scope of the loss of life and reveals the places were human remains have been found along the border. Skwarek's art comes alive on smartphones screens as tridimensional coffins or Oaxacan traditional calaca skeletons: these objects are digitally designed and superimposed in the actual field of view to revive the humanity and reality of the immanent Other (Mezzadra 2012). The two interventions display the sites where memory turns into matter and vice versa: by following Homi Bhabha's Location of Culture (2004), it will be argued that the virtual image is the blasphemous cultural transduction of the physical space through which newness enters the world.

Viola Sarnelli

Al Jazeera's *The Stream*: Digital and Diasporic Geographies Beyond the West

A few months after the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolts, the satellite news channel Al Jazeera English, broadcasting from the Middle-Eastern region for an international public, launched 'The Stream', presented as "A television show based on a social media community". By integrating the social media into the news production process, The Stream is expected, according to its authors, to transfer the geographic and cultural variety of the internet into a television format. This paper aims to explore how a transnational media like Al Jazeera English uses the convergence between television and social networks to 'give voice' to the changing relations of power and cultural influence between the West and the Rest, particularly through the category of the 'diaspora'. By analyzing some episodes of the program, this paper will look at how in The Stram this term, loaded with historic and cultural meaning in migration studies and media- and postcolonial theory, becomes part of the everyday language of a multi-media community. The article analyzes how the term 'diaspora' is used and transformed within The Stream media environment: as a field for 'social change'; as an element contributing to discussion, democracy, modernization; as a

key aspect to elaborate the cultural complexity of contemporary societies.

Ebru Yetiskin

Paratactic Media in Social Networks: Emerging Forms of Resistance to
Algorithmic Power in Artistic Practices

This article deploys the concept of 'paratactic media' to define emerging practices which exploit the logic of algorithmic governance in subversive artistic interventions as a means to expose and contest authoritarian regimes of power. By means of an engagement with the works of Istanbul-based artists during the 2013 Gezi Park Resistance in Turkey, the essay explores the ways in which paratactic media are able to uncover and remediate the invisible layers of algorithmic regulation through aesthetics of friction, cacophony, foolishness, depletion and waste.

Notes on Contributors

Federica Caporaso has a Master Degree in Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". In her thesis on "Monstrous Motherhood in Literature, Cinema and Art", she focused on the interrelation existing between motherhood and technology, also by highlighting the uncanny aspects of pregnancy. Currently she is involved in a Fair Trade organization in Malta, taking care of the educational activities and awareness campaigns organized by the cooperative.

Roberta Colavecchio is a PhD researcher in Postcolonial and Cultural Studies at University of Naples "L'Orientale", Italy. Her academic formation focuses on the intersection of postcolonial issues of migration, capitalism and globalization and those of Cultural Studies (class, race, gender, sexuality) and New Media Theory ones (cybernetics, cyberculture, network society). More recently, her research has addressed to contemporary debate on the relationship between art and the politics of ecology connected to recent theorizations of New Materialism in the frame of postcolonial capitalism and neoliberalism. She contributes to an Italian quarterly bilingual (Italian/English) journal of arts and culture (EQUIPèCO, www.equipeco.it), for which she edits the section 'Technoculture'. She also works as curator of artistic projects and performances.

Giuseppe De Riso is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where he completed his Ph.D. in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World with a thesis entitled "The Body Expanded: Agency, Representation and Affect in Tridimensional Videogames". He has authored the monograph *Affective Maps and Bio-mediated Bodies in Tridimensional Videogames of the Anglophone World*, and the essay "'Negative' Heterotopias: Opacity in Virtual Worlds and Social Networks". He is currently investigating the emergence of violence in South Asia and the complex nexus between art, politics, technology and the media.

Beatrice Ferrara (Ph.D.) is an Affiliated Fellow at the ICI Kulturlabor, Berlin, Germany. Her research interests include sonic- and cyber-cultures of the black diaspora; theories of affect and post-representation through images and sounds, especially in relation to race; media theory from a post-colonial perspective; museums and art-working practices in the context of the contemporary global migrations. In 2012-14, she was an Appointed Researcher & Project Assistant within the EU Project "MeLa* – European Museums in an age of Migrations" (FP7) at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" (Italy), where she also taught "Media and Cultural Studies". She was Visiting Doctoral Student at Goldsmiths University of London (2009). She is the author of several essays and articles, a translator of cultural theory from English into Italian, the editor of *Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices* (2012) and the co-editor of *Postcolonial Matters* (forthcoming). She serves as Editor for the *Critical Contemporary Culture* Journal (London School of Economics, UK) and for the OLH – Open Library of Humanities Project (Lincoln University, UK).

Oana Parvan
Oana Parvan is a Romanian researcher living in London. She studied Philosophy and Semiotics at the University of Bologna (Italy) and is currently a doctoral student at the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths with an AHRC Block Grant Partnership. Has published articles on *Il Manifesto*, *Alfabeta2* and *th-rough.eu*. Her present research explores the relationship between forms of cross-class struggles linked to the Tunisian revolution and the way they are being framed by Tunisian video-artists.

Annalisa Piccirillo completed the Ph.D. in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World in 2012, with a dissertation entitled "Disseminated Choreographies: Female Body-Archives". Today she is a research fellow based at the Department of Human

and Social Sciences, University of Naples "L'Orientale", where she carries out the project: "New practices of memories: Mediterranean Matri-Archives". She combines gender critical approaches with a deconstructionist perspective in order to investigate contemporary performance-based languages. She is member of the "Choreography and Corporeality Working Group" (IFTR/FIRT); and is teaching assistant in "English Literature".

Michaela Quadraro holds a Ph.D. in "Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World" from the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where she is a researcher and a member of the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies. She is also involved in the Research Project MeLa* *European Museums in an age of migrations*. Her research interests focus on contemporary art and cinema through the critical approach of postcolonial theory and visual culture. Among her works, are *L'arte digitale postcoloniale. Uno studio sull'opera di Isaac Julien e Trinh T. Minh-h*a (2012) and the co-editorship of *The Postcolonial Museum. The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History* (2014).

Stamatia Portanova teaches Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Her research focuses on philosophy, digital culture and aesthetics. She is the author of *Moving without a Body. Digital Philosophy and Choreographic Thoughts* (MIT Press, "Technologies of Lived Abstraction" series), and of several articles published in books and journals such as *Body and Society, Computational Culture, Space and Culture, Fibreculture, Angelaki, Anglistica and Inflexions*. She is a member of the Senselab, a Montrèal-based interdisciplinary laboratory on research-creation directed by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, focusing on intersections between philosophy, technology and art.

Viola Sarnelli, after a bachelor degree in Media Studies in Bologna (2005) and a master's degree in Intercultural Communication in Naples (2009), earned a Ph.D. in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies at "L'Orientale" University, Naples (2013), with a thesis on the news channel Al Jazeera English. As a journalist Viola collaborated with local and national newspapers, radios and TV stations, and is and co-author of collective books of reportages and interviews. Her first book is "Voci da Sud. Al Jazeera English e i flussi delle notizie internazionali" (L'Orientale University Press, 2014). She is a member of the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", and she is currently a Battuta post-doc fellow at Mostaganem University, Algeria.

Ebru Yetiskin is an Istanbul based academic, art critic and curator. She studied Radio-TV-Cinema as a BA in Istanbul University, attended the joint MA on "Science, Technology and Society" in Université Louis Pasteur and Istanbul Technical University in 2001, and completed her Ph.D. in Sociology in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 2008 after conducting a research in Centre Sociologie de L'Innovation in Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris as a visiting scholar. Since 2002, she has been working as a researcher in Istanbul Technical University and teaching sociology and media in The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. She has curated an exhibition, Cacophony, in Istanbul in 2013.