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**Body, Society, History:
Enacting materialisms through performances**

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1. Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Overview of the dissertation

1.1.1. The aims

The dissertation starts locally. It starts with my observations on and engagements with contemporary artistic performances, a loosely defined category at the intersection of theatre/performing arts, performance art and media art. The dissertation explores performance as a form of thinking by itself which gives an access to non-representative forms of knowledge and reveals an immanent world in its making. The ‘(en)actors,’ as we will see, are as much the performers as the materials they choose to work with, embodied in the materiality of language, biological materials, machines, weretigers and vampires. Thinking with the performances as they unfold with the variant sets of ‘(en)actors,’ I inquire into the social and political contexts in which they are situated to launch critical investigations. The aim of the dissertation is to take the performances as enactments of different theories of materialism, to provide conceptual tools through which both material ‘things’ and socio-political processes could be understood in emergent, relational and dynamic ways. Hence, the dissertation rests on two interconnected pillars, on the one hand it takes the performances seriously as an immanent mode of thinking, and on the other it traces the social-political imaginaries they enact, expounded in a materialist philosophical inquiry into bodies, society and history.

1.1.2. The structure and organisation of the dissertation

The dissertation is organised in six chapters. Following the introduction chapter that lays the theoretical foundation, each of the five chapters that make up the body of the dissertation is dedicated to one artist and her or his respective works (with the exception that chapter three focuses on one artist and one artist collective). Each of the works, along with the historical, social and political contexts it is situated in, creates a constellation that as much demands rigorous analysis as it creates transversal connections with other constellations. What they all share is a practice of immanent unfolding of events, a focus on tactility and materiality, and sharpened sensibilities for the socio-political meanings resulting from the movements and conjunctures of the materials.

The way the chapters are structured, or more precisely, stacked upon each other, and the way they interact with one another is inspired by the ‘plateaus’ of Deleuze and Guattari. Each chapter has its own movements and speed, as it tries to untangle different modes of political and historical codification and the production of subjects. Yet at the same time, they are interconnected by lines of flights that traverse different chapters. Sometimes the theoretical lines of flight work tangentially to the artistic works, and by so doing they enlarge the context under which the works could be viewed and map out hidden connections among the works. Sometimes they work paratactically, creating ‘contrasts’ as Whitehead terms it, and the patterned contrasts increase the ‘intensity of feeling’ of the experience (Whitehead 1929, 252). Sometimes, concrete figures like Pyotr Kropotkin and Antonin Artaud, or metaphorical figures like the schizo/tiger/vampire meander in passages connecting different chapters.

The introduction chapter builds the theoretical foundation of the dissertation. The overarching question in all chapters goes: how are bodies imbricated in societies and histories? And how do societies and histories mark on the bodies? Even though my working methodology is akin to the rhizome or slime mould, that is to say, I start with analysing different artistic works locally and then a network of lines of thoughts emerge out of it, I find it useful to set forth a few theoretical parameters. As such, the first chapter is conceived as interlocking and interwoven threads of theoretical queries that lead to thorough explorations in the chapters to come. I will chart a conceptual ground based on the various strands of materialisms, starting from what can be generally categorised as new materialisms, by studying the efficacy of matter and materialities, emergence, process and self-organisation, and how this can be implicated in a critique of reductionism. I will then bring this into interlocution with the classical form of materialism, namely historical materialism, with the aim to tease out a materialist philosophy on history and politics. With the materialist theoretical foundation, I will outline the account of

history and politics through desire and movements following Deleuze and Guattari. As the dissertation evolves, I will interject the theoretical frame with references from East Asian context – though sometimes also with references from the Middle East, Russia or South America, as the world does not simply turn around the East-West axis. Sometimes they provide a counterpoint of non-essentialising differences, and sometimes they substantiate what is mutually shared between the cultures. The introduction ends with a note on the ways in which I bring these theories into the dissertation, and how they do not squarely fit into either particularity or universality, but are rather implicated in political ramifications of gazes and perspectives.

Chapter two ‘Taqiyyah and the Materialism of Language: On Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*’ examines the politics of language and how the materiality of language could transgress political boundaries by focusing on Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s performative lecture *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself* (2014-ongoing). Aptly combining video, installation and performative formats, Lawrence Abu Hamdan has created a rich body of works that often reveal the political dimension of language and speech. The chapter investigates, in particular, the live performative lecture *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*, which draws on *taqiyyah*, an old esoteric Shi’a Islamic jurisprudence practiced by the Druze Islamic minority, whereby a believing individual can deny his faith or commit otherwise illegal acts while they are at risk of persecution or in a condition of statelessness. The artist analyses various moments involving language and speech act in the Druze community, such as in the Islamic conversion and the communication between mother and baby through the lens of *taqiyyah*, which reveals the paradoxical structure of language and language in its pre-semantics instance. The application of *taqiyyah* suggests transformations of rules that challenge the structural divide between the form of expression and form of content in language. Furthermore, drawing on Massumi’s notion of ‘non-sensuous similarity,’ the alignment of *taqiyyah* to the ‘sense-perceived meaning’ highlights the dynamics of the immanence that constantly differentiates into language and expression. The case of onomatopoeia, beyond its trivial daily usage such as in describing the dog’s bark, is studied in a transcultural context and suggests rather that it is another mode for things to exist. This brings the materiality of language to the fore and situates it in pre-personal and impersonal expressions. Finally, this leads to a conceptual comparison to Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology, which reveals how *taqiyyah* may be seen to reclaim a consciousness pertinent to the smooth space, hence avidly transforming the condition of language and producing political efficacies.

Chapter three ‘Codification, Desire, and Transgenetic Technology: On Vanouse and Spiess/Strecker’s works’ continues the problematisation of language as a signifier with a different set of materials, namely with bioart that deals with DNA technology. Following Luciana Parisi, the chapter traces the manifestations of the feminine intensive desire, a desire for multiple connections and a desire to become on the micro and macro levels, in physical realities and in social realms, as well as in the ancient and the digital-technological forms of life. With it, a linear natural history can be recast into a non-linear hypernatural history, which in turn challenges notions we take for granted from popular science. The works of Vanouse and Spiess/Strecker offer different critical approaches to this hypernature. The DNA fingerprint artifice crafted in Paul Vanouse’s *Suspect Inversion Center* (2011) challenges the process of overcodification that imposes in a top-down fashion a signifier function upon the DNA, such as in the case of O. J. Simpson. A genealogy of biological sex evinces that the scientific and cultural discursive organisation codifies what was indeterminate body-sexes in meiotic reproduction into a filiative relation of two-parent sex. The study of linguistics firmly situated in a philosophy of immanence sheds light on the mutual relation between the complex state of things/content and the discursive construct/expression, which in the case of DNA, translates into the mutual deterritorialisation between cytoplasmic realities/chromosomes and phenotypes/genotypes. As we move headlong into the age of genetic engineering, we witness the overcodification at work again. On the biodigital stratum, it renders everything as information, coinciding with the capitalistic machine’s tendency to subsume life itself as labour and to reduce energy expenditure in increasingly virtualised productions and reproductions. Biopolitics becomes necropolitics, but the definition of organic death is once again challenged by the feminine intensive desire on the micro level of mitochondrial reproduction and complex chain reactions unforeseeable in transgenetic operations. Klaus Spiess/Lucie Strecker’s *Hare’s Blood +* (2014) taps into the biodigital capture of life coupled with the question of value production and market, as the artists enact and animate an organism – an artifice – whose inorganic becoming overflows our anthropocentric logic of organic death, exhibiting a feminine intensive desire on the biophysical level. By way of multiperspectivism, the critical intervention of *Hare’s Blood +* returns us to the human realm, with all the socio-cultural and techno-discursive implications, in recognising our own potential of becoming within the hypernature we co-inhabit with other forms of beings.

Chapter four ‘Strange Intimacies Caught between East Asian Feminism and Animism: On Geumhyung Jeong’s choreography’ focuses on Korean choreographer Geumhyung Joeng’s solo works in which she engages in precisely executed and laborious ways with a wide range

of machines, including hydraulic excavators, refitted fitness training machines, dummy figures for medical usage and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation equipment. The repetitive, medical or mechanical procedures she performs give way to moments of strange intimacies and with sexual connotations. The chapter uses relationality as a critical lens to examine what is assumed in the reactions that Jeong's works often invite – that she is an East Asian feminist or that she works with machines in an animistic way. The relational efficacy in my analysis sheds light on the differential differences concerning Confucian womanhood and what can be tentatively called 'Confucian feminisim' following Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee. Rosenlee's historical research charts the lived and symbolic realities of East Asian womanhood beyond the divide between the biologically 'natural' woman and the 'cultural' man, and highlights the praxis of reciprocity as fundamental in the relational network. In a similar fashion, contra the naïve understanding of animism based on a presumed subject-object dichotomy, what is suggested in Jeong's works is an animism favouring the relational co-emergence with the man-machine assemblage, and the embodied reality of the body bringing higher-order resonances together. The relationality affirms the turn from the epistemological to the ontological, and hence deepens the discussion of multiperspectivism.

Chapter five 'Immanence, Performance and History: On Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers*' examines Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen's theatre production *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014), which retells the history of Southeast Asia through the lens of the Malaya tiger, based on the transmogrification between tiger and man situated in a world of univocity. Presented as a complex installation or theatre machine featuring various machines being animated at times, and actors narrating, singing and chanting, *Ten Thousand Tigers* journeys through history without following a linear timeline: while the tiger symbolises a cosmological order deeply rooted in traditional Malayan belief systems and eco-philosophy, it also synthesises strong, new symbols in the encounter between the British coloniser and the tiger in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, the nickname of Malaya Tiger given to the Japanese general during World War II when Japan occupied Southeast Asia, and the haunting communist history where the party leader appeared to bear many names and faces. *Ten Thousand Tigers* provokes a reading of historical figures through the continuum of matters in flux, their synthesis and transformations. The multi-layered, 'anachronistic' worlds of Southeast Asia presented in the work thus enact an intensive perspective of time and history. History so viewed is recast, following Deleuze and Guattari, as the organisation of desire, from the free and connective desire in the primitive societies, to the taming of desires in the despotic society and further to the once again dislodged flows of desire that seek to self-perpetuate in the conjunctive logic of

capitalism. It produces the schizo, or the tiger, at the same time as an ancient figuration and as a modern/contemporary embodiment of the free flow of desire. The chapter also deals with animism and technology. As a continuation to the discussion on animism and multiperspectivism, this chapter also shows how univocity is at work in the material sense, which is to say, how things are not the same, but the way they exist can be said in the same way.

The last chapter, chapter six ‘Manchukuo, Capitalism and the East Asian Modern: Transhistorical Desire in *Kishi the Vampire*’ takes this reflection on desire in history further. The chapter focuses on Chinese Australian artist Royce Ng’s *Kishi the Vampire* (2016), a lecture performance on the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo (1932-1945) and its finance minister Nobusuke Kishi (1896–1987). The article investigates the historical question of nationalism and Pan-Asianism in Manchukuo accompanied by philosophical reflections from the Kyoto School thinkers and their Chinese contemporaries. It traces the role opium played in the economy and Kishi’s adoption of state-guided capitalism, which has far-reaching implications for East Asia and Southeast Asia until today, and further helps to unpack trade protectionism in the world at large. At the same time, the chapter follows the materialist account of history and highlights the mutation of desire under capitalism. The flow of decoded desire in conjunctive capitalism disrupts the man-heaven alignment in a traditional society, manifesting itself in the perversion of desire in the *hentai*, or erotic-grotesque culture, the price of which is life itself subsumed in necropolitics. Appropriating this aesthetics of *hentai* culture and focusing on the disenfranchised bodies of the opiated Chinese and Korean coolies, Royce Ng’s performance aptly enacts this flow of desire in the figuration of the vampire.

The last chapter brings the previous chapters in convergence and concludes with a personal note on the journey of the dissertation.

The overview of the chapters already evinces their interconnectedness. The aim of the dissertation is not to establish one absolute theoretical framework that can explain away the questions raised. Rather, it presents an assemblage of interdisciplinary materialist practices that serve as interpretative and interventionist frames of socio-political structures. While respecting the formalities of academic writing, I intend to craft the dissertation in such a way that the reader may start from any chapter and go back and forth, or jump upwards and downwards among the plateaus. In line with the academic standard, the style of the writing is concise and analytical. At the same time, I also hope they paint a vivid picture of the artistic works I engage with, and provide useful resources in larger cultural, political and historical contexts.

As the chapters are dedicated to the enactment of material efficacies thwarting the political, economic and scientific-discursive capture of life, the introduction of my theoretical foundation first plunges into the world of matters.

1.2. New Materialisms and Performance

1.2.1. New materialisms

This part surveys various strands of new materialist theory that are relevant for the dissertation. As we will see later in section 1.3, there is no necessary rupture between new materialism and the more classical, historical variations of materialism. The history of capitalism and schizophrenia, brilliantly analysed by Deleuze and Guattari by way of the organisation of bodies and desire, provides a way to mediate the new and classical materialisms, and lays foundation to almost all the chapters. Manuel De Landa's formulation of the new materialism, similarly, focuses on the dynamic morphogenesis as a historical process that is constitutive of *the material world* (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 15). I will dedicate them to different subsections to keep the theoretical frame compact and clear.

Pitted against dualisms of matter and mind, body and soul, nature and culture, things and language, new materialist thinking is firmly rooted in the philosophy of immanence. Whereas the dualist structures establish concepts by playing them against each other in a set of predestined, negative relations, new materialist thinking structures them in affirmative relations, thereby achieving an immanent way of conceptualising difference (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 115-136).

Nature, in the mind of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers, is objectified as something exterior to Man and so stands opposite to Culture. The Romantics' expressions of endearment to Mother Nature, recognising the creative and the unknown aspect of the outer world as it does, lapsed into a melancholic self-pity of inadequacy vis-à-vis the very creative force. Spinoza's *Natura Naturans*, or 'nature naturing', posits nature – in his term 'God', but strictly a non-personified God – as the infinite substance possessed of infinite power that we are all part of (Spinoza 1992). This line of thinking has regained currency in the wake of poststructuralist thinking and ecological distress. The epidemic of the systematic exclusion and othering of nature results not only in an impasse of conceptualising being in its changing environment, it also feeds into the incessant capitalist machine with its exploitation of natural resources reaching a historical height in the age of the Anthropocene. A similar set of

dichotomies is found in the body versus the mind. However, an escape from the Cartesian coordinates of mind over body is no strange to Western intellectual tradition. From Spinoza's parallelism taking what body and mind register as respective expressions of the same reality under different 'attributes' (Spinoza 1992), to Deleuze's reworking on Spinoza (Deleuze 1988), there is a lineage that takes thought as emerging from bodily and affective encounters not by matching pre-set ideas but by being exposed to the sensible.

In trying to conceptualise difference in an affirmative and dynamic light, in other words, in accounting for the self-difference of matter, the various strands of new materialism see matter not as inert but more elusive, and exhibiting self-organising properties, as well as immanently imbued with capacities to act and be acted upon. For Jane Bennett, the 'vitality' of matter implies the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own (Bennett 2009). In a short essay called *Immanence: A Life*, Gilles Deleuze proposes the concept of 'a life,' with the indefinite article suggesting an 'indeterminate vitality' and a 'pure a-subjective current' (Deleuze 2005b). 'A life' points to what *A Thousand Plateaus* describes as 'matter-movement' or 'matter-energy,' a 'matter in variation that enters assemblages and leaves them' (Bennett 2009, 54).

Many scholars have pointed out the affinity between materialist thinking and recent scientific advancements. Chaos theory, for example, describes how apparently random effects may have an extremely complex, nonlinear provenance, and complexity theory examines how unpredictable events can catapult systems into novel configurations (Coole 2010, 13). Bringing theory and science into fruitful interlocution, Deleuze scholar John Protevi sees emergence articulated in Deleuze as producing 'the ontology of a world able to yield the results forthcoming in complexity theory' (Protevi 2006, 19). Massumi argues that Deleuze, along with Bergson and Spinoza, can be profitably read together with recent theories of complexity and chaos. It is all a question of emergence, which is precisely the focus of the various science-derived theories that converge around the notion of self-organisation (the spontaneous production of a level of reality having its own rules of formation and order of connection). (Massumi 2002b, 32) The immanent self-organisation and dynamism of matter come up in various moments in the works I analyse, as a material overflow of the system that tries to oppress it, be it scientism, capitalism or colonialism. As Bennett puts it, however 'cultural' an assemblage (e.g. capitalism, the military-industrial complex, gender) may be, the affect of the matter involved still can resist and elude cultural control (Bennett 2009, 61). This critical

juncture of materialism of the body/bodies and cultural questions such as history serves as a through line in this dissertation.

Not only is complexity theory applicable to the understanding of dynamic physical systems, this approach can, in broader ways, affect the treatment of biological organisms and their relationship to other aspects of their material environment. In the life sciences as well as in physics, material phenomena are increasingly being conceptualised not as discrete entities or closed systems but rather as open, complex systems with porous boundaries (Coole 2010). While science may offer material proof to philosophical ideas that are speculative in nature, it is important to stress that the popular reception of science may indeed revert to reductionist, hence non-complex understanding. For instance, the reductionist tendency of seeing the world in terms of information and material manifests in the recent debate around human genome cloning and editing, presupposing that the DNA codes are the holy grail of human life, a book of life, as it were. I will return to this in the chapter on DNA.

This efficacy of matter can be incorporated into the social field to establish new relations and effectuate changes in a social setting. In actor-network theory proposed by Bruno Latour, an actant is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, exercise the agency given to them or programmed within them, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, and alter the course of events (Latour 2005). It is ‘any entity that modifies another entity in a trial,’ something whose ‘competence is deduced from [its] performance’ rather than posited in advance of the action (Bennett 2009, viii). At the same time, however, this is not a case of merely imbuing a specific object with agency, such would lead to a naïve animism, to be analysed in the following section 1.4.3. Importantly, for Latour, things do not suddenly materialise in the world, but are born of negotiations between the material world, the social, historical contexts and human beings. This lends itself to a cross-reading to the Marx’s analysis of labour process as ‘the universal condition for the metabolic interaction...between man and nature’ (Harvey 2010, 118). This metabolism is crucial for both the old (Marxist historical) and new materialism, which will be expounded on in section 1.3.

Whether the emergence is material or social, involving human or nonhuman actants, taking place under scientific, historical or daily social circumstances, the foundation remains firmly material. The emergence takes place relative to the virtual (as in Deleuze) or the potential (as in Whitehead). Conversely, the virtual or the potential is the immanent condition of all emergences. Importantly, they do not ‘prefigure or predetermine the actualities that emerge

from it. Rather, it is the impelling force, or the principle, that allows each actual entity to appear (to manifest itself) as something new' (Shaviro 2009, 34). Creativity is rooted in the virtual and potential field becoming transformed, articulated, elaborated, composed, contained and dissociated, over and over again.

1.2.2. Performance as immanent, material process

One of the basic premises of the dissertation is that performance acts as an immanent mode of thinking (Cull 2013), and an enaction of materialist philosophy that is at the same time situated in the body as it is in cultural political discourses. All of the works analysed in this dissertation are either presented in performing arts context, or have a predominant live element even when they are not presented in a theatre. It's easier to define what they are not: they are not classic dramas or spoken theatre in the sense that they do not simulate reality. Therefore, they fall more conveniently into the broad category of performance.

Performance is a long established academic discipline. Performance scholar Chris Salter distinguishes several characteristics of performance from other forms of knowledge making: in performance, there is an interest in enaction or doing; it favours real-time, dynamic processes over static objects or representation; it is situated in embodiment and materiality and triggers an immanent experience; and it is the effect of both human and nonhuman presence through transmutation and reconstitution (Salter 2010, xxiii). All of the characteristics show a further development of performance from traditional representational theatre, but performance can be taken to imply a much broader field than theatre. Defined by performance scholar Richard Schechner, performance renders the moment as an event, an 'actual,' in which something actualises, and that can take root as much in the secluded spaces of art as in daily life, for example in rituals and in playing. It marks a convergence of the social sciences and performing arts, introducing anthropology, shamanism, psychotherapy and non-West cultures into the discourse of performance (Schechner 2003). The inherent interdisciplinarity of performance proves crucial for my dissertation. Hence, in the broader sense of performance, the works I analyse are works of performance in themselves, and at the same time, the complex layers in some of the performances can be said to enact other forms of performances, namely rituals, the ethnographic gaze, or economic activities.

On an ontological level and meta-level, the presentation of arts, including the audience constituting the co-presence, offers a potent site for articulating immanence. Immanence in and of performances, is the ontological requisite for thinking, being and performing, both human

and otherwise. Thinking with the vibrancy of matter, it follows that patterns, coordination, subjects and meanings emerge out of a material constellation, not to meet any predetermined set of goals but rather from bottom up. This immanent mode of organisation and creativity coming from the processes themselves can offer an optic for understanding the workings of artistic processes. For performance scholar Laura Cull, live arts enact such processes: ‘There is no leader, director, author or transcendent idea that commands coordination and organization from without; rather, coordination arises more spontaneously and in a manner immanent to the ... activity. The material bodies involved in the creative process do not obey commands issued from a transcendent source, but generate their own rules and forms of creation’ (Cull 2013, 25).

For the audience or co-participants, this immanent perspective asks us not to view performances as outside of ourselves, but as an emergence differentiated in degree of our own experiences and participation in a situation. The emergence of new relations that have never existed in the same way before is also pertinent to the immanence of performance. However, even when the immanent perspective in performance is ‘inherently participatory’ and suggests that ‘participants are produced by processes of participation’ (Cull 2013, 146-147), it requires clear analysis on the locations, as well as on the degrees of action and being acted upon. As Cull argues, ‘the extent to which we act according to this immanence varies, the degree to which we acknowledge our “partness” or partiality can and does differ’ (Cull 2013, 162). In live art or performance art, this may mean a heightened level of awareness of the mutual becoming or affective unfolding in moments of participation, in tangible or intangible manners. Through the exercise of attention, we reconfigure our bodily reality in tune with the immanence, with intensive time, and ‘gain a heightened awareness of the complexity or self-difference of our body’s perpetual variation in relation to its surroundings’ (Cull 2013, 175). The performance situates the ‘parts,’ both as observing audience and as processes in the artwork, in a ‘whole’ that is about to emerge from randomness and virtuality. Thus immanence is generative. ‘Our powers to act and be acted on, to change and be changed, are themselves the result of our immanent participation’ (Cull 2013, 162).

At the same time, seeing arts through the lens of immanence does not discredit discursivity. What new materialism entails for the studies of art is a refocus on the material dimensions in tandem with the discursive dimensions. Dolphijn and van der Tuin point out that the contemporary scholar influenced by the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ proceeds to deconstruct the messages of art. New materialism emphasises on the two dimensions in their entanglement: the experience of a piece of art is made up of matter *and* meaning. The material dimension creates *and* gives form to the discursive, and vice versa (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 91).

The way how this entanglement works, and especially how it works to create new discourses and new materialities, rings true in all the chapters. The most challenging part for my theoretical project is to extrapolate this creative process into cultural-historical contexts spanning over a considerable period of time, such as the works of Ho and Ng exemplify. Both artists are dedicated to making trans-historical movements tangible. The last two chapters are an attempt to bring the artistic and discursive together in works that in themselves spin over various plateaus.

I consciously deploy the term ‘enaction’ to describe the potency of art and performance. Enaction can contain legal connotation in the sense of ‘enacting’ a bill, and for the dissertation, it encompasses both the aesthetical and ethical practice in putting ideas to life. Following neuroscientist and philosopher Francisco Varela, enaction is based on situated, embodied agents, whose world of significance *emerges* along their active living, not as a representation system, but as constrained imagination (Cohen and Varela 2000). Felix Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm resonates with the enaction and world-making in performances, for the aesthetics ‘isn’t something that gives you recipes to make a work of art,’ it is a ‘speculative cartography’ which constructs coordinates of existence at the same time as those coordinates are lived (Guattari 1993, 240-241). Artistic works hence act as powerful conduits between new materialism and history and politics precisely because of the condensed ways in which they enact the undercurrents and potential of bringing forth a world – worlding. And this enaction, by resonating with the audience/co-participants, further enacts coordinates and processes of ‘active living’ and supply ethical and socio-political imaginaries.

1.3. Materialist Lens on Politics and History

If, as mentioned above, the material agency of matter seen in a network of actants is one way of inserting the materialist dimension into the social, then this section is tasked to illustrate another approach – taking the social body as a whole and analysing the internal and external forces and movements.

The works I examine in this dissertation all have various degrees of historical and political references and implications as they problematise the modern concepts of language as signifier, spatialised time, science and biology, and ideological camps. They do not represent any one category of political theory or of approaching politics or historiography through art. The common ground is rather that they are dedicated to unearthing the discursive setups behind these concepts and challenges the structuralism, reductionism and construction of bifurcation by going into the material strata that condition them in their particular localities. Based on this,

they aim to enact different imaginaries or materialist overflows that open up to (indeterminate) potentials, or deterritorialise set structures in Deleuzian terms.

In the critical engagement of the power of knowledge, the works continue the tradition that Michel Foucault sets forth in *The Order of Things*, which analyses the epistemic condition, or how knowledge is constituted, on language, biology and economics that emerged in the nineteenth century in the West (Foucault 1971). At the same time, power works by ‘subjection,’ or producing the subjects and the condition of the subject to exist as well as to evolve, to desire. The operation of subjection is important for Judith Butler, ‘power does not stand outside of the subject and is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are’ (Butler 1997, 2). In this sense, any attempt to unpack power in the context of politics has to go beyond ideological judgements. As the proverb goes, ‘power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely’.

This discursive line has been carried forth into a more general materialist study of knowledge by thinkers like Deleuze and DeLanda. DeLanda’s book, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, presents his reworking of the production of knowledge in language, economics and biology, and its power over bodies following the Foucaultian tradition. The historical development of the European society from 1000 to 2000 AD is recast as processes of abstract material processes – sedimentation, selection, autocatalytic feedback loops, which DeLanda identifies in isomorphic fashion underlying the evolution of languages, the growth of cities, the emergence of large-scale industry, in the European context. (DeLanda 1997) Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of historical processes such as different forms of societies and economy covers at least another thousand years, where the nomad figures prominently.

How to mediate the various strands of thinking that can be characterised as ‘new materialism’ and the topics with historical dimensions? How to weave them together on a coherent plane of materialist politics? The following section provides a theoretical proposition on how to bridge ‘new materialism’ and the classical form of materialism, i.e. historical materialism. It will not go into an elaborate comparative study, rather, it focuses on questions pertinent to my dissertation, such as biopolitics and necropolitics (Spiess/Strecker), economics and colonialism (Ng and Ho). In the chapters that follow, the bridge will hopefully be more fleshed out.

At the intersection of these two forms of materialisms is the man and the body, at once material and social. For some questions explored in new materialism, the man has to be debunked as an individual subject in favour of relational constellations that give rise to the

individual, but even this pre-individual is historically produced. Historical materialism tries to analyse the conditions that produce classes of man in particular historical processes and to locate the agency of man. The relation is not irreconcilable; rather, the interlocution of the two can help bringing the understanding of politics further.

Marx writes, ‘Labour [...] as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself’ (Marx 1990, 133). This idea of ‘metabolism,’ with labour as the mediator between human existence and nature, is central to Marx’s historical-materialist argument (Harvey 2010, 27). The sense of the historical in historical materialism entails a collectively planned relationship to the conditions of existence of man, and it is further characterised by the changing nature of those conditions. The human is thus both a shaper of nature (as part of its historical agency) and shaped by nature. Importantly, ‘we encounter a sense of interaction with nature as constant change, or a dynamic metabolism. This metabolic understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature, the social and the environmental, is where the critique of political economy starts to cross into political ecology’ (Vishmidt 2018a, 41).

The political ecology can thus work perfectly in tandem with the ecology-minded schools of new materialism. The question regarding the collectively planned relationship to the conditions of existence of man is admittedly more complex, for here, the classical Marxist view that the human society transits from certain tendencies of social or economic organisation towards increasing rationalisation is contested. The mutation of capitalism under neoliberalism presents a bigger challenge as ever (which Marx perfectly anticipated), which demands clear analysis and actions to penetrate the many faces that capitalism deftly takes on, especially as it works to assimilate the radical energy originally targeted at it. The institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of the feminist or postcolonial movements have proved the adaptability of capitalism. This current political-economical totality prompts some to seek answers not outside, but from within capitalism, such as in ‘accelerationism,’ or the hope that the destructive energy within capitalism can be channelled, and accelerated, to lead to radical changes and to a post-capitalist future.

1.3.1. Non-material and material entanglement

Theories associated with new materialism, especially those working on the non-material aspects of capitalism, offer fruitful counterpoints to classical materialism. Patricia Clough (2008) points

out the entanglement of technological advancements and the pre-personal affective capacities of the bodies, especially in how technologies grasp and manipulate the imperceptible dynamism of affect. She does it by linking it to a materialist analysis of value. In this way, she effectively proves the critical resources of Marxist labour theory of value and affect theory can produce meaningful pathways in response to late capitalism. Crucially, she argues that what is upheld as the core of the body's indeterminate potential, namely the pre-individual affective capacities, have been captured by capitalism which functions on an 'affect economy,' that is to say the accumulation of capital has shifted to the domain of affect. By the 1970s, there was a shift from selling products to manipulating affect, an expansion of the service economy and the technological autonomisation of its functioning. She writes,

Social reproduction had become a matter of time, capital invested time realised in images to be consumed by the consumer, for example, in watching television, but also in doing therapy or going to the gym. The function of the media as a socialising/ideological mechanism had become secondary to its continuous modulation, variation and intensification of affective response in real time, where bodily affect is mined for value. (Clough 2008, 16)

In the society of omnipresent control and biopolitical surveillance, the individual subjects are and can no longer be rendered as individual entities but what Deleuze refers to as 'dividuals' (Deleuze 1995, 180). They are 'statistically configured in populations that surface as profiles of bodily capacities, indicating what a body can do now and in the future. The affective capacity of bodies, statistically simulated as risk factors, can be apprehended as such without the subject, even without the individual subject's body, bringing forth competing bureaucratic procedures of control and political command in terms of securing the life of populations' (Clough 2008, 18). This shifts biopolitics, or the control of the population through socialisation of behaviours, into necropolitics for it determines the value of the lives of various populations (Mbembe 2003). This aspect of necropolitics will be fleshed out in the work of Spiess/Strecker concerning organic death in bioengineering, as well as in the work of Ng taking the opium as material lens.

The bodies of the 'dividuals' that make up a social body, or what Deleuze and Guattari calls 'socius' is crucial for their understanding of history and politics, which I will plunge into in the following. With that, it becomes evident why the delineation between the historical and new materialisms is not absolute.

Furthermore, the Marxist theorisation of capital renders capital not as a thing, but a

process that exists only in motion. As Harvey points out, what Marx seeks out in *Capital* is ‘a conceptual apparatus, a deep structure, that explains the way in which motion is actually instantiated within a capitalist mode of production. Consequently, many of his concepts are formulated around relations rather than stand-alone principles; they are about transformative activity’ (Harvey 2010, 13). This contradicts the biased view that Marxism is conceived as a fixed and immobile structure, and thus provides a fertile ground for the interlocution between historical materialism, labour theory of value, and various strands of poststructuralist theories, most notably I follow the creative interpretation of Marx in Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking on the development of capitalism.

Deleuze and Guattari’s postulation on the operation of capital in *Anti-Oedipus* may appear familiar and strange at the same time to classical Marxists. Their relation to Marxism is a relation of translation and addition, focussing on what classical Marxism ignores, most notably the question of madness, which for them should be treated as *social*, not merely individual. Deleuze scholar Lecerle points out the major shifts from classical Marxism in Deleuze and Guattari, including replacing the Marxist periodisation of history by a parallel series – regimes of signs, flows of libidinal energy, coding, the shift from history to geography, from work to desire, from ideology to assemblage, from the party to the group, and a final displacement which recapitulates the whole series – from the molar to the molecular (Lecerle 2005). To replace the molar is to counteract the majority, which is linked to power and domination, and to adopt a molecular or minoritarian position, which is not related to absolute numbers but is defined ‘by its capacity to become, or in its subjective geography, to draw for itself lines of fluctuation that open up a gap and separate it from the axiom constituting a redundant majority’ (Conley 2006, 167). Through these replacements, the materialism of Deleuze and Guattari highlights the horizontal, serial movements of entities that give rise to capitalism, but they also rejoin classical Marxism on the question of the capital’s perpetual movement in the ceaseless production of surplus value, both have had the foresight to what would later emerge as advanced capitalism and neo-liberalism. The chapters in the dissertation all turn around this question of movement and production in different ways.

In terms of political programs, Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of capital may not provide a sketch for concrete political actions, but it offers multiple lines of flight that cut through the planes that are ‘the source of a politics of desire, often described as a form of anarchism’ (Lecerle 2005, 39). I will return to anarchism in the chapter on Royce Ng. At the same time, the political dimension is posited as a critique against totalising, reductionist and abstracting systems across diverse fields and disciplines, not just in political power but also its

associated fields of knowledge and ‘subjection’ production. Indeed, a key dimension of Deleuze and Guattari's work is the investigation of ‘bodies politic,’ material systems or ‘assemblages’ whose constitution in widely differing registers - the physical, chemical, biological, neural, and social – can be analysed in political terms. (Protevi 2006, 10) This rigorous engagement with a broad range of subject matters has inspired me to look through the artistic works I study into questions on language, biology, animism, economics and colonisation. And the method of accounting for and critiquing on the abstracting mechanism remains thoroughly materialist.

The artistic works afford a space of reflection precisely because they do not aim to *represent* social discourses or history in a molar sense, but rather present certain undercurrents that take us to a meta-level understanding of them. In the image of plateaus, it is thus possible to create a narrative that implicates material conditions, material process together with the human social and historical processes in the dissertation. Each chapter spins its own universe and touches on certain aspects of new and/or historical materialism, without being reducible to a historical or geographical point of reference. This undertaking is firmly against any teleological and deterministic exposition of history, rather it unveils the materialist configurations of social forms, which underlie both the ‘pre-modern’ belief systems like animism and the ‘modern’ development of capitalism. Instead of claiming necessities of precedence, through the materialist lens, the co-existence of multiple social forms and the contingent character of history come to the fore, which will be expounded on in the following section on the Deleuzian perspective on history.

To begin an exposition on history and philosophy underlying the following chapters, I will go into the general reflection on history by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

1.3.2. History and desire

History, for Deleuze and Guattari, is messier than the grand narrative told through historical events in linear fashion, which could be observed in the Hegelian form of periodisation. For them, the organising principle behind events is not so much the succession of modes of production, than what they call the ‘regimes of signs,’ which involve coding, decoding and recoding. ‘What History grasps of the event is its effectuation in states of affairs or in lived experience, but the event in its becoming ... escapes History’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 110). They recast history as contingent and examine it through the optics of the movement of desire, desiring-production and its implications for social production. Contrary to psychoanalysts who

attribute desire to a lack of something, Deleuze and Guattari's desire does not lack its object. Rather it is 'the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 26). They stress emphatically that 'desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production,' and that 'there is only desire and the social, and nothing else' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 29-30). The body on which history unfolds is the social body, as material and corporeal as the body of the earth, subject to animating flows driven by desire and at the same time, delineated and separated by codification processes. Importantly, the concept of *socius* is not identical with the concept of the society, for a material body is also a collective body, whereas the term society, at least in the liberal version, is a collection of individuals (Lecerle 2005, 42).

Deleuze and Guattari deploy the primitive, despotic and capitalist orders to describe development of the social in relation to desire and desiring-production. In the primitive social order, the earth is the body of all collectively owned organs, and hence the primitive, savage unity of desire and production. For the earth is not merely the multiple and divided object of labour, it is also the unique, indivisible entity, the full body that falls back on the forces of production and appropriates them for its own as the natural or divine precondition. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 154-155) Contra anthropologists who believe human society is based on exchange relations, Deleuze and Guattari hold that it is rather inscription that constitutes all social relations and give rise to power relations. Inscription happens already on the primitive body of earth: 'Filiation is the first character of inscription marked on this body. And we know the nature of this intensive filiation, this inclusive disjunction where everything divides, but into itself, and where the same being is everywhere, on every side, at every level, differing only in intensity' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 154).

In the despotic order, the despot challenges the lateral alliances and the intensive filiations of the old community. He imposes a new alliance system and places himself in direct filiation with the deity: the people must follow (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 210). The despot inscribes, though it is 'not content to inscribe all things, it must act as if it produced them. It is necessary that the connections reappear in a form compatible with the inscribed disjunctions, even if they react in turn on the form of these disjunctions' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 154).

Here, an important set of concepts of the dissertation is proposed: the intensive and extensive. The former denotes division of everything into itself, while the latter works by placing itself in direct filiation to others. The passing from the primitive order to the despotic order is one of passing from an intensive energetic order to an extensive system, which entails both qualitative alliances and extended filiations: 'Nothing is changed by the fact that the

primary energy of the intensive order – the Numen – is an energy of filiation, for this intense filiation is not yet extended, and does not as yet comprise any distinction of persons, nor even a distinction of sexes, but only pre-personal variations in intensity, taking on the same twinnedness or bisexuality in differing degrees’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 155-156). Despite their seeming opposition, the intensive and extensive do but signal different forms of movements that emanate from generic movements, and are hence not absolute binary in nature. The intensive and extensive processes also apply to the notion of time and history, as it concerns the modes of the coexistence between ‘the genesis of actual, lived or corporeal bodies, alongside the incorporeal events that disclose that *other time* of the virtual which exists and insists to disturb clock time or spatialised time’ (Colebrook 2009, 9). Later in the dissertation, these concepts will come up in the notions of time, of the self and the other, and of familial relations (Jeong and Ho chapters), furthermore, they appear in the question of biological sexes (Vanouse and Spiess/Strecker chapter).

Another crucial optic for the dissertation is the role of money, and later capital. In the despotic social order, the role of money is decisive, for the despotic machine, like the primitive machine, fears the socially corrosive effects of decoded flows, particularly the flows of activities its merchants unleashed. The despots thereby try to tie down the flow of desire materialised in commercial activities as they introduce money and tax regimes, by means of which the state rendered debt infinite.

Yet this is still not the capitalist order. The selling of work force, exchanging of goods and the invention of money do not necessarily give rise to capitalism. In ancient Rome, there had been ‘privatisation of property, the decoding of the monetary flows through the formation of great fortunes, the decoding of the commercial flows through the development of commodity production, the decoding of the producers through expropriation and proletarianisation,’ but as we know, it didn’t give rise to capitalism. For the despotic regime works by ‘disjunctions of inscription’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 223-224), which imposes an order, meaning and structure to things that are in their natural state multi-directional and multi-connective. This can be the absolutism of kings or spiritual orders. In so doing, it tames desire.

The decoded flows of desire must encounter and form new conjunctions: flows of decoded soil sold as private property, flows of decoded money that circulates as capital, flows of workers who are now deterritorialised to be mere labour in the service of work itself or the capitalistic machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 223-225). From this point on, the sway of life

as desire or as differential can be seen in capitalism's tendency to liberate all flows and relations from any single organising body.

Capital always adds new territories and nodes to its operation, a process Deleuze and Guattari term 'axiomatisation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 250), be it new overseas markets or the once solid entities liquidated, decoded like the human body in the service of information technology. We witness ever accelerated forms of capitalism in reducing initial expenditure and in churning out more profit. In the finance industry or financial capitalism especially, money begets money, increasingly bypassing actual production.

Capitalism's axiomatising power has not excluded the arts. The circulation of artworks, acting increasingly as mere tokens of value, in primary and secondary markets, and new forms of financialisation on art, i.e. creating derivatives based on artworks or art markets all demonstrate how capitalism seeps into the field we find ourselves in. Curiously, the opposite seems to be true too in the sense that art and capitalism shares a structural identification: 'art is mimetic of capital in a very specific way: art mimetically assumes the role of the automatic subject of value' (Stakemeier and Vishmidt 2016, 41).

In this way, capitalism in Marx, as well as in Deleuze and Guattari (and Braudel, who they draw on) does not entail a top-down teleological or linear history. Rather, capitalism is a 'singular, emergent historical phenomenon which happened to occur at a given time and place but could well have arisen elsewhere – or nowhere at all' (Holland 2006, 184). Hence contra the critique of Manuel DeLanda, capitalism works very much in the same way as De Landa calls it, borrowing the terminology of nonlinear science, 'a "probe-head" which blindly incorporates whatever fits into its meshwork of axioms and doesn't disrupt the internal consistency of capitalism as a system' (Holland 2006, 195).

Under this scheme, it's neither inevitable nor necessary that the Chinese (or Arab or Indian, for that matter) empire would by itself develop exploitative capitalism. What Chinese history textbooks define as the infant stage of capitalism starting in southern Song dynasty is rather the proliferation in the rate of exchange, but nothing to the extent that decoded flows of wealth (capital), land, workers (labour replaceable by machines when necessary to reduce cost, and who are involved in a market to buy back the things they produce in order for social reproduction) all acted among each other to reinforce the autonomy of the flow of desire itself. Ray Huang's study of Ming dynasty tax stations on the grand canal provides good insights of how goods were taxed according to a fixed yearly amount rather than by percentage. Hence there were no fluctuation of tax income even in times of surged business, as records had it that

sometimes the taxation goal was fulfilled in the first half of the year. (Huang 1964) If the fixed percentage in commercial tax demonstrates the general disinterest of the Confucian society in the commercial sectors making up a small portion of pre-modern Chinese economy, then the case of land transfer policy and agriculture tax in agricultural sector is by and large systematic. Taisu Zhang's insightful study *The Laws and Economics of Confucianism: Kinship and Property in Preindustrial China and England* presents a nuanced comparative analysis of economic history and law in the early modern era that attempts to address the Great Divergence, i.e. how the West came to replace China and dominate the world in the modern era. Going against the orientalist assumption that there is something fundamentally irrational about the Chinese society, Zhang demonstrates that the Chinese small holders of land were just as self-interested as their British counterparts. The most significant difference was, the British system of land mortgage (the practice of conveying a piece of land to a creditor as security on a loan) stipulated that the small holders had to redeem the land in a year with a high interest, otherwise they would default and lose the land. Hence it was favourable to the creditors as the rate of defaults was high through which mortgages became permanent transactions, which in turn amassed land as primitive accumulation and at the same time political agency for an emerging privileged class. In China, however, the small holders didn't need to pay an interest to buy their land back when their financial standing allowed (which sometimes could take decades). Furthermore, because of the spread of Confucian ancestral worshipping, seniority, instead of wealth, was determinant for political power in villages, making the case favourable to the peasants and small holders. (Zhang 2017) Hence capital, land and men did not constitute decoded flows in early modern China. This form of social and economic organisation from the bottom up was coupled with the top-down taxation policy in early modern China – until 1907, shortly before the last Chinese dynasty dissolved, agriculture tax remained at around 1%, while the British taxation by 1800s and the Japanese in the industrialisation period was at 20%. Taxation was the core of modern state investments to promote key sectors and rapid industrialisation, as we will see in detail in the chapter on Royce Ng and Manchukuo. The reason for the resistance to change in the case of early modern China is ideological, which resonates on a philosophical level with what Deleuze and Guattari describe as desire tied to a despotic regime of taxation and not for the production of more surplus value.

In this light, Deleuze and Guattari ask – and answer – emphatically,

Let us return to this eminently contingent question that modern historians know how to ask: why Europe, why not China? Apropos of ocean navigation, Fernand Braudel asks:

why not Chinese, Japanese, or even Moslem ships? Why not Sinbad the Sailor? It is not the technique, the technical machine, that is lacking. Isn't it rather that desire remains caught in the nets of the despotic State, entirely invested in the despot's machine? "Perhaps then the merit of the West, confined as it was on its narrow 'Cape of Asia,' was to have needed the world, to have needed to venture outside its own front door." The schizophrenic voyage is the only kind there is. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 224)

1.3.3. Schizophrenia

Deleuze and Guattari put forward their definition of 'the body without organs' as 'the ultimate residuum of a deterritorialised socius'. Having examined how the socius or social production codifies the flows of desire in the primitive and despotic orders, they point out the task of capitalism is to decode and deterritorialise the flows. Capitalism does not impose its operation from the outside as in the previous orders, but creates an immanence implicating all flows labour, capital and goods. It is 'both its primary determinant and its fundamental raw material, its form and its function'. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 33) It draws near to its own limit and keep expanding its limit, subjecting new arenas under its field of immanence.

Importantly for Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is a general way of describing capitalist production, beyond a mental illness that's attributed to individuals: 'before being a mental state of the schizophrenic who has made himself into an artificial person through autism, schizophrenia is the process of the production of desire and desiring-machines' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 24). It is capitalism that tends to 'produce the schizo as the subject of the decoded flows on the body without organs' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 34). With it, they offer their version of psychoanalysis from a materialist point of view. In the face of the capitalistic machine, they recognise that schizophrenia does not merely mean that modern life drives people mad. It is not a question of a way of life, but of a process of production. The emphasis on production processes allows them to situate the schizo where the psychoanalysts fall short, for the latter try to reduce him to the image of the daddy-mommy-me triad predicated on the narrow ego of the individual.

This conjunctive operation of capitalism formally reflects the multi-connectivity of desire, leading to the deterritorialised socius – schizophrenia. Indebted to Marxist analytical frame of capital creation and value relations, what informs the theorisation of desire that is obviously different to Marx in Deleuze and Guattari is the recognition of the operation of

capitalist machinery on an affective level, and an attempt to ‘autonomise affects *within* rather than *from* alienation’ (Stakemeier and Vishmidt 2016, 63).

They portrait the schizo as ‘continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, he plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialisation, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the socius on the surface of his own body without organs. It may well be that these peregrinations are the schizo’s own particular way of rediscovering the earth’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 35). The body without organs of the schizo conflates with the immanence of earth itself.

The account of history above is a generic description of the movement and organisation of desire, itself constituted by the assemblage of bodies and materials in flux. The way these regimes figure, the primitive, the despotic and the capitalist, does not follow any teleological or linear, developmental view of history, and it does not dictate exclusion among the orders, so that the ‘earlier’ orders may very well co-exist or live in symbiotic relation to a ‘later’ order. As indicated by its title, *A Thousand Plateaus* ‘refuses to posit any plane or regime that might account for the movement and nature of other durations’ (Colebrook 2009, 5). It derives from an immanent body of earth, and posits a meta-level historiography that forestalls discussions on morality based on liberal individual subjects. This is not to exonerate any individual of particular responsibilities, nor to be an appeaser or apologist to political pasts such as socialism. Rather, it casts political domination and violence in a new light as counterintuitive movements from the perspective of earth philosophy. For bifurcation, or the process of perceiving differences is always already the source of something ‘accursed,’ as Deleuze maintains, ‘thought “makes” difference, but difference is monstrous’ (Deleuze 1994, 37). The twentieth century has seen extremely artificial binary logic in politics, not least in countries where Marxism was distorted in its application, such as the notion of perpetual revolutions and class struggles that resulted in massive atrocities. In this sense, violence is of course imbricated in the materialist analysis in the dissertation.

This non-deterministic, materialistic view of history will be closely examined with the artistic works of Klaus Spiess/ Lucie Strecker, Ho Tzu Nyen, and Royce Ng, in which the material congregations seen through historical optics are enacted in different ways. Yet all chapters share the analysis of the underlying mechanism of inscription as the primary force of socialising bodies and relations, as well as the optic of the intensive and extensive. Further, the figure of the schizo is embodied in the works of Ng and Ho, offering new annotations to the schizo as the product and at the limit of capitalism through artistic imaginaries.

1.4. On 'Asianness'

1.4.1. Method and content

Before I close the introduction chapter, it is necessary for me to clarify how much 'Asianness' is in the dissertation, and to justify the theoretical lens which may seem dominated by Deleuze and Guattari and various strands from new and historical materialism.

My attempt of bringing in a number of artistic works and discourses from East Asia does not qualify the work as an 'Asian' take on performance philosophy, as I am aware of the vastness of such an enterprise and the variegated forms in which it can be exercised, from pure metaphysics to applied political science. What I will do in the dissertation is to selectively examine specific cultural histories in the interest of making sometimes differentiated, and sometimes synergetic articulations of critique, and all the while being cautious with culturalism.

To justify the choices, let me first start with the artists. Obviously, there are pitfalls in essentialising the origin of the artist, the subject matter of a work or the thinking behind a work, which is to say claiming 'Asianness' in some or all of the categories. It is, however, not the concern here. As to the origins of the artists, there is no criteria regarding where they are from, trained or live and work that inform my choice of them. More important than the origins of the artists is the awareness to the local, regional and international conditions of artist production, display, dissemination and reception, which demands constantly shifting grounds for critical engagements.

The subject matters I investigate are broad; while some pertain to 'general' discussions as language or human inheritance, some do take a particular history (Malaya, or Manchukuo) as focus. The way the latter is brought up, however, inserts them into a larger frame of materialist history of colonial expansion and of economics, of which they are particular consequences. I do, at the same time, draw on references that do not squarely fall into either East Asia or the West defined in the narrow sense, for example when referencing ethnography from South America or artistic movements in Russia, simply because of the methodological or topical relevance I identify in them. By taking such liberty, I want to chart the global terrain of critical theories that are productive for the dissertation.

On the theoretical level, readers may rightly raise their hands and ask, why so much Deleuze? I would draw on the statement made by a growing community of Deleuzian scholars from or concerned with Asia, in that the way of engaging with Deleuzian philosophy is 'to use Deleuze as a generative force of inquiry in Asian contexts, and to use Asian culture and thought as a means of probing and testing the viability of Deleuze's own philosophy' (Bogue, Chiu, and

Lee 2014, x). Several scholars have made invaluable contribution to comparative philosophy by bringing Deleuze and Buddhism or Confucian thoughts together. However, my own focus here is less systematic than cherry-picking specific topics for a transcultural interlocution.

Now the other side of the story. The theoretical exposition of ‘Eastern’ theories is neither comprehensive, nor systematic. I have not adopted any variant of Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist as a structural frame for the entire dissertation, which is to construct a ‘Eastern’ frame of language, understanding of time, or performance, for each topic would be far beyond the scope of this dissertation. The frame is, as iterated time and again, old and new materialisms enacted through performances. Still, there are short detours, more in an ‘acupuncture’ fashion, to particular Eastern theories or thinkers. There are, for example, passages on Zen Buddhist *koan* and Daoist ideas on language and perspectivism in the chapters on Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s work on language as a dissimulation tool, and on Ho Tzu Nyen’s work on the history of Southeast Asia. There are engagements on feminism and man-machine relation in a Confucian relational framework when I examine the performances of Geumhyung Jeong. And there are political/historical theories of the Kyoto School thinkers in the analysis of Royce Ng’s work on the Japanese puppet regime of Manchukuo, alongside ideas of some of their contemporary Chinese thinkers – notably, almost all of them were influenced by Western thinkers of their time while consciously invigorating their own traditions.

It already invites widely differential readings when discussing just one of the East Asian traditions, Confucianism. Confucianism is often taken to be the moral backbone and ideology that justified the rule of China (and influenced East Asia) for almost two thousand years, based on a purportedly rigid differential, hierarchical society. Some have attributed the economic boom of East Asian states to the Confucian work ethic, whereby the individual worker is subordinated to the social hierarchy and collectivity. Yet Confucianism can also be interpreted as a dynamic, non-hierarchical social field based on non-transactional reciprocities and social mobility, as we will see in the chapter on Jeong. At various positions in the dissertation, I choose to work with particular strands of Confucian thinking, and when doing so, I will explain the background and critical impasse so as to give a solid ground of transcultural assessment.

How should the strands of ‘Eastern’ thinking figure in my dissertation vis-à-vis the European canons? In short, I am cautious both with eurocentrism, and with the all-too-quick affirmation of ‘other’ thinking systems. I place equal weight on combing through theories of differences and locating the culturally different situatedness (from gender to animism as differently conceived and lived realities), and at the same time on differential differences (i.e. how East Asian feminism may look different historically than the first wave feminism in the

West). All the while, I try not to lose sight of issues that remain true to different contexts (against the background of capitalism, for example), and to affirm commonalities with the ‘Western’ strands of materialism which function as powerful tools to debunk them. Hence, there should be no automatism in resorting to ‘Eastern’ thinking, for just by drawing on thinkers originating from the West does not equate the theoretical project to eurocentrism, and conversely, resorting to non-West thinkers does not qualify its anti-eurocentrism potential. Instead, caution and rigour should always be exercised, because the essentialisation of ‘Eastern’ or non-West thinking can come from both sides. One area that invites such multiplicity of gazes concerns animism.

1.4.2. Animism

I have mentioned that one way of approaching materialism and the socio-political is through the material agency of matter seen in a network of actants, and the other is taking the social body as a whole – the *socius* in Deleuze and Guattari, and understanding historical processes in terms of inscription and organisation of desire and movements. Related with the former but associated with a somewhat mystical undertone is what can be categorically called ‘animism’, which is concerned with how matter ‘acts’. Performance is a pertinent site for such thoroughgoing exploration, for in performance studies, it is set forth that rituals requiring heightened attention, trance-inducing acts, or simple daily repetitive acts, are all performances. Approached in this nuanced way, the question of animism is paramount to the discourse around the conditions and configurations of emergence, ontogenesis, and the demarcation or scion from the undifferentiated.

Animism, or the perception that everything, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, is alive and possesses a spirit, comes from the Latin word *anima*, soul. However, the attribution of life to seemingly inanimate things makes up the naïve understanding of animism. For it assumes the extensive mode of existence rather than intensive dynamics of things, or what Anselm Franke calls the ‘segmentations of life’ (Franke 2010).

How to address life beyond the scientific capture of it, given the problematisation of ‘objectivity’? This is when the pendulum swings to the other extremity, and when we realise that the spiritual, the animistic and the occult do have a place in the society today, if not all too categorical. They often take the form of a pristine spiritual highland. How this comes up in moments like robots with spirits, photography stealing the soul, shamanic healings and so forth will come back time and again in the dissertation.

The swing of the pendulum comes with its own political ramifications. The good intention of overcoming eurocentrism sometimes operationalises and instrumentalises the

thinking in the interest of decentralising Western, purportedly universalised forms of thinking. Such movements in thinking may seem to warrant a different epistemology or ontology, but at the same time they can lead to embracing anti-Enlightenment, anti-universal particularism which has no reality beyond the culturalist or intellectual debates at best, and helps certain political agents to justify blatant political violence at worst. (One example of such a discursive movement could be seen in how the Communist Party of China uses its own Confucianism-backed political ideology to justify China Exceptionalism today.)

Franke analyses the institutionalisation of these ‘trends’ in the name of art, and further examines the historical predecessors with animistic underpinnings. He writes,

The regression to ‘earlier states’ (historically or subjectively) and the conflation of differences between fiction and reality, the self and the world; all this becomes possible as long as it is institutionally framed and cannot make claims to objective reality, in which case it would likely be rendered pathological, but at least cease to be ‘art’ in the modern sense of the word – the form of art that, according to Adorno, was made possible by the secularisation of the Enlightenment. [...] Insofar as aesthetic resistance to social rationalisation (cultural modernity versus social modernity) takes the form of a dialectics, its attack on the latter remains bound to its own myths. This can be confirmed by a most schematic survey of the role animism plays in the modernist imaginary: a reconciliatory and transformative force in the face of alienation, a phantastic horizon for a better, utopian, animated modernity. From the Romantics to the Russian Avant-Garde, from Primitivist Modernism via the Surrealist to Psychedelia, animism frequently appears on a (troubled) quasi-mystical horizon in which it was inscribed by the modernist myths, variously as a displaced key or a transgressive phantasy, an engine that fuels the imaginary of a liberation, of an ‘outside’ to modern enclosures and identifies. But the animism in question remains the phantasy of otherness, a romantic antidote. (Franke 2010, 35-36)

Franke’s scathing critique on some of the artistic movements may be too categorical, yet the problematisation of the ‘other’ and the ‘outside’ is spot on. The conceptual complex with the heritage from the Enlightenment on the one hand, and institutionalisation of pre-Enlightenment thinking systems on the other hand leads Franke to make the plea to focus on, instead of ‘subjectivity of perception (leading to ever-new mirror-games)’ but on ‘perception of the subjectivity of the so-called object’. For him, ‘these subjectivities are not to be conceived

in anthropomorphic forms, but rather in relation to the available and possible forms and dispositifs of recognition' (Franke 2010, 49). This marks a paradigmatic shift from the epistemology to ontology, or variably expressed in Viveiros de Castro's multiperspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2004), explored in the chapters on DNA with a shamanic ritual featuring a bio-chimera, and by way of the Daoist butterfly dream in the chapter on Royce Ng. The chapters on Geumhyung Jeong's choreography and Ho Tzu Nyen's theatre also respond pointedly to the question of animism, including a critique on naïve animism and a proposition unearthing the relational aspects of animism.

When such multiple gazes and pushbacks emerge, it is in good order to turn back to the materialist strata of things. Vivek Chibber succinctly points out the culturalist tendencies of the Subaltern studies thinkers. Though Subaltern studies theory tries to challenge universalism inherently conditioned by eurocentrism by highlighting the experience of the colonised and racialised, they fail to recognise the underlying universalising mechanism of capitalism in the postmodern global world and the struggles of the underprivileged class for concrete material subsistence. The universalising tendency of capitalism allows it to assimilate differences instead of homogenising them. Indeed, there is a fine slippage from the good intention of provincialising Europe to the actual project of orientalising and exoticising the non-West. Chibber astutely comments on Dipesh Chakrabarty's social ontology modelled on the Indian society:

Because capitalism is wrongly taken to require complete homogenisation, any departure from the homogenising drive is seen as resistance to the abstract logic of capital: any practice not reduced to the abstract logic of capital is thereby a resistance to capital. The minute examination of such practices can then be linked to emancipatory theory, and so, offsets the intrepid area specialist in search of the myriad 'particularities and incommensurabilities' of his region, whether India, or Bolivia, or Turkmenistan. The more marginal, and the more mysterious, the better. The various practices are all construed as ways of being, or better yet, ways of *knowing*, that have escaped the totalizing grasp of capital, and hence presented as potential escape routes from it. Traditional Orientalism is thereby repackaged as resistance to capital. (Chibber 2013, 289)

Chibber's tone may be unfriendly critical, yet what he points out as the phenomenon of

‘the more mysterious, the better’ has vastly gained currency in academic and artistic spheres. As a meta-condition, the assimilation of critical energy, and more recently from non-West artists especially, into the global art market is inevitable, and has been slowly unfolding in tandem with the expansion of neo-liberal capitalism as we will see later.

This complexity urges me to always practice self-reflexivity. This is the method of speculation and immanent critique that takes both the motion of deconstruction (in a negative-productive way) and dynamic transformation. As Marina Vishmidt outlines in her book *Speculation as a Mode of Production* (Vishmidt 2018b), speculation figure variably in the work of Hegel and Marx, which performs a recursive process of regress. The example given in Marx, who preserves the dynamism of the regress without the Hegelian idealism, is how to move from a simple abstraction – a population, an industry, to the concrete components of it – the stratification of this population through class, and further breaking down to the concrete components that determine the practice in reproducing that society – wage, education, etc. This is similar to Whitehead’s concept of speculative reason with the three phases of discovery – observation, generalisation and renewed observation, crucial as an ‘adventure of ideas’ for novelty and experimentation, which will be discussed in the chapter on Royce Ng, capitalism and Confucianism.

In this light, even though my dissertation does not overtly deal with post-colonialism or Subaltern studies, there are chapters where I tread a fine line between voicing a nuanced subject position in facing questions of animism and historicity/time on the one hand, and the potential risk of exoticising and essentialising these particularities. The questions I deal with pertain more to philosophical debates, and as such are less liable to the logical fallacies as a social critique that are pitted against the Subalternist theorists. I do see the merits for a cross-cultural dialogue taking in consideration of all these subject positions with their non-essentialised differences, and not conveniently restraining oneself to either track of the discussion thereby foreclosing the possibility of a constructive framework. On top of that, I am aware that no theory can explain away the questions I investigate, whether ‘Western’ or ‘Asian’. Therefore, I try to elaborate on the context in each critical argument I make in the dissertation, and my position is carefully weighed in between these tendencies. On the one hand, one should recognise the differences and nuances when dealing with particular issues (language or the question of women for example), and at the same time, one should be careful not to exercise such differently situated thinking as a weapon or refuge, so to not fall into the trap of essentialisation.

When philosopher Peter Osborne claims that European philosophical tradition as a resource for art-critical discourse has failed, it seems that ‘the end of the end of the history’

paralysis by the name of contemporaneity bears hard on the West (Osborne 2013). To conclude this introduction, my approach to the questions of body, society and history exemplified in contemporary performance works embraces fissures and messiness, differences and commonalities in a way that articulates an immanent, and transcultural, criticality. As critical theorist Paul Gladston puts it, contemporaneity's multiply grounded perspectivism faces in two directions at once: 'as ineluctably negative of any commonly held ground for reflexivity or critical distancing [...] and as a (presently identified) location of the (continuing) transcultural productivity of critical meanings' (Gladston 2019). In the following chapters, I will practice a kind of 'witnessing of the immanence of deconstruction' (Gladston 2019), which means a transcultural materialist approach to questions both within and across assumed cultural boundaries as well as against itself as a singular basis for criticism.

2. Chapter Two

Taqiyyah and the Materiality of Language

On Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*

*The world was so recent that many things lacked names,
and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.*

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967)

2.1. Lawrence Abu Hamdan's Works

In the sound installation (or 'audio documentary' as the artist calls it) *The Freedom of Speech Itself* (2012) Abu Hamdan draws our attention to accent-tests deployed by governmental organs to determine the origin of asylum seekers through interviews of experts. The video and sound installation (or 'sound documentary') *The Whole Truth* (2012) introduces the audience to automated lie-detection technique, which measures bodily stress levels through sound. This technology is used in politicised contexts, such as in by European, Russian and Israeli governments as well as by border agencies and insurance companies. The video (or 'audio essay') *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley* (2013) investigates the concrete instance when the Druze Islamic community members gathered on each side of the border in a valley between Syria and Israel to shout at each other whereby language became a border-transgressing medium.

The different iterations of *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself* (2014-ongoing) constitute the artist's most profound engagement with the politics of speech and language so far and explore the inherent contradictions of speech through the Druze Islamic jurisprudence of *taqiyyah*. The installation version at the features a teleprompter – a glass sheet mounted on

a microphone stand mirroring the prompted text – in front of a flat screen, also mounted at eye-level. The installation invites the audience to face the teleprompter as if assuming the position of a speaker (in some of the live performative lecture iterations, Abu Hamdan appears in front of such a teleprompter himself). Narrative and commentary texts appear on the teleprompter, and seem to float above the video running on the flat screen. The presentation relates to language and speech on different levels: the video depicts the algorithmic capture of the speech such as in the lie-detection program, it also enlists speech through subtitling and other mediated and remediated forms. The teleprompter further complicates the presentation of texts in that its functional suggestion puts the viewer already in the position of the speaker. While this is a media-savvy set-up that depicts the algorithmic capture and modulation of speech through enacting speech acts and enlisting speech in subtitled, mediated and remediated forms, the rest of this chapter will focus on the performative lecture ('live audio essay') Abu Hamdan has developed under the same rubric.

In the performative lecture *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*, Abu Hamdan usually appears on an empty spare stage, speaking from his script on the teleprompter screen or on a music note stand, with video projection substantiating his lecture in the background. (Fig. 2.1 and 2.2) He carries a portable multiple-effects unit for sound modulation, making him appear strangely in between a hip musician and a nerdy scientist at the same time. The voice-distorting instrument, in both the musical and the scientific sense of the word, is indispensable to the performance as it opens, in the performer's own words, a 'multitude of statements that all emanate simultaneously from one voice' (Abu Hamdan 2014).

2.2. Language, truth and contradiction

2.2.1. The Sense of Contradiction

Drawing from the genealogy of his earlier works, Abu Hamdan opens with the distressing situation of surveillance in voice communications such as accent tests and lie detection software, and stresses that the freedom to remain silent is not enough to oppose this omnipresent form of surveillance. He then turns to an esoteric Shia Islamic jurisprudence called *taqiyyah*, in which 'a believing individual can deny his faith or commit otherwise illegal acts while they are at risk of persecution or in a condition of statelessness' (Abu Hamdan 2014). Practised by Islamic minorities, especially the Druze minority living in the Levantine countries, *taqiyyah* is often described as 'dissimulation or a divine permission to lie'. Yet Abu Hamdan explains, paradoxically, '*taqiyyah* is not lying but it is not not lying either' (Abu Hamdan 2014).

What does ‘not lying and not not lying’ imply? On a formal and philosophical level, it approximates such paradoxical structures as the Zen-Buddhist *koans*, although this chapter by no means wishes to compare the two belief systems. A *koan* is a short story or statement that represents an unsolved problem, which, while paradoxical or puzzling in nature, aims to help one to achieve enlightenment. Some famous examples are, ‘If you meet the Buddha, kill him’ (Linji), and, ‘Two hands clap and there is a sound, what is the sound of one hand?’ (Hakuin).

Such statements appear, on the surface, downright anti-intellectual and anti-logocentric. This is, of course, all intended as a vehicle for direct perception and attainment of insight. By essentially not acting in line with or contradicting what is asked or expected, there arises a new form of meta knowledge, one concerning the interpretation of all things and conducts. The negation of direct answers or paradoxical actions all charts the limitation of language ‘which allows the break-through to an alternative mode of experience to occur’ (Goodchild 1993, 3). There is an excess that cannot be addressed in language. Commenting on this form of Zen writing Deleuze observes, ‘The famous problems-tests, the questions-answers, the *koans*, demonstrate the absurdity of significations and show the nonsense of denotation’ (Deleuze 1990, 134).

In a similar way, *taqiyyah* is embedded in such a paradoxical structure of belief qua non-belief and shares a deep distrust of signification. Its wilful dispensation to lie complicates the relation of speech to reality and shows that speech is insufficient as a determinant proposition of logical problems. In the construction of logic, a statement like ‘lying and not lying’ would seem blatantly impossible, unless we recognise that language has an indeterminate sense. That is not to say that the ‘lying and not lying’ must be replaced by ‘lying or not lying’ to make logical sense, but that the sense of ‘lying and not lying’ exceeds the linguistic context of ‘lying’ and ‘truth’. We should also note that negation in the form of illogicality is not inherently negative, rather, “‘nonsense’ is not merely the subversion of order: it is, on the contrary, a process of imposition of order over chaos’ (Lecerle 2002, 102). In other words, precisely because of the indeterminate sense of any language, paradox functions as a ‘distribution’ of thought and common sense so that sense can emerge from nonsense (Lecerle 2002, 103). Further, it dethrones the notion of truth as confirmed by language and points toward the ‘denial of the power of any doctrine to articulate the truth’ (Goodchild 1993, 3).

2.2.2. Truth and Dissimulation

It is the common belief of truth reflected in language and speech that Abu Hamdan takes issue with in the next part of his performance.

Traditionally, the Druze believers don't go to mosques and instead pray in private. Abu Hamdan plays a video that shows the alleged conversation of a Druze community to Wahhabi Islam, under the forceful command of the Saudi Sheikh Saad Said Al-Ghamidi in December 2013. In this video of Al-Ghamidi's crusade widely spread on the Internet, a Druze community member is seen assuming the role of a *Muezzin*, who sings the *Azan*, the call to prayer. The Druze community was also allegedly ordered to speak the truth claim 'there is no god but God'. This instrumentalisation of the voice announces the break with the Druze community's traditional way of praying and their subjugation to a new jurisdiction.

Parodying the 'universalist' outcry of international media that interpret this matter as a threat to free will and individualism, Abu Hamdan offers an alternative claim:

[T]he act here was not the conversion of the Druze to Wahhabi Islam, but in fact an act of *taqiyyah*. What sounded to the ears of al-Ghamidi exactly like the required speech act of Islamic conversion or the sound of the *Azan* sung by the Druze was in fact nothing more than the sound of *taqiyyah*. (Abu Hamdan 2014)

Let's take a closer look at this very moment by resorting to the discussion of linguistics. In structuralist linguistics formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure, language is composed of as a system of signs, each consisting of a signifier (sound pattern) and a signified (concept), which are purely cultural constructs for they do not relate to an outside world, but only to each other (de Saussure 2011). Saussurian structuralist linguistics cast a lasting influence on structuralist anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who will come up later in Deleuze and Guattari's studies. Indebted to Saussurian, post-structuralist thinking takes its departure point away from the structuralist frame that attempts to explain the underlying operation of the world in structures. Deleuze, equally influenced by structuralist linguistics and approaches it in a different way, once puts it dismissively when he describes the linguist as someone who 'only finds in language what is already there: the arborescent system of hierarchy and command. The I, the YOU, the HE, is very much a part of language' (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 34). The structural institutionalisation of language which fixate the spoken and written language onto the two poles of the signified and the signifier is but a patent symptom of dualism: word and thing, form and material. For the signifier enthusiasts, 'from the word they extract the signifier, and from the thing a signified in conformity with the word, and therefore subjugated to the signifier. They operate in a sphere interior to and homogeneous with language' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 66).

The goal of rethinking language amounts to rethinking this fundamental dualistic pattern, as Deleuze formulates it,

We must pass through [passer par] dualisms because they are in language, it's not a question of getting rid of them, but we must fight against language, invent stammering, not in order to get back to a prelinguistic pseudo-reality, but to trace a vocal or written line which will make language flow between these dualisms, and which will define a minority usage of language, an inherent variation as Labov says. (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 34)

In an attempt to replace the dichotomy of the 'signifier' and the 'signified,' linguist Louis Hjelmslev uses the terms 'expression' and 'content,' and draws a larger picture that defines both terms as well as 'form' and 'substance'. In Hjelmslev's view, 'form' is nothing but the shadow of a grid work cast upon a surface of unformed, undifferentiated matter, and 'substance' the elements of matter contained in the now delineated grids on the surface. Similarly, what could be called 'expression' is but the shadow of a grid imposed upon 'an amorphous "thought" matter' (Bogue 1989, 126). This separates what could be called 'content' elements from the surface of thought matter. Their designation is 'quite arbitrary. Their functional definition provides no justification for calling one, and not the other, of these entities expression, or one, and not the other, content' (Bogue 1989, 126).

The question is not what a given sign signifies, or to which other signs it refers. It is the amorphous continuum that for the moment plays the role of the 'signified,' but it continually glides beneath the signifier, for which it serves only as a medium or wall: the specific forms of all contents dissolve in it. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 112) Hence expression or content, form or substance are not fundamentally different in kind, but are only different designations of levels or degrees.

Hjelmslev's proposition is important for Deleuze and Guattari because it positions expression and content on a plane of immanence, and identifies 'a material substrate which precedes the formation of the planes of expression and content' (Bogue 1989, 127). Or as Brian Massumi interprets it, 'there are any number of forms of content and forms of expression, each with their own substance or specific materiality' (Massumi 2002a, xviii). What is crucial, at this point, is the movement and process that constitutes our experience of things on a material level. Specifically, between a form of content and a form of expression 'there is only the process of their passing into each other: in other words, an immanence. In the gap between content and

expression is the immanence of their mutual “deterritorialisation” (Massumi 2002a, xviii).

Looking at language as a form of expression and content in reciprocal relation affords a theoretical lens to examine the alleged Druze conversion. J. L. Austin’s ‘speech act theory’ analyses how language not only presents information but also ‘does things,’ or, how the meaning of an expression and its proposed social reality coincide, such as when naming properties, giving promises and pronouncing verdicts. In line with Austin, Deleuze and Guattari discern the performative aspect of language, yet they inject more dynamism into the formation process of the performative. Their account of the performativity in language is situated at the blurred boundary, or in the mutual ‘deterritorialisation’ of the form of content and the form of expression.

Massumi underscores the connection between Foucault’s study of discipline and punishment, and the content and expression in Deleuze:

In Foucault’s analysis in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), as read by Deleuze and Guattari, the form of expression for which the prison is the form of content is ‘delinquency’. The actions in the social field leading to the emergence of the modern prison system were most effectively expressed in a varied and widespread discourse on delinquency, not through philosophical or semantic reflections on the meaning of ‘prison’. There was no essential connection between delinquency as form of expression and the prison as form of content. There is no logical or teleological reason why that particular articulation had to be. Its power was the cumulative result of a thousand tiny performative struggles peppered throughout the social field. The connection was made, and it was made collectively, under the control of no individual subject. (Massumi 2002a, xix)

In the moment that Abu Hamdan highlights, Islam is the form of content while the initiated bodies are its form of substance. The Druze community members’ utterance of ‘there is no god but God,’ then, contributes a substance to the form of content. There is no other relation between the form of content (Islam) and the form of expression (the utterance) than a performative one – this is when they pass into and ‘deterritorialise’ each other in creating a non-representational relation. Furthermore, this performative relation, or speech act, is capable of ‘transform[ing] the attributes and physical conditions of a body or state of things simply by being said’ (Massumi 2002a, xviii). Such transformation is not passive, nor does it merely exist in the interpretative realm, it also ‘modifies the target body’s own potential for action: it is an action on an action’ (Massumi 2002a, xix).

But what does *taqiyyah* do to this potential for action, itself being not a truthful action but rather a dissimulated or camouflaged action on an action, and contributing not a real substance but a mal-substance to the form of content? If Austin's performative utterances can only be judged as 'felicitous' and 'infelicitous', depending on, for example, if the speech act in the case of a promise is fulfilled or not, then the Druze speech act further complicates the situation. More than misfiring the intended performative speech act and consequently realising the intended potential for action, its elusiveness may be able to enact, modify and magnify other sources of potentials less than intended and welcomed, and all this happens in a substratum escaping accountability. Hence the moment of the Druze conversion is charged with political subversiveness seen through the principle of *taqiyyah*.

When applied outside of such emergency situations as the forced conversion, *taqiyyah* may imply a continuous shift or rewriting of the rules and codes. Indeed, it adds an evolving element that accounts for the transformation of game, in which *taqiyyah* could be seen as a framework 'for an opening up of subject positions, a liberation of what it means to make rules, share them, and play' (Flanagan 2009, 148).

Abu Hamdan continues:

Taqiyyah is a speech act! Yet unlike other speech acts such as the oath to tell the whole truth or the maritally consummating 'I do,' *taqiyyah* can take many different forms of vocal articulation and become performative in a multitude of spaces. (Abu Hamdan 2014)

2.2.3. Subjectless subjectivity

The paradoxical problems-tests, questions-answers and *koans*, or what Deleuze and Guattari elsewhere call 'atypical expressions,' all demonstrate the absurdity of significations and the nonsense of denotation, which are not to be taken literally as they are, but instead point to another mode of expression. Deleuze and Guattari write,

The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialisation of language, it plays the role of tensor; in other words, it causes language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or beyond of language. The tensor effects a kind of transitivisation of the phrase, causing the last term to react upon the preceding term, back through the entire chain. It assures an intensive and chromatic treatment of language. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 99)

Historically, Dadaists have experimented with the production of atypical expressions. From sound poetry, simultaneous poetry to cut-up method in composition, they characterise language as artistic materials, and not just the means for communication. The material aspect of language, the sound of words, is redeemed, and the syntax and grammar broken in return for an experience beyond logical meaning. In this way, the Dadaists join a tradition of thinkers who see the world as a continuum as opposed to fragmented slots cognised by our mind. Nietzsche, for his part, sees the world as a continuum, ‘from which we isolate a pair of fragments, just in the same way as we perceive a movement as isolated points and therefore do not properly see but infer it ... there is an infinite set of processes in that abrupt second which evades us’ (Nietzsche 1974, 173). The way we perceive movement can be likened to chronophotography, which frames movement into photography sequences. Though mechanical in nature, the framing for Benjamin can make a certain ‘optical unconscious’ manifest, by revealing phenomena that appear strange to the eyes. The Dadaists offered a way ‘to discover what Nietzsche calls “an infinite set of processes” occurring in the present moment,’ suggesting ‘a nihilism that opened onto bright horizons, not the pessimistic frame of mind in which the world is senseless and all hope is futile’ (Lushetich 2016, 28).

The bright horizon of senselessness is furthered in Guattari and Massumi. For them, there is an autonomy of self-creation, or ‘autopoiesis’ of atypical expressions (Massumi 2002a, xxviii). Instead of considering language as emanating from a cognisant subject, we are to conceive the subject of expression as thrown in the world:

It is because the subject of a singular expression continues under formation, still yet-to-come, that its autopoiesis must be considered a ‘subjectless’ subjectivity. Shy of its definitive capture at the reproductive end of its stream, it is a process without a fully determinate agent or product (an open-ended subjectification). The singular’s conditions of anomaly are counter-conditions of absurdity, but in an entirely different way than the postmodern. They are absurd not because they produce an *excess of* signification, but because what they produce is, as potential, *in excess* of it. (Massumi 2002a, xxviii)

We may infer, from the example of the Dadaists, that the production of sound and words – beyond semantic functions and hence as sheer materials is a way of achieving this excess. On a political level, the production of subjectless subjectivity reconfigures the subject analysed in Foucault and Deleuze earlier in that it complicates the production of political subjectivities.

Here, the weaponisation of *taqiyya*, beyond moral judgment and by mere fact of its being possible, suggests the thrust of hypertrophy within a deeply inscribed and increasingly ubiquitous political power matrix.

In the performance of Lawrence Abu Hamdan, the practice of *taqiyya* enacts a moment of autonomy of the atypical expression in the case of conversion to Wahhabi Islam. Precisely because it contradicts the Druze doctrine, the expression made by following the orthodox Wahhabite way of praying constitutes a yet-to-come subject, not in a determined relation with the Druze subjects. Yet in the ears of the Wahhabi war lord, this expression meets the projection of a determined subjectivity, hence renders the task of conversion complete.

If *taqiyyah* practiced here is a tool for the self-protection of a vulnerable community, it does not mean that it cannot be co-opted by other parties. Indeed, in the hands of jihadists, the interpretation of *taqiyyah* can amount to a powerful dissimulation strategy too. In concrete terms, it means ‘hypercamouflage’ and dissolution into the enemy, i.e. the infidels, and participation in all the worldly activities that a Muslim is typically not allowed to do, including taking drugs. It suspends the determinate rules of a ‘Muslim subjectivity’ such as taboo on drinking and drugs. Such expressions, as much practice-based as linguistically performative, only terminate as a definitive subject (non-Muslim), thereby creating a fracture in the typical Muslim subject identity. The result is to make it all the more difficult to identify a terrorist from a civilian, which arguably has already taken effect in parts of the world today. This weaponised reinterpretation of *taqiyyah* is ‘a silent and fluid military infiltration, a course of action which forms one of the elemental components of fetishised Jihadism’ (Negarestani 2007, 58). The subjects in this weaponised reinterpretation of *taqiyyah* undergo transformation in a practical, daily manner; their speech and conduct can no longer be measured by the logical construction of rules that differentiate an infiltrator from a civilian.

The Muslim subject is a cultural and historical construct in the West. Time and objectivity appear as important vectors underlying the discussions on religiosity and secularity. Whether the conflation of human and divine experience together or the carving out of ordinary time against higher time, time becomes a dimension through which worlds are played out. In this teleological view of time, non-West cultures were or still are relegated to an earlier stage of development (the Muslim world as a case), or on the ‘benevolent’ side of the same coin, they are romanticised and often categorically depicted as frozen in a pristine past (new age practices inspired by non-West spirituality such as Tibetan Buddhism). ‘Secular’ comes from ‘saeculum’, a century or age or a shared world of human experience. ‘Death of God’ theologian Gabriel

Vahanian holds that *saeculum* does not mean the opposite to sacred in the primary sense and instead underlies the secondary opposition between sacred and profane for ‘a *saeculum* is a theological notion which implies that we live in a world of immanence which functions as the location of human and divine meaning and value’ (Crockett 2001, 1). Charles Taylor emphasises the disenchantment of time: ‘People who are in the *saeculum*, are embedded in ordinary time, they are living the life of ordinary time; as against those who have turned away from this in order to live closer to eternity. The word is thus used for ordinary as against higher time’ (Taylor 2007, 55). Yet how secular is this secularity?

Not only does this disguise under secular time and objectivity affects science, but it has concrete political consequences: there are always groups with power whose interests are best served under the condition of history as *telos*. In the recent century, the West has experienced categorical reactions to Muslims as the Other. In his eloquent study *Islam in Liberalism*, Joseph Massad traces how liberalism has systematically established dualistic oppositions between Islam and Europe and Protestant Christianity, Western democracy and Oriental despotism, European/Christian women’s freedom and Muslim women’s slavery, European/Euro-American sexual freedom and ‘Islamic’ repressiveness and oppressiveness of sexual desires and practices, the tolerance of modern Europe and the intolerance of Islam and Muslims (Massad 2015). In the everyday, we are confronted with practices that seemingly pertain to a religious order, such as scarf-wearing in societies of moderate Islam, is our reaction not pray to the normative function of secularism? Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, Ian Buchanan sees the French Muslim schoolgirls’ voluntary wearing of *foulard* (head scarf) as an act of ‘neoterritoriality’ (without passing moral judgements), an archaism with a perfectly modern function (Buchanan 2008, 115).

The hegemony and normativity of liberalism is based on the moral superiority co-extensive to the conceptual structure of difference of the same, hence the universalisation of secularity becomes a weaponised ideal against the Muslim community. And behind these ideological debates is often a blatant political and economic game, leading to wars in the name of rescue and aid. Talal Asad rightly argues, ‘Violence is embedded in the very concept of liberty that lies at the heart of liberal doctrine. That concept presupposes that the morally independent individual’s natural right to violent self-defence is yielded to the state and that the state becomes the sole protector of individual liberties’ (Asad 2007, 59). In the West now, the normativity of secularity serves concrete domestic power leverage, such as those propagated by rightist movements in the very heart of Western societies (e.g. banning the Burkini). In all of these public outcries, the fundamental idea of the self versus the other, the difference to the

same can be discerned, which in turn validates the position taken on secularity versus religiosity, when the seeming differences merely affirm differences of the same.

Hence, the practice of *taqiyya* inserts dissimulated subjects, or subjectless subjects into the dualist social and conceptual structures. It occupies the liminal zone of ‘subjectless subjectivity,’ in both the case of Druze conversion, and in what Reza Negarestani calls the ‘weaponised reinterpretation’ of *taqiyya*.

2.3. Language, materiality and relationality

2.3.1. Non-sensuous Similarity and Sense-perceived Meaning

In order to discuss and enact the different forms of vocal articulation that *taqiyyah* may take on, Abu Hamdan introduces a Druze scholar, Wissam Abu Dargham, whom he impersonates as he reads the statements and simultaneously distorts his voice through manipulating the multi-effect unit.

Abu Dargham/Abu Hamdan explains the phenomenon common in their part of the world that mothers communicating with their new-born babies with two sounds:

It is just two sounds – INGHH and APOO – used to communicate with the new-born child. The new-born baby perhaps does not understand; it doesn’t have any way of processing this information in its brain to really understand any meaning other than just an abstract sound of the mother’s voice. So what does the INGHH APOO communicate? What is flowing through these two syllables? It is love and care. So the child receives these two sounds that don’t make any linguistic sense but transmit the mother’s love. (Abu Hamdan 2014)

In a low-pitched voice, Abu Hamdan (as Abu Dargham) gives a vivid demonstration of the raspy sound of ‘INGHH’ and the throbbing sound of ‘APOO’ to the extent that they almost exert forces – a combined affective resonance of the Arabic language and the electronic modulation.

This performative enactment of sounds brings us deeper into the matter of language. Here we will expand on the set of mutually inclusive notions of expression, content and substance to highlight the process of coming into language.

Massumi considers Benjamin’s idea that, in the old times, ‘people danced a storm’ and relates the connection between dance and storm to what he terms ‘non-sensuous similarity’

(Massumi 2011, 105). It is a similarity that does not situate in comparable correspondence between the senses of the body and the sky, rather, it is a similarity ‘tied to the senses but lacking sense content’ (Massumi 2011, 105), yet is nevertheless felt. To account for this relation, Massumi first plunges into felt-perception of movement in the experiment of Albert Michotte where a ball disappearing behind an object feels as if it continues its trajectory of travel. Daniel Stern’s ‘activation contour’ serves as a conceptual tool to explain this continuing in sense perception: ‘a continuous rhythm of seamlessly linked accelerations and decelerations, increases and decreases in intensity, starts and stops’ (Stern 1985, 57). To push this further, non-sensuous similarities can bring extremely diverse events or non-local linkages involving different sense perceptions together, in a qualitative way, ‘according to the quality of movement -- the activation contour or shape of change – they nonsensuously share’ (Massumi 2011, 108).

Two participants entering a relationship share the same activation contour, which essentially entails ‘differential involvement in the same event’ (Massumi 2011, 112). This dynamic relationship comes before the separation of forms and their supposed content but is often renegaded when we have learnt so, as we will see later. In the case of the mother and the new-born baby, the INGHH and APOO sounds the mother makes and her soothing actions happening at the same time would make up an activation contour by virtue of their shared intensities. The child would feel the love and care in both modes of soothing beyond their sensory specificity, that is, the shared relation is constant from hearing to touching. This is why the sounds don’t have to make any linguistic sense but suffices as materially and rhythmically determined on an activation contour to cast a sense-felt affect to the baby being soothed. This enactive force of sound reestablishes the materiality of language and extends the implication of meaning from semantics to including the ‘pre-meaning,’ and at the same time ‘sense-perceived meaning’.

At this point, Abu Hamdan turns off the morphing effect and comments in his own voice:

Through his description of *taqiyyah* as a vocal practice Abu Dargham reminds us of the fact that voice precedes language. That the baby listens to pure sound and the voice itself, not language, is the essence of communication. A reminder that in any context of speech the vocal form that the speech takes remains significant as a mode of communication in and of itself. (Abu Hamdan 2014)

The self-referentiality of voice here also points to the fact that through voice morphing,

Abu Hamdan's own voice material is iterated, serialised, and appropriated. It is left to the speculation of the audience if Abu Dargham is a real or fictive person; nevertheless, the presentation of a counterpart to Abu Hamdan on stage seems not without importance in a performative context. The sound morphing effect itself performs and makes us confront 'the reality of illusion (the live) with the illusion of reality (the mediated)' (Kattenbelt 2010, 35). This 'intermediality' in the performance affords a new sensibility by shifting the identity of the performer between his presented self and his other serialised identities, between being himself and make-believe. And the appropriation of Abu Dargham by Abu Hamdan (or vice versa) exposes 'the self-difference that was always already there, the always "more than" and "other than"' (Cull 2013, 48).

2.3.2. Politics of Pronunciation: Form of Being and Sound

Without explicit announcement of transition, Abu Hamdan goes into another form that *taqiyyah* may assume in the pronunciation of Arabic phonemes. It is noted that the Druze pronounce all Arabic phonemes faithfully, whereas other Arabic-speaking peoples drop certain letters for convenience, such as changing the 'qaf' sound of Arabic letter ق (most equivalent to English q) to a glottal 'af' sound. So the word *taqiyyah* would be pronounced distinctively by the Druze as 'taqiyyah', and by others as 'ta'iyah'. The different pronunciations are articulated by Abu Hamdan and the audio bite put on loop, creating a little symphony of sound variations.

This seemingly arbitrary drop of the 'qaf' pronunciation makes a significant difference in the contemplation of language and politics. Abu Hamdan introduces that according to certain Druze believers, 'speaking the truth is not about what you said but in the way of saying it, in the pronunciation of the letters themselves' (Abu Hamdan 2014). Switching to impersonate Abu Dargham, Abu Hamdan expounds on this further:

Speaking the truth is to enunciate the word as it is originally intended in the Arabic language and the theological context for this is that the Arabic language is the divine word of God. Unlike English, which is not the original language of the Bible, the Quran retains its original language. And because the Arabic language is the language of God it is the language of He who created all things. The Arabic language is not a representation of things in the world, but actually language is another mode for that thing to exist. The sound of the spoken word in Arabic is therefore inherently onomatopoeic, whereby the form of the thing and its sound are one and the same. (Abu Hamdan 2014)

This is a statement charged with theological and linguistic muddles. Indeed, some commentators of Abu Hamdan's work seem to have fallen prey to it. Curator Anders Kreuger refutes the idea that Arabic could be considered a medium through which things exist as they are, he especially opposes the temporal determination with regards to Qur'an, claiming, 'There was Arabic before the Qur'an and there was, and is, Arabic after it' (Kreuger 2015, 71). Theological discussion aside, let us consider what it means, and how it feels like, to conflate the form of being and the sound.

In the earlier case with the mother and the new-born baby, the shared action contour of soothing unifies the mother and the baby in a mutual relation and nowhere but in that relation, that is, it does not belong solely to the child or the mother. In this relation the form of being (action) and the participating language/sound is inseparable. And yet, the child will eventually 'learn to separate out what it actually hears, touches, and sees from what it perceptually feels amodally in the relational in-between of bodies' (Massumi 2011, 113). The relational in-between will part and the participant on each end will create separated forms of sense perception, so for the child, sound becomes audible and later language, tactile becomes touching.

It seems that when Abu Hamdan/Abu Dargham refers to language as another mode for things to exist, it would be more appropriate to understand language in the stage prior to the separation of form from which point the audible is to be experienced as inherent to language and the things as objects – a higher form of onomatopoeia. In contrast, the refutation for mutual relation of being and sound from a linguistics point of view is based on the (indeed unattainable) interaction between language and beings as separated forms and experienced as such.

Benjamin also sees language in the expanded sense as aligning in a relation with the divine, though without any theological overtone, 'God rested when he had left his creative power to itself in man. This creativity, relieved of its divine actuality, became knowledge. Man is the knower in the same language in which God is creator' (Benjamin 1986, 323).

2.3.3. Another form of existence: more on onomatopoeia

As analysed above, the mutual relation and the shared action contour of the form of being (action) and the participating language/sound is, before the cognitive registration of language, inseparable. This leads to Abu Hamdan's argument that language is another mode for things to exist. Indeed, we could trace the same inseparability in earlier developments of language, or in words maintaining more 'primary' roots in the process of development. This is imperative for a materialist understanding of language. In order to further this thinking, two aspects of the

Chinese language will be examined – in the case of onomatopoeia and of ideogram.

The case of onomatopoeia exists in a wide range of languages. Here we examine a case of onomatopoeia in words that are found in early Chinese sources, which sinologist and translator Jean François Billeter has carefully studied:

This [word] ‘芒芴’ (máng wù) has the same or similar meaning as in the words ‘渾沌’ (hùn dùn), ‘糊塗’ (hú tu), ‘葫蘆’ (hú lu), etc. Hun dun refers to a kind of chaos, [...] hu tu refers to muddled mind, and hu lu is calabash. These are very special words. They are binomials, each made of two consecutive parts with same or similar sounds, which is rare in classical Chinese. The two sounds are distinctive from each other yet only slightly, and they respond to each other, [...] similar to ‘borborygme’ (rumbling sound) in French, and of course, we can easily associate it to “tohu-bohu” (chaos and confusion in Old Hebrew). These binomials [...] maintain not yet completely separated phonemes [...]. This connection can be symbolised in the image of cabbalas, which boasts two rounded parts, being neither one nor separated. In all, everything comes from the unseparated realm of chaos, their lives arise from chaos. (Billeter 2011, 78) (my translation)

Billeter points out the similarity in phonetic quality in both constituent parts of a single-meaning binomial word and suggest that they represent a state when the meaning of the word formed (such as chaos, ‘hun dun’), yet the phonetic sound of the word remained in a state of lesser degree separation. What furnishes the discussion of onomatopoeia here is that certain sounds carry traces of the affective quality of the word, such as the ‘hun’ and ‘dun’ sounds – both nasal sounds produced by occluding air from going through the mouth but through the nose, which matches the image of internal and invisible movements that ‘chaos’ duly evokes.

There is a deeper level of onomatopoeia at play here, distinctive to the Chinese language. The words examined here, hun dun, hu tu and hu lu are, just like most of commonly used Chinese words, binomials. A binomial is a word consisting of two grammatically and semantically independent syllables (and clearly expressed in the different Chinese characters in writing), yet as a word has one specific meaning. Here, hun and dun, hu and tu, as well as hu and lu, as syllable/Chinese character, each has its own set of meanings, yet two syllables/Chinese characters conjugate to form words with one specific meaning. The fact that the two syllables – the ‘un’ and ‘u’ sounds – in a binomial are replicas of each other affords the speculation that the two syllables are not yet separated enough in the process of conjugating

bionomials. In other words, not only do the ‘hun’ and ‘dun’ sounds pertain phonetically to the image of chaos, but that ‘hun’ and ‘dun’ arise from a less articulated, and indeed more chaotic, state marked by their shared heritage of the ‘un’ sound.

Here, to use the analytical framework of Massumi, one could regard the sound of nasal ‘un’ and the (mental) image of chaos and confusion as sharing nonsensuous similarity, yet the linkage was there despite their different sense-inputs, only to be separated when the word for chaos (as sound) was formed from the lived and imagined reality. The exceptional aspect, as suggested in the case of hun dun, is that the delinking does not seem to be, or sound as if it were complete. Indeed, through the process of culture, it is *‘the separation of forms that is learned – not their dynamic relations’* (Massumi 2011, 113).

The materiality of language was further developed into a rigid and rhyming form of poetry or prose in Chinese literature. Without going deeper into specialist knowledge, suffice it to say that the tonal nature of the Chinese language has shaped these literary expressions in that it creates a balance and counter-balance between the characters and a point and counterpoint between the high-pitch (*ping*) and low-pitch (*ze*) tones of the characters. This sing-song effect is derived to enhance the harmonious balance of the piece.

Chinese characters are ideograms, symbolising the meaning without indicating the sound used to utter it. The construction of Chinese characters being an assemblage of radicals and basic components, each radical or component presents an abstracted form of life (such as the stand-alone characters – but also components in other characters – 日, sun, and 月, moon, were rendered in the earliest script as ☉ and 月), and the assemblage gives a meaning beyond the immediate appearance of things (such as 明 ☉月, brightness, is constructed with sun and moon put on each other’s side on the same level).

Japanese Studio Otoro designed an algorithm that ‘dreams up’ Kanji/Chinese characters that look completely plausible yet unreadable – and even following the right stroke order (Otoro 2015). The algorithm trains on stroke-order database of of Kanji, and comes up with probability distribution of the next characters based on a random sampling of an input character. The stroke-by-stroke writing is simulated by the probability distribution of the position of the pen and whether the pen is up or down. In this way, the algorithm generates self-made Kanji/Chinese characters that are, for a Kanji/Chinese reader, at once familiar and strange. Due to the inherent meaning in each component, even the fake Kanji could harbour potential meanings.

Writers of Chinese may be reminded of the rote process of repeating each character, and

mistakes – or fake characters – arise when one forgets one component and tries out possible variations. This also evokes Chinese artist Xu Bing's *A Book from the Sky* (1987-91), featuring around 4000 pseudo Chinese characters, finely carved on wood, typeset, printed and bound in traditional fashion. Some careful readers have found real characters – too rare to be identified as real – and have used them to challenge the artist. For me, even such ‘mistakes’ precisely highlight the possibility of emergent relationality in the Chinese characters – that it is an abstraction of life, including its visible forms and invisible operative forces. Though fake, the characters do point to a virtual relationship that may as well exist and indeed bring something new to the world, hence putting the language into a conundrum: at which point can the set of Chinese characters be said to have exhausted itself?

The relational world suggested by the ‘fake’ Chinese characters arises from a process of *prehension*. For Whitehead, *prehension* is a ‘uncognitive apprehension,’ an uncognitive ‘grasping’, or a pre-epistemic, not necessarily knowledge-based operation of relating to things and environments. This is a non-intentionality process (or not necessarily intentional process) of interaction, and suggests that indeed the ‘feeling’ can be located as much between a human subject and an apple as object, as between the apple and the ground; as much in physical *prehension*, apple and ground, as in conceptual *prehension*, or the realm of ‘thinking’. (Whitehead 1929) Conceptual *prehension* does not bear ‘reference to particular actualities’, hence for Luciana Parisi, computational processing of data is a form of pure conceptual *prehension* (Parisi 2014). I will return to the concept of *prehension* in the context of animism in the chapter on Geumhyung Jeong's work.

Here, in *prehending* input Kanji data, the possible events whereby strokes and forms correspond to the representation of data get reorganized in indeterministic ways and henceforth contributes to the emergence of something new. Yet this newness in algorithmic terms, or ‘machinic vision,’ is only relevant for us when we have an embodied cognition of it (indeed we may have too much of it, for example in Google DeepDream, which satisfies the very human desire of seeing for himself how the computer ‘hallucinates’ in visual terms). Because of the assemblage of Kanji components, the conceptual *prehension* or the decoding of Kanji returns the viewer to an embodied experience of life that pertains to the creativity and relationality of matters.

2.3.4. Expression, sense perception and language

The discussion on onomatopoeia in the previous section leads to a renewed examination of expression. Does expression predate language?

If we draw a larger plane of immanence on which language arises, expression can be seen as not yet detached from the smooth space, and happens not from within the boundaries of the subject but from outside in. This is not to discredit language as a faculty of the individual subject, but to locate expression as something pre-personal or impersonal. Massumi puts it succinctly:

More radically, Deleuze and Guattari are suggesting that there is an impersonal expressive agency that is not only not restricted to language, but whose process takes precedence over its operations. Expression is not in a language-using mind, or in a speaking subject *vis à vis* its objects. Nor is it rooted in an individual body. It is not even in a particular institution, because it is precisely the institutional system that is in flux. Expression is abroad in the world – where the potential is for what may become. (Massumi 2002a, xxi)

Massumi relates this impersonal expressive agency to the body, through the working of which the generative potential gets felt and articulate. He thereby affirms a theory of embodiment: “Artaud was right: expression ‘says too much to be born, and says too much in being born’” (Massumi 2002a, xxxii).

Antonin Artaud’s concept of Theatre of Cruelty is a primitive ceremonial experience that acts as a savage exorcism of the darkest latent forces inhabiting human experience. As such, it acts as an ‘emotional and moral surgery on consciousness’ (Artaud 1976). Artaud holds that theatre should mirror but not mimic life, and it should recall those moments when we wake up from dreams unsure whether the dream’s content, or the bed we are lying in, is our reality. (The state between dream and reality will be further discussed in the Butterfly Dream story in the last chapter on Royce Ng.) Important for a study on expression is the inspiration Artaud took from Cambodian dance and Balinese dance. The dance replaces words with ‘embodied states of consciousness as a series of gestures in flux. A metaphysics of gesture transformed the dancer’s bodies into pure signs and moving hieroglyphs’ (Salter 2010, 46). In this sense, dance, sign and the state of mind coincide to channel the expressive energy in a synthesis that articulates a mode of existence.

Similar operations are at play in rituals. Ritual is a way of performing thought via the performative use of language – language as *gesture*. Ritual works as ‘a technique of existence for bringing forth virtual events through techniques involving bodily performance, in mutual inclusion with events of the other kinds’ (Massumi 2011, 124). Massumi continues:

Its expressive momentum carries a charge of potential too great to be absorbed in any particular thing or event: too much to be born(e). It is for this very reason that it has to take body: so as to continue, generating a more to reality to absorb the excess. What absorbs the excess of potential are the determinate functionings of the host body. These actualise the potential in determinate forms of content and expression. That actual definition says too much in being born: it annuls the potential, bringing a current of expression to the end of the stream. So the movement must begin. Its determinate products must pass again into an intermediate state where they are repotentialised. Expression regains momentum, cascading through the body's many levels, like a contagion. If the result is an exemplary expression convoking of a collectivity, the contagion will spread. Expression will take another body. Across an indefinite series of such incarnations, it will not only have taken bodies, it will have taken on a life of its own. What each host body receives in return for its service to expression is a quantum of that vivacity: a quantum of potential to feed into its own growth and functioning. What expression spreads when it says too much are forces of existence. It disseminates life. It comes to be determined, and exceeds its determinations to become. (Massumi 2002a, xxxii)

Only when expression and content/substance are differentiated, detached from the felt-relation of the activation contour yet still retaining the qualitative affect open to enter into new relations, does language as we know it come about. Language 'makes it possible to share felt relations at any distance from the identifiable sensuous forms they yoke' (Massumi 2011, 116). Able to skip the intermediate steps (the physical condition in the relation between the mother and the child for example) and thereby detaching non-sensuous perception from local participants, language thus increases 'the range of its potential yoking between extremely diverse events' (Massumi 2011, 116). Such is the potential of smooth spaces, which gives rise to the variable features that are reflected – as we perceive them – in striated spaces.

Bergson holds similar views on language and words. For him, the word, 'made to pass from one thing to another, is, in fact, by nature transferable and free. It can therefore be extended, not only from one perceived thing to another, but even from a perceived thing to a recollection of that thing, from the precise recollection to a more fleeting image, and finally from an image fleeting, though still pictured, to the picturing of the act by which the image is pictured, that is to say, to the idea' (Bergson 1998, 172). Bergson describes this process as an

internal operation that catches the external world and at the same time penetrates into its own internal world through the layers of recollections (Bergson 1998, 172).

If Massumi highlights the ‘abroad in the world’ aspect of the expression, and Bergson calibrates it to the internal working of intelligence through language, then Whitehead’s view on perception and language brings more nuance into the interlocking moment of the immanent ‘sense-perception’ and the intelligence-processed linguistic rendering, or the intersection between the smooth and striated spaces. Whitehead differentiates ‘sense-perception’ from what is captured in thought. In sense-perception, ‘we are aware of something which is not thought and which is self-contained for thought’ (Whitehead 1920, 3). The example he gives is ‘red’: something is lost in the transition of the ‘red’ of awareness to the ‘red’ of thought (Whitehead 1920, 3). Hence in the abstract and autonomous realm of language, ‘nonsensuous perceptions may detach so thoroughly from objects that the “sense-perceived meanings” are entirely lost’ (Massumi 2011, 117). This is when language entirely disconnects from the smooth space and operates on the level of self-referentiality and homogeneity, which falls under the capture of the structuralist view of language. I will reflect more on this Whiteheadian concept of non-cognitive feeling and perception in chapter four on animism.

In line with the complex operation between sense-perception and language, there is an ambiguous passage concerning ‘知’ (knowing or perceiving) in Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi’s writing that begs a critical re-reading. He writes,

聽而可聞者，名與聲也。悲夫！世人以 (...) 名聲為足以得彼之情。夫 (...) 名聲果不足以得彼之情，則知者不言，言者不知，而世豈識之哉！

What we hear are words and sounds. Unfortunately, people believe that these (...) words and sounds could help one capture the true situation of things. This is wrong. (...) (my translation)

And the last sentence is usually interpreted as ‘those who know, do not speak; those who do not know, speak’. Again, this common interpretation depicts a worldly situation of one’s reservation and moderation in expressing thoughts. Billeter considers this almost too trivial for a philosopher; he takes this rendering of ‘知’ as ‘knowledge’ to issue and interprets it as ‘perceive’ (so “percevoir” instead of “savoir”): ‘They do not realise that, when one perceives, one does not speak; when one speaks, one cannot perceive’ (Billeter 2011, 13). Billeter further explains:

This passage from Zhuangzi describes a relation that we ourselves could observe. When we devote our attention on a subjective (感性) reality either exterior or interior to us, language disappears from the centre of our cognition. Conversely, when we use language, even though we do not necessarily stop our cognitive activities, our cognition still retreats to the periphery, where we do not focus our attention on. [...] Zhuangzi holds that precisely it is because our mental activities encompass this relation that language is illusory. When we speak, we do not cognise, hence we cannot see the gap between language and reality and mistakes language as the accurate expression of reality. And when we focus our attention on a subjective (感性) reality (for example, on a gesture we attempt to accomplish), we forget language and similarly do not perceive the gap between language and reality. (Billeter 2011, 14)

Billeter's translation of 'zhi' as 'percevoir' and not 'savoir' at this spot is plausible. Much more than being merely invested in humbleness and suppressing outspokenness, the saying provides an ontological stage for highlighting the process through which language comes about. Hence the constituency of language is never able to capture what is in the perception and cognition in the full.

How does the perception in the full seem like? Zhuangzi wittingly offers a parable of a mythical monster named Hundun, literally chaos (as mentioned above in the example of onomatopoeia): There were two emperors who frequently entered the territory of [emperor] Hundun, and Hundun treated them very generously. They discussed how they could repay his kindness. 'All men,' they said, 'have seven openings so they can see, hear, eat, and breathe. But Hundun alone doesn't have any. Let's try boring him some.' Every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hundun died. (Watson 1968)(with minor changes)

When we conceive things, including our bodies, not as unitary, complete wholes but as an endlessly creative, mattering continuum evolving in time, then they are in a state like Hundun's. Intelligence is assigned the task of contemplating this endlessly creative matter, organising the unorganised, speaking the unspeakable, trying to capture the continuity which is nothing but the evolution of life. This is the moment when the opening of the holes (rationale, intelligence) causes an irreversible differentiation. Zhuangzi pronounces the tragic death of Hundun, leaving the readers in their own journey of finding the Hundun moment in life. It may dawn on us, if our attention is attuned to it, when something exceeds the limit of structuralism, when it reaches us with the tactility and materiality encapsulated in language itself, or when we

are connected with the sheer emergence of relation between ourselves and language.

2.4. Inscription, language and politics

2.4.1. Inscription and overcodification

We have seen the potential of the expression ‘abroad in the world’ and its mediation through the body, and hinted at how autonomous expressions can be poetically explored in the arts. The reminder that there is an ‘outside’ of language, however, does not mean that this outside cannot be or has not been appropriated by or subjugated to overcoding structures.

To understand how overcodification works is important not only for this chapter on language and for the next chapter on DNA as codes, it further provides a foundation of engaging with language *politically*. This political lens will be put to use in the chapters on Ho and Ng focusing on their works with outspoken historical dimensions that imply a study of the *socius*, the collective body of the society. As mentioned in the introduction, I primarily draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s figuration of plateaus (of different speeds) to understand historical stages from the primitive, to the despotic and to the capitalistic. The processes of coding and decoding is crucial as they determine the composition, motion and modes of operation of the elements on the plateaus. It is hence no coincidence that Deleuze and Guattari speak at length about language.

Regarding the place of language in the primitive society, Deleuze and Guattari hold that ‘primitive societies are oral not because they lack a graphic system but because, on the contrary, the graphic system in these societies is independent of the voice; it marks signs on the body that respond to the voice, react to the voice, but that are autonomous and do not align themselves on it’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 202). At this stage, things divide but they divide into themselves, changing in intensity yet remaining on the same plane of immanence. This corresponds with the state before the separation of the form and content of expression analysed above, and indeed at that stage, expressions can be multiple, seen most clearly in the case of ‘hundun’ or ‘hulu’, where not only is the sound ‘un’ or ‘u’ onomatopoeic, but also the single sound is not yet separated into binomials.

In the next stage, the barbarian despotic order, inscription and overcodification takes place on the undifferentiated mass of things/meanings and writing comes about. This is ‘not because the voice has been lost, but because the graphic system has lost its independence and its particular dimensions, has aligned itself on the voice and has become subordinated to the voice, enabling it to extract from the voice a deterritorialised abstract flux that it retains and

makes reverberate in the linear code of writing. In short, graphism in one and the same movement begins to depend on the voice, and induces a mute voice from on high or from the beyond, a voice that begins to depend on graphism. It is by subordinating itself to the voice that writing supplants it' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 202). This fictitious, mute voice from above dictates the one absolute connection between the voice itself and graphism, at the cost of defacing the multiple voices once loosely organised around graphism. This is a process of inscription and codification on what used to be the full body of earth. In this way, writing as a 'direct filiation' is institutionalised. The consequence: 'Then there occurs a crushing of the magic triangle: the voice no longer sings but dictates, decrees; the graphy no longer dances, it ceases to animate bodies, but is set into writing on tablets, stones, and books; the eye sets itself to reading' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 205). Similar to the deterritorialisation – to make way for codification – we have seen with Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy, the conceptual thinking as the Greeks established it no longer operates on the earth itself but stretches out 'a plane of immanence that absorbs the earth (or rather, "adsorbs" it),' hence making an absolute deterritorialisation, irrevocable from the relative deterritorialisation of previous orders (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 88).

This exposition on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of language in relation to history reveals the political implication – however implicit – of differentiation itself, as it delimits the plane of immanence.

2.4.2. Writing

From another kind of materialist perspective, media theorist Friedrich Kittler also traces how the 'outside' of language is mediated through writing. It is important to reproduce it here as it relates to the politics of language. Kittler proposes a 'information-theoretical materialism', or a media materialism, through which he aims to examine the physical, material components of the communication system, and by extension, the human-machine complex with increasingly blurred boundaries. For him, information is 'transformed into matter and matter into information' (Kittler 1997, 126).

Kittler shares Hayles's problematisation of information theories that assume there is an underlying information layer beneath material things that can be extracted or abstracted. While Hayles emphasises embodiment, and resituates information in the bodily practices, for Kittler, there is no attempt to prioritise embodiment because the boundaries between bodies and machines are no longer clear: 'The age of media... renders indistinguishable what is human and what is machine...' (Kittler 1999, 146).

While I share more with the embodiment theory of Hayles, it's important to configure our investigation with technological components and systems. A fundamental idea that Kittler puts forward in his media materialism concerns language and the medial and technical conditions of it. He analyses how the formal languages of programming distort the human programmers who use them, and thereby introduce a feedback loop from the machine to the programmer rather than the other way round, this marks for him a differentiation from the human-tool relation and that the computers cannot be classified as tools (Kittler 2016).

While one may argue here that the feedback loop is taken in the narrow, first-wave cybernetics sense, and that man-programming language-operating computer program should be studied as one assemblage instead of segregated entities, the media materialism of Kittler does shed lights on the relation between philosophy and language. Kittler writes,

I start from the assumption that philosophy (or, in Heidegger's term, European metaphysics) has been necessarily unable to conceive of media as media. This neglect begins with Aristotle: first, because his ontology deals only with things, their matter and form, but not with relations between things in time and space. Second, because the Greeks did not distinguish between articulated speech elements and articulated alphabetic letters, the very concept of writing as philosophy's own (technical) medium is missing from Aristotle onwards. (Kittler and Yoshimi 2017, 23-24)

Writing as a medium is indeed indispensable for the undertaking of philosophy. In this context, the Greek vowel alphabet figures for Kittler as an early, pre-mechanical instantiation of the computer's universal sign system, incorporating letter, number and tone; and it too evolved in constant feedback with a magical thing that connects mathematics to the domain of the senses, the lyre (Winthrop-Young and Gane 2006, 12). For now, I will not pursue a comparison of music and mathematics/signs, but it is important to note here that the 'toolness' of the signs are affirmed as connecting to a magical instrument that pleases the senses.

To extend the reflection on the medium of writing, which then conditions philosophy politically, a passage from Latour is equally enlightening. In 'Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together' (Latour 1986), Latour highlights the condition for the persuasiveness of science by recounting a moment of writing on a scientific expedition as follows,

La Pérouse traveled through the Pacific under the auspices of Louis XVI to bring back maps for the French court. He encountered the native Chinese inhabitants on the island of

Sakhalin in Northeast Asia and wanted to learn from them whether Sakhalin was an island or a peninsula. ‘To his great surprise the Chinese understand geography quite well. An older man stands up and draws a map of his island on the sand with the scale and the details needed by La Pérouse. Another, who is younger, sees that the rising tide will soon erase the map and picks up one of La Pérouse’s notebooks to draw the map again with a pencil’ (Latour 1986, 5). The crucial difference is not that the Chinese cannot think abstractly or produce maps – they were perfectly capable of that, but rather the drawing was of no importance to them, indeed disposable by the tides, while the map on the paper amounts to the single most important object of study for La Pérouse. He was able to bring back the map to Europe, reproduce it and disseminate it for future expeditions carried out by others. This gives rise to scientific objects that have the properties of being ‘*mobile* but also *immutable*, *presentable*, *readable* and *combinable* with one another’ (Latour 1986, 7). By virtue of being mobile and immutable, the map enters into the shrine of science just as language did before it, disembodied from the context which it originates from, detached from the bodies that produce, and carrying on a life as an abstract entity in a system of communications.

In a larger context, this process is implicated in colonialism and the subjugation of other cultures and earth. I will return to the problematic of scientificity in the next chapter on DNA and art, and to the anthropological gaze and colonialism in the chapter on Ho Tzu Nyen’s *Ten Thousand Tigers*.

2.4.3. *Taqiyyah* and nomadic distribution

As we have seen, the codification process and making language immutable is by nature political. What *taqiyyah* amounts to is a powerful strategy to subvert the political capture of language. If in the earlier instances, the application of *taqiyyah* suggests transformation of the rules imposed on actors inherent in a given structure, here *taqiyyah* as an instance of pre-language amounts to rethinking the relation of actor and structure all together. Here a comparison of chess and the game of Go reveals the fundamental difference between logos and nomos, which condition thinking differently.

Deleuze and Guattari consider the difference between chess and Go as exemplary for two reasons: the pieces’ status and the relation between the pieces and the space they move through or occupy. Chess involves coded pieces, each overlaid with a certain given identity and corresponding function. Chess pieces move across an equally coded and gridded space, and enter into gain – or loss-determining relations with other pieces following prescribed structures. Go pieces are anonymous, collective and make moves to form situations of bordering and

shattering. Gain or loss is not a result of confrontation of certain pieces but is measured by the connectivity of a collective of pieces in relation to the space they are distributed in, so that one Go piece can destroy a whole constellation of enemy pieces. Deleuze and Guattari define the space of the chess as a striated space and the space of Go a smooth space. In Go, ‘the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 353).

It is therefore not surprising that Deleuze and Guattari hold that ‘chess is a semiology’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 353). Its predetermined structure and the constituent elements within a striated space are reminiscent of the operation interior to linguistics consisting of the signifier and the signified. Here, however, what is relevant for a discussion of language is not that language as a whole belongs to the striated space or smooth space, or is structurally similar to the game of chess or Go, but that the view of what informs its emergence and thereby the experience of language gravitates toward one or the other. Shackled to semantic structures that govern our thinking, there are nevertheless overflows, as shown in the case of paradox or onomatopoeia, that challenges the structuralism in language.

In contrast to the logos of chess, the Go is more akin to the nomadic nomos, which is without property, enclosure or measure: ‘there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits’ (Deleuze 1994, 6).

The nomadic distribution, based on distributing themselves to cover the largest possible space, has a sense of play: ‘it is more like a space of play, or a rule of play, by contrast with sedentary space and nomos’. Extrapolating this element of play back to the games, it is not to suggest that Go has more elements of play than the chess, but that the way the two games distribute the pieces vary in their sense of play, or delirium: the latter ‘is an errant and even “delirious” distribution, in which things are deployed across the entire extensity of a univocal and undistributed Being. It is not a matter of being which is distributed according to the requirements of representation, but of all things being divided up within being in the univocity of simple presence (the One - All)’ (Deleuze 1994, 36-37). This univocity in the nomadic distribution can be also described as ‘everything divides, but into itself’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 154).

In the game of Go, just as in language before the sound/utterance becomes detached from an activation contour, there is no single object – game piece, or the object as ‘signified,’ but the object is in an event of ‘continuous variation’ (Deleuze 1993, 19). The continuous variation allows for continuous transformation of the plane, its actors and their movements

enfolded, thereby avoiding falling into a dualistic representational mode. A nomad evades accountability in the all-eyes, all-ears control society, as Agamben notes, ‘A being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the State’ (Agamben 1993, 86). In this sense, to defy the decentralized network of control, one has to stay within and become in excess of it, or in the word of Galloway and Thacker, to become ‘hypertrophy’: ‘resistance implies a desire for stasis or retrograde motion, but hypertrophy is the desire for pushing beyond’ (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 98). We could view *taqiyyah* as a tactic of reclaiming the smooth space, reconnecting with the exterior of language that informs its very emergence and hence avidly transforming its own condition of being. Therefore, we could understand why *taqiyyah* takes various forms in the Druze belief.

It is important to note that the operations of striation and smoothing are always in flux and undergoing ‘passages or combinations’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 500). The question is, of course, when does the striated become smooth, and when does the smooth become striated? In the case of the mother and the child, language and its content, yoked as part of an activation contour, rest on the surface of the smooth space. The points (sound, action) as articulation of the relation are subject to the trajectory (activation contour), as opposed to the trajectory (language) merely linking the points (‘signifier’ and ‘signified’) in the linguistic model. And yet, this is only a momentary stasis before the smooth becomes striated again and the senses de-yoke to form other sense relations.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter turns around the junction of the two-way movements that *taqiyyah* operates with. Earlier in this chapter, the reading of *taqiyyah* as *koan*-like or paradoxical dissimulation attempts to recast the relation of form of expression and form of content, only to reveal their mutual ingression and to open language to its exterior. The alignment of *taqiyyah* to the ‘sense-perceived meaning’ native to the smooth space and before the reduction to linguistic semantics, subsequently, highlights the dynamics of the immanence that constantly ‘de-yokes’ and differentiates into language and expression. A survey into onomatopoeia and the cultural history of the Chinese language further evinces the pre-personal quality of expression. These two movements from different sides both end in the place of language in the form that is experienced on a daily basis. Hence by partially enacting and partially demonstrating, Abu Hamdan shows how *taqiyyah* may help us conceptually transform and expand the spaces on both sides of language, and once again – however momentarily – reclaim the smooth space.

In the very last part of his performance, Abu Hamdan returns to the political implication

of *taqiyyah*, with which he starts the performative lecture and with which he has dealt in his earlier works.

In our time of technological intervention in lie detecting and accent tests, it is not what one speaks but rather how one speaks that is subject to examination. We have seen that to apply *taqiyyah* in this doomed situation means the freedom to remain silent. We have also seen, in cases of coercion such as the forced conversion, *taqiyyah* could be adopted as camouflage. The practice of *taqiyyah* always looks away from the interiority of language to enact a consciousness pertinent to the smooth space – transitory, resistant, subject to the exterior and looking for ‘transversal interconnections’ in the politics they find themselves in (Braidotti 2011, 186). In closing, Abu Hamdan emphatically concludes:

Taqiyyah is the infra-politics that plays out in the minutia of human utterance. ... *Taqiyyah* is not a minorities’ claim to an identity and State of one’s own, but rather a claim to Statelessness; it is not the right to rule the land, but a command over the border itself. A simultaneously subservient and subversive form of political agency. A contradictory concoction of simultaneously speaking freely and remaining silent. (Abu Hamdan 2014)

3. Chapter Three

Codification, Desire, and Transgenetic Technology: On Vanouse and Spiess/Strecker's works

*It was when I said
'Words are not forms of a single word.
In the sum of the parts, there are only the parts.
The world must be measured by eye'*
Wallace Stevens, 'On the Road Home' (2009)

This chapter continues the queries into the materiality and codification of language, albeit 'language' of a different kind, namely that of the human genome. Or following the new materialist method proposed, we shall start not from negative bifurcation but rather from the creative undifferentiated state before processes of bifurcation, codification and reduction under the scientific capture, which in this case implies the materiality and efficacy of life matters. Why is the context of science, and the artistic probing into science interesting for the analysis? It shows the underlying interlocking relation between 'nature' and 'culture'. For the mechanism of reductionism is operative as much in the cultural realm and social sciences, including language, social norms like family, and social constructions like gender and race, as it is in science. For this, this chapter draws on DNA profiling and DNA as a book of life in the popular imagination, as well as more recent debates in transgenetic engineering. This chapter aims to achieve a cultural perspective on these developments. As Dolphijn and van der Tuin point out, new materialism is firmly engaged in the rewriting of events that are usually only of interest to natural scientists, because a new materialist perspective on 'nature' is transposable to the study of 'culture' and vice versa, notwithstanding the fact that these transpositions are not unilinear (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 91).

A darkly humorous opening teaser to this chapter, borrowed from the novel and film *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: having taken 7.5 million years to ponder 'the ultimate answer to life, the universe, and everything,' the super computer announces its final calculation to a large, impatient audience: '42'. Naturally, everyone is dazed, confused and disappointed. Upon registering this, the super computer explains that the question isn't clear enough, and that in order to provide an answer to the ultimate question, a computer infinitely more complex is needed, one that would comprise organic life, and that, incidentally, this computer should be called: 'Earth'. (Adams 1979) In other words, the ultimate computer is the bio-chemico-physical sphere of the Earth itself. This is, of course, an ironic take on computation: if a super computer were capable of simulating absolutely everything, it would have to be absolutely everything itself. The underlying cultural problematic here is our deep, posthuman belief that everything is information and that, as Katherine Hayles has pointed out, information circulates *unchanged* between the different material substrates (Hayles 1999, 1), instead of the substrates both changing and being changed by the circulating information.

With this in mind, in this chapter I set out to examine the politics of the DNA codes and the transgenetic engineering technology as related to notions of life and death, the organic and the inorganic, the temporal and the material strata of sex and reproduction. I do so through the prism of two artistic positions: Paul Vanouse's *Suspect Inversion Center* (2011) and Klaus Spiess and Lucie Strecker's *Hare's Blood +* (2014). Vanouse's work challenges the veracity of the DNA as evidence in crime investigation thereby revealing how biopolitical power overcodifies the material strata of the DNA to take control of life. Spiess/Strecker, for their part, stage an auction of transgenetic chimera whose organic 'death' critiques the virtualisation of value in affect economy, and the real subsumption of 'life itself' under biotechnology. Life is rendered informational and measured by its energy expenditure and cost of reproduction, heralding a desire of self-reproduction: parthenogenesis. Yet exactly the capitalistic desire of desire points to a possible double-folding to the feminine intensive desire in the primitive sex before two-parent sex, suggesting that the inorganic becoming of the chimera harbours subversive potential to undermine the necropolitics of genetic engineering technology.

3.1. Overcodification and DNA as Signifier

3.1.1. Paul Vanouse's works

Paul Vanouse's installations and live performances often turn around biopolitics and the epistemological limit of biotechnologies. In his 2002 installation *Relative Velocity Inscription*

Device, Vanouse used the DNA imaging technology including gel electrophoresis to render visible the DNA segments of his partially Jamaican family members. Each of the samples passing through the gel electrophoresis made a moving banding pattern in which light and dark transversed fluorescent-coloured bands visible to the naked eye, while simultaneously producing a racing effect. The artist intervened in the visualisation of the DNA by coupling his family members with their respective moving banding patterns, effectively creating a racing game to test the ‘fitness’ of his family members, thus alluding not only to the cultural myth of the ‘fitter’ (Jamaican) race, but also acting as a poignant reminder that DNA studies harken back to racial studies. In his 2007-2010 installation *Latent Figure Protocol*, Vanouse purposefully subverted the DNA imaging process by adding enzymes to manipulate the outcome of the banding pattern and crafting them into cultural symbols such as a ☺ or ©. This strange synthesis of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ raised questions about the expressivity of the DNA itself, while, at the same time, taking the authenticity of the DNA imaging technology to issue.

In similar vein, *Suspect Inversion Center* (2011) is a staged, fully functional laboratory and a live performance where the audience witness the laboratory processes of constructing historical DNA fragments of the alleged murderer O. J. Simpson with the aid of the artist’s own DNA. (Fig. 3.1) In front of the audience, the artist and his assistant complete each step of the process including injection, separation, and imaging using wet lab tools, which amounts to a performative moment based on precision and procedurality. The macro-level blends into the micro, where the operation of the two ‘scientists’ is augmented by their physical relation to the ‘set’ – the tubes, liquids and gels, mediated by the subtlety and precision of touch. (The next chapter on Geumhyung Jeong will continue this discussion on man-machine dynamism in a relational and desiring network.) Though this may be the most basic routinely operation in a real laboratory, here the scientific instruments and materials are so tangible that they exert a kind of immediacy in the performative moment, especially when one thinks of the state-of-the-art laboratories today where biological experiments are increasingly computerised and automated. (Electrophoresis remains one of the common methods of separation and detecting for DNA profiling today.) Even the treatment of the biological waste cannot be taken for granted in an art context as in a science laboratory. The audience may rightfully ask, when and where does the performance end? Where do the remainders of the performance go? The laboratory process obviously involves different processes, goals, temporality and modes of representation, while being implicated in larger cultural contexts that co-determine scientificity. Putting this on display affords a performative reading of the actants, both human and non-human, both material and conditional. All actants ‘take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their

relations to other entities' (Law 1993, 3) and establish a relational materiality through which performativity in the expanded sense (as put forward in the introduction chapter) comes about.

The other 'performance' takes place in the scientific process itself: the behavior of the DNA segments. The constructed DNA is made visible through the imaging process based on the above-mentioned gel electrophoresis technique, where long chains of DNA are cut into smaller pieces using restriction enzymes. These DNA pieces contain sequences that vary greatly among unrelated individuals, making them the perfect base for DNA profiling. The obtained fragments are subsequently separated as they are run through the electrically charged agarose gel field, with shorter sequences moving further away from the original spot and longer sequences moving closer to the original, thus marking up the DNA profile used in forensic studies or for parental clarification. Playing with the acronym of CSI (crime scene investigation), *Suspect Inversion Center*, or *SIC*, situates itself at the intersection of laboratory sciences and crime investigation. Using various probes and enzymes to modify the fragmentation of his own DNA material, Vanouse succeeded in creating a banding pattern identical to that of O. J. Simpson's, the notorious acquitted murderer. Described as 'the most publicised trial in history' by the USA Today, Simpson's trial was also one of the first trials in which DNA profiling played a prominent role.

Discussing the motivation behind his practice, Vanouse draws on a statement made by a FBI science spokesman who equated DNA profiling with the use of fingerprints, so that during the trial, the jury may use the available evidence to identify 'one individual to the exclusion of all others' (Vanouse 2011, 61). As Vanouse rightly points out, the FBI spokesperson did not care about the politics of DNA analysis, rather, the 'jury's belief was their main concern' (Vanouse 2011, 61). DNA profiling is a widely used tool in criminal investigation since the 1980s. However, despite its seeming reliability in the popular view, the accuracy of DNA profiling depends on many factors, including how the DNA samples get to the crime scene, so the labs normally demand a large quantity of crime scene samples with the suspect's DNA. It is the seeming authenticity of DNA profiling that Vanouse undermines through the meticulously staged, detailed enactment of the laboratory process and the fabrication of a fake signifier. The understanding of the DNA as a signifier of a particular reality, be it identity or disease, stands, in popular imagination, in contrast to notions of content and expression, which I will use in conjunction with Luciana Parisi's three-tiered construction of biophysical, biocultural and biodigital, also known as 'abstract sex' to undermine the reductionist tendency of reading genes as signs and to trace the discursive movements at multiple sites and on multiple levels around DNA and life.

3.1.2. Abstract Sex and Meta-Stable Bodies

In investigating abstract sex, Parisi draws on the feminist politics of desire, or the micropolitics of becoming-woman. She situates the politics of desire in the biophysical, biocultural and biodigital strata through a careful reading of the history of biology and genetic technology. Her alternative conceptual frame of abstract sex radically redefines sex and body based on a continuum between three levels of sex: the cellular level or biophysical sex (bacterial sex), human or biocultural sex (heterosexual mating), and bio-technological or biodigital sex (cloning). (Parisi 2004, 12) These three levels are linked through the manifestation of a non-discharge-based desire for becoming, in other words, by the proliferation of information exchanged via the (unnatural) mixtures of bodies and sexes. Different bodies-sexes co-exist and enfold to make up the human body – the bacterial body, the nucleic cell's bodies, the multi-cell organisms' bodies, some of which replicate by themselves while others participate in genetic trading and mixtures. A body is thus defined by 'metastable relations between microcellular and multicellular bodies, the bodies of animals and humans, the bodies of society' as well as by the 'technological bodies merging and unleashing new mutating compositions' (Parisi 2004, 27). On each level, this meta-stable state, that defines the composition and organisation of bodies, depicts the body as non-holistic, as noted by Gilles Deleuze:

The logos is a huge Animal whose parts unite in a whole and are unified under a principle or a leading idea; but the pathos is a vegetal realm consisting of cellular elements that communicate only indirectly, only marginally, so that no totalisation, no unification, can unite this world of ultimate fragments. (Deleuze 1972, 174–175)

The logos informs the common understanding of the human body. Descartes, for example, sees living organisms as assemblages of machines. Such a machinic and reductionist understanding of the human body feeds into popular imagination and contributes to the misleading view that with the Human Genome Project which completed in 2003, we can piece together the secret of our existence as in a puzzle. Many media portrayed the sequencing of the genome as deciphering the 'book of life'. The 'book of life' reference is not unfounded. There has been a structural linguistic view that likens DNA to language, pairing nucleotides and letters, and codons and words (Jakobson 1973). I do not wish to say that this is not without merit, but as the previous chapter has shown in regard to linguistics, it is a cultural construction

that rather disregards the materiality of language. And here too, it does not account for the complexity and materiality of DNA.

The public discourses have evolved much further to date, and more and more attention is turned toward other non-genetic or non-nucleic factors. So this part of the dissertation is a cultural observation based on a historical frame of understanding DNA and heredity. As a cultural reflection, the scientific relevance of it may be constantly updated, but the methodology and rigour can be applied to new contexts. In this sense, we will see that the non-genetic factors in heredity are not without problems. And with the rise of transgenetic engineering, a new tide of reductionism is on the rise.

The figuration of the vegetal realm reminds us that the human body cannot be reduced to a unified organisation, to a sum of discrete parts, and certainly not a sum that can be explained through our genes, as poignantly noted by the super computer in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. New materialist scholar Diana Coole identifies that these emerging fields of genetic studies oblige new materialists to recognise the interactions of different orders of matter: The unexpectedly small number of genes that geneticists actually found compelled them to abandon the explanatory framework of simple genetic determinism and to acknowledge that an organism's particular properties and susceptibilities are produced through complex interactions between genes and a host of other factors such as hormones, neurochemical stimuli, dietary intake, and environmental conditions. This has in turn prompted a reappraisal of organisms as discrete, autonomous units with relatively tidy, bounded causal patterns. (Coole 2010, 17)

At the same time, new materialists should be alert that materialities are always already material-cultural constellations, and there is constant need to reassess the cultural discourses constructed around them. For example, the field of epigenetics, where 'epi' stands for being 'on top of' has shown that many tangible and intangible factors co-determine inheritable characteristics that are beyond the changes in the DNA sequence. It should be noted, however, that the potential of epigenetics to rescue life from DNA determinism is subject to a new kind of determinism, that of social and behavioural circumstances. For example, one campaign called 'Begin Before Birth' from the Imperial College London portrays how stress and anxiety during pregnancy are correlated to troublesome behaviours in the kids later, implying a new correlation and determinism between social class and social behaviours and the wellbeing of one's offspring.

Despite the complexity of inheritance, virtual DNA codes still occupy a privileged position in popular imagination. Behind this view is the scientific rendering of the world in terms of *telos* and linearity, which Parisi interrogates by placing the emphasis on non-linear

developments across three strata, thereby challenging the supposedly linear evolution or progression from bacterial DNA trading, to genetic recombination processes of animal and human reproduction, and, finally, to transgenetic operations such as cloning.

How could the symbiotic relations, the continuum between the different levels of order (biophysical, biocultural and biodigital) look like? We may find some hints from geneticist Albert Jacquard in his expanded notion of 'life' as, in the words of performance scholar Schneider, 'the basic propensity of all matter to mime' (Schneider 2015, 11). Jacquard writes, 'What appeared 3 billion years ago was not "life," but a molecule that happened to be endowed with the capacity to make a copy of itself – to reproduce. This capacity is due to its double-helix structure and the process is not particularly mysterious; it is the result of the same interactions between atoms as those which are at work in all other molecules' (Jacquard 1998, 33–34). In this sense, an isomorphism in an expanded sense can be found: the fashion in which actions on different levels are addressed may be a similar way.

This scientific fact affirms the primary force of interaction at play on the nucleus level and on the atom level. This cloning of the cell of bacteria, in the very early moment of 'life' on earth, constitutes for Parisi a 'bacterial sex' and expresses a non-anthropocentric form of desire. At the same time, it resonates with Spinoza's conatus as the perseverance of a thing in being (Spinoza 1992), and Whitehead's 'conceptual initiative' or 'the origination of conceptual novelty' (Whitehead 1929, 102), which highlights the active self-transformation of entities.

From this moment on, 'life' goes on, but not necessarily in a linear fashion. In an effort to account for a non-linear development of abstract sex, Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan's theorisation of endosymbiosis offers an important insight: symbiotic and parasitic relations precede the appearance of nucleic DNA and sexual reproduction but *co-exist with the latter* as a form of continuing the life of a cell. In other words, bacterial and cellular beings, though seemingly belonging to different stages in the linear progression of evolution, have a mutual interest in each other's continued existence (Margulis and Sagan 1986). Based on Margulis and Sagan's study, Parisi identifies the connection between the two states of cell separation – mitosis and meiosis – as 'an intensive extension of microbial sex and reproduction' (Parisi 2004, 79). Mitosis, through which most human cells and animal cells are produced, is the cell division by which the chromosomes self-replicate in the parent cell so that each of the two daughter cells gets the same set of chromosomes. Meiosis is the process of cell division where the chromosomes in the parent cell self-replicate once while the cell divides twice, resulting in four daughter cells, or haploid cells, each containing half the number of the parent cell chromosomes.

Meiosis enables genetic variation in sexual reproduction when two haploid cells – sperm and eggs – mix the genetic materials from two parents.

Through the lens of mitosis and meiosis, we can trace a non-linear history of biophysical sex and biocultural life. According to Margulis and Sagan's study, the ancient protists (eukaryotic cells) ate each other under harsh circumstances, incorporating each other's genetic material in a process like mitosis (biophysical sex). A new (re)balance is achieved only by a reduction of chromosomal duplicity in the process of meiosis, heralding later developments in sexed haploids (biocultural sex). (Margulis and Sagan 1986, 152) Importantly, studies show that when meiotic sex first spread in protists, sexual patterns appeared nearly identical, suggesting that the way genetic materials duplicate and transmit through meiosis leads to the formation of sexed organisms in animals and plants, rather than the other way around. Hence Parisi claims that meiosis as a cell operation gives rise to sexed forms of organism in plants and animals (Parisi 2004, 80). This instance of meiotic sex sheds light on the parallel yet connected modes of sex, or exchange and differentiation of genetic materials on both the biophysical and the biocultural strata. The implication of the cross-strata continuum of meiotic sex and the cultural notions of sex in relation to feminist desire will be explained later. For the moment, I will resort to the already mentioned content and expression to examine the linguistic structure used in the scientific organisation of sex that simplifies and reduces the aforementioned strata (in)to codes.

3.1.3. Content and Expression, or How DNA Becomes Overcodified

As analysed in the last chapter on Lawrence Abu Hamdan's work, linguist Louis Hjelmslev's proposition positions expression and content on a plane of immanence, which has in turn inspired Deleuze and Guattari. In an attempt to replace the dichotomy of the 'signifier' and the 'signified', Hjelmslev uses the terms 'expression' and 'content,' and further clarifies that both terms have the intrinsic properties of 'form' and 'substance'. Content refers to the visible states of things formed by complex power relations. Expression is the set of articulate statements and discourses arising from the field of social interactions. In Hjelmslev's view, 'form' is nothing but the shadow of a grid work cast upon a surface of unformed, undifferentiated matter. 'Substance' is matter contained in the now delineated surface grids. Similarly, 'expression' is but the shadow of a grid imposed upon 'an amorphous 'thought' matter,' which separates what could be called 'content' elements from the surface of thought matter. Their designation is 'quite arbitrary. Their functional definition provides no justification for calling one, and not the other, of these entities expression, or one, and not the other, content'. (Hjelmslev 1969, 126)

This means that expression or content, their form or substance are not fundamentally different in kind, but are only different designations of levels or degrees. Brian Massumi interprets Hjelmslev in the following way: ‘there are any number of forms of content and forms of expression, each with their own substance or specific materiality’; further, between a form of content and a form of expression ‘there is only the process of their passing into each other: in other words, an immanence. In the gap between content and expression is the immanence of their mutual “deterritorialisation”’ (Massumi 2002a, xviii).

To understand the dynamic relation between expression and content in the social field, Deleuze and Guattari draw on Foucault’s analysis on the production of delinquency, which points to the penal law as the form of expression and delinquency as the substance of expression, and the prison as the form of content and the prisoners as the substance of content (Young 2013, 140). The performativity in and of the social field, in this case, pronouncing the sentence, is what binds the content and expression through their mutual deterritorialisation. This performativity underlies the operation of biopolitics in Foucault’s study of how human beings are socialised into subject positions through the institutionalisation of discourses, and how life is managed and governed through the operation of power. Extrapolating the notion of expression and content, Parisi suggests that a similar dynamism is present on the immanent plane of genetic materials. She locates the form of expression in genotypes, the substance of expression in phenotypes, the form of content in chromosomes, and substance of content in cytoplasmic and mitotic processes (Parisi 2004, 88). The expression, or the ‘decoded’ genotypes, characterise an organism’s identity, which is in a perpetual process of deterritorialisation with regard to content, in other words, the chromosomes that carry them. Here, genotypes refer to the genetic composition, or the DNA codes of eukaryotic cells of humans, animals and plants, commonly held as the sole key to the secret of our (human) being. Yet there are other, non-nucleus-based forms of heredity, for instance through mitochondria in the cytoplasm, which also possess genomes passing through the maternal lineage, whose molecular mechanism has remained elusive to scientific studies. However, studies have suggested that the human mitochondria might have come from bacteria with an ancient history, and were only later incorporated into the eukaryotic cells. In this sense, mitochondria are a very ancient form of being preceding many other forms of life yet living *in endosymbiosis* with us. This means the distinction between nucleus/chromosome (form of content) and cytoplasm/mitochondria (substance of content) is ‘not a boundary but a threshold between parallel networks of sex and reproduction (nucleic and mitochondrial)’ (Parisi 2004, 78).

What *overcodifies* the multicellular forms of content and expression (the chromosomes

and the genotype) is a 'regime of signs,' through which biophysical processes become linguistic signs on the biocultural stratum. Parisi puts it thus:

Overcoding implies that the '[f]orm of expression becomes linguistic rather than genetic'. On this new level of organisation, expression no longer operates through genetic connections, but entails the emergence of a new order above the layers of the genotype. This new order of expression is constituted by comprehensible and transmittable symbols that convey a superlinearity: the capacity to synthesise all codes-milieus' relations into a sufficiently deterritorialised system of signs. In particular, this order defines the capacity of the scientific world to translate all particles, codes and territorialities of the organic strata into a new order of signs. [...] It involves an abstraction (virtualisation or potentialisation) of particle-signs on a new level of relations, producing a new organisation (decodification and deterritorialisation) of forms and substances of content and expression. (Parisi 2004, 89)

This overcodification imposes a linguistic character on genotype and all its associated material processes, disregarding the mutual deterritorialisation between the content and expression and enforcing each to form its own organisation. It further transforms these immanent intensities into extendible entities – signifiers, so that on this new level of organisation, the abstracted entity of DNA sequences or genotypes is taken conceptually as a signifier for phenotypes, be it identity or a particular illness. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, the imperialism of the signifier 'challenges exegesis in the name of recitation, pure textuality, and superior 'scientificity (*scientificité*)' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 208). Furthermore, the consequence of overcodification is an extension of Western intellectual history – a certain bifurcational thinking, using genotype to access the realm beyond (phenotype) without seeing the difference between the two as form and substance of the same expression.

A number of scholars have contested the seeming indisputability of science through anthropological reflections and philosophy of science. Scientist and Nobel prize laureate François Jacob has made the following observations on the life sciences, 'like the other natural sciences, contemporary biology has had to discard numerous illusions. It no longer searches for truth; instead, it constructs its own truth' (Jacob 1997). In *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979), Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar shows that the practice of science, which is 'a body of practices widely regarded by outsiders as well as organised, logical and

coherent, in fact consists of a disordered array of observations with which scientists struggle to produce order' (Latour and Woolgar 1979, 36). Scientificity is therefore constituted as an order imposed on material setups to the extent that they can be reproduced.

In his study on *Pasteur in The Pasteurization of France* (1988), Latour extends his critical examination into the institutions around science that codetermine scientificity. Latour's study of Louis Pasteur shows how his genius lies not just in the discovery of the microbial transmission of disease in the mid-nineteenth century, but also in taking advantage of the different interests of 'farmers, army doctors, hygienists, the press, France nationalism, cows, industrialists, popular journals, transport experts and the French Academy, as well as the microbes themselves' (Lushetich 2016, 237). Science never occupies the objective space outside of the world, from where it critically examines the world, but it is also implicated in the networks and connections of the society. Science is therefore successful for it can be assessed through 'the number of points linked, the strength and length of the linkage' (Latour 1988, 201).

Vanouse's *SIC* critically taps into the network around the DNA, the variety of players include those involved in the Simpson trial, the prosecutor, detective, jury members, the judge, and also popular media, the public sentiment, as well as class difference and racialism at large. All of which have contributed to the infrastructure of (dis)belief and the construction of scientificity.

Another example here is from the cultural-philosophical perspective pertaining to matter. It demonstrates how scientific overcodification operates to carve out stem cells as an entity from a whole set of material processes pertaining to *élan vital*, the vital force of life, an 'impulse which thrust life into the world, *which made* it divide into vegetables and animals, which shunted the animal on to suppleness of form' (Bergson 1998, 132). Drawing on the *élan vital*, Jane Bennett writes that she had a revelation from reading the National Institutes of Health 2001 Report on Stem Cells and that she was surprised by two claims. The first is that no one yet knows whether 'embryonic stem cells' exist as such in human embryos in the womb, that is, whether they have a presence before they are extracted from blastocysts and placed in a new, laboratory-generated milieu. The second is that it is also uncertain whether even the embryonic stem cells produced in the lab are in fact 'homogeneous and undifferentiated.' Bennett casts this questioning of the actual existence of embryonic stem cells in the light of materiality in Bergson, where 'a flow, an indivisible continuum of becomings whose protean elements are not only exquisitely imbricated in a flowing environment but also are that very flow.' (Bennett 2009, 78) Importantly, she examines her own natural inclination to conceive stem cells as discrete entities existing in a body that, again, is usually unquestionably conceived as

physiological mechanism. She asks, 'If it turns out that there are no 'embryonic stem cells' in vivo, this may be because an embryo is not a collection of discrete parts, perhaps not even of protoparts or preformed possibilities, and that it is only in the closed system of the lab that what Bergson called the "indivisible continuity" of life allows itself to be sliced and diced into "embryonic stem cells"' (Bennett 2009, 92). Here too, we see how the predisposition by way of framing the question lies fundamentally in the way science interacts with the world. As analysed by Latour in *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, this is exactly when scientific experiments 'produce the nature whose existence they predicate as their condition of possibility' (Hayles 1999, 8-9).

Even though the precise laboratory procedure is beyond the focus of this article, and that DNA imaging entails a different set of procedures than stem cell isolation, it is important to draw a cultural philosophical reading inspired by Bennett. In a way, this 'slicing' and 'dicing' of the indivisible continuity of life is one perspective on growth and evolution, a string of light cast upon and delineating an amorphous flow of material, inseparable content and expression, as it were. The laboratory sciences foreground discrete, identifiable entities in order for intervention, modification and experimentation, even when or precisely because this process artificially allows a certain perspective on things. This is not to discredit science, but to chart its epistemological limits in relation to what conditions life.

Inspired by Vanouse's works, this chapter observes the discourses around science by thinking through images and artistic production. It does not aim to tell the 'truth' about science, rather, it looks at the overcodifying cultural constructions around 'truth' by unveiling the reductionist tendency regarding DNA as language or book of life. It is on this level of scientific overcodification that Vanouse's work critically intervenes. His aptly enacted performance/scientific process de-codifies the overcodified view of DNA through the performativity of scientific processes and through a conceptual questioning of the linguistic view of genetics. In the performance, the laboratory settings group the organisation of bodies (technical and epistemic, organic and non-organic) into new relations deterritorialised from the plane of immanence, which Hans-Jörg Rheinberger critiques as the scientists' tendency of effacing the means and media necessary to bring the phenomena of their scientific interest into being (Rheinberger 2011, 95-99). Vanouse performs exactly this new organisation of bodies that generate new sets of abstracted meanings by following meticulous laboratory procedures. The twist is that he produces a fake artefact – a manipulated result of the DNA imaging that shows exactly the same patterns as that of O. J. Simpson's. The artist has thus produced a

misleading signifier, a misnomer for a misnomer, effectively de-codifying the regime of signifiers from within. The temporary suspension of the epistemology of science in the case of DNA as signifier allows the mutual relation between the discursive multiplicities of expression and the non-discursive multiplicities of content to reemerge, the mutual deterritorialisation of both taking on renewed rigour in the negotiation of a truthful identity.

The work of Vanouse thus not only criticises the reliability of DNA profiling caught in the signifier-signified identification, but also taps into the cultural network around the technology with co-determinants such as popular media and the trial by jury system. This critical intervention opens up to a larger debate around the relation between nucleic DNA and heredity, again rendered in a reductionist frame of the signifier and signified.

If the DNA as a signifier points to the particularity of identity or pathology, human genetics as a discipline after The Human Genome Project has shifted to another level of engaging with ‘life itself’ and renders the capture of life in the regime of necropolitics, which, following Mbembe, refers to the contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death (Mbembe 2003). For example, research into normalcy informs the decision about which lives are worthy of living, and further heralds a whole new era of biodesign, genetic engineering, and with that, a new synthesis between power and the capitalisation of life and death.

3.2. Inorganic Becoming against Death: Spiess/Strecker’s *Hare’s Blood* +

3.2.1. *Hare’s Blood* + Beuys, and ritual

In their 2014 *Hare’s Blood* +, artists Klaus Spiess and Lucie Strecker perform a ‘ritual’ in the form of an auction, in which they introduce a genetically modified organism made with the DNA segments of hare’s blood that Joseph Beuys used in his 1974-1977 mixed media work *Hare’s Blood*. (Fig. 3.2) The performance starts with a video documentation showing molecular scientists preparing scraps of the dried hare’s blood shrink-wrapped in Beuys’s original mixed-media work. The video documentation also features an art historian discussing the symbolism in Beuys’s works. This is followed by the artists inserting the acquired DNA into a genetically modified organism with a standardised genetic sequence – or biobrick – creating a living organism encased in a triangular container (that resembles the plastic envelope used by Beuys). (Fig. 3.3) The audience is invited to participate in the auction by placing bids to which the living organism responds. As the bids raise the amount of injected enzyme, which protects the organism from ageing, decreases, thus allowing the organism to decompose.

Beuys's original *Hare's Blood* is loaded with symbolic meanings; the hare features prominently in his other works, such as his 1965 performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, in which Beuys walked around the gallery explaining his drawings to a dead hare which he held in his arm. For Beuys, the hare 'has a strong affinity to women, to birth and to menstruation, and generally to chemical transformation of blood; in carving out from earth a habitat to fit its own body shape, the hare demonstrates 'the movement of incarnation'; as such, it is radically different from human's rationalising tendency and presents a thinking that is 'sharpened, then transformed, and [that] becomes revolutionary' (Phaidon 2014). Further, Beuys denies biological death as an end, and claims that death is a passage of energy through matter that liberates new powers and that a higher level exists for thinking through the liberation of death, which the hare embodies as it circulates freely from one level of existence to another (Lushetich 2016, 120).

Beuys was interested in anthropology, shamanism and myth. This was part of a general tendency in the works of German-speaking countries between the 1970s and 1980s, when the high Conceptualism and Actionism of the time were structured around the references of anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistics and various forms of esoteric literature (Deliss 2017, 93). Beuys claimed, 'the concept of anthropology must also be extended. There is a basic element in this concept: Anthropos, man. It's very simple: man is in the centre. Today, Levi-Strauss and others have a different way of looking at anthropology. They turn their attention to the past, to myth, not in order to immerse themselves in mythology, but in order to examine it: in order to say, for instance, this is how man visualised the world as a whole at a given time. Our present-day concept of science is divided up into sectors and needs to be extended. In the future, the concept of science must be redefined in holistic terms, in terms of materialism and polytheism' (Deliss 2017, 93). This perfectly anticipated the critique articulated by Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). For Latour pre-modern people mixed myth, superstitions, the social and the natural indiscriminately while modern science separates these spheres: 'Modernisation consists in continually exiting from an obscure age that mingled the needs of society with scientific truth in order to enter into a new age that will finally distinguish clearly what belongs to atemporal nature and what comes from humans' (Latour 1993, 71).

This position on science could be labelled anti-modern or alternative to the modern paradigm. However, it does not foreclose us from engaging with it in the context of technology. Indeed, the transgressive perspective on non-death in Beuys resonates with a kind of inorganic becoming that the analysis of Spiess/Strecker's work will take us to, in a context of genetic engineering and biotechnology.

3.2.2. Desire, Death and Capitalism

In contrast to the overcodification of meiotic reproduction in systems of signs critiqued in Vanouse's work, Spiess/Strecker's work offers a critical perspective on the double fold of genetic engineering/biophysical sex under the condition of capitalism. Their work engages the three strata described by Parisi: the biophysical bodies that present an ancient form of bacterial reproduction preceding two-parent sex; the gendered/racialised body and its reproduction on the biocultural level, which is itself a site of biopolitical and sociosymbolic interplay; the body in the biodigital age, which is constantly reshaped by biotechnologies begging a critical engagement with their political and ethical implications. Simondon calls this relation 'transduction,' an activity of individuation of a physical, biological, mental or social process emerging from the metastable relations between two disparate realities (the pre-individual state of being and the individuated state of becoming) (Simondon 1992, 313). Parisi stresses the non-linear nature of the relation between the three strata as they define the meta-stable states of bodies and organise sex and reproduction. (Parisi 2004, 11) This non-linear continuum (from the variation of bacterial bodies to bio-engineered bodies) sets in motion on each stratum 'a micro level of difference proliferating through the symbiotic engineering of information crossing not only species and sexes, but also humans and machines' (Parisi 2004, 17). Out of the meta-stable states of the bodies on all levels the individual individuates and actualises from a previous metastable state, Deleuze speaks of this process of disparateness in Simondon as follows: 'the existence of a "disparateness" such as at least two orders of magnitude or two scales of heterogeneous reality between which potentials are distributed. Such a pre-individual state nevertheless does not lack singularities: the distinctive or singular points are defined by the existence and distribution of potentials. An "objective" problematic field thus appears, determined by the distance between two heterogeneous orders. Individuation emerges like the act of solving such a problem, or – what amounts to the same thing – like the actualisation of a potential and establishing of communication between disparates' (Deleuze 1994, 246).

As shown above, the organic level of meiotic sex is overcodified by the socio-cultural organisation of sex. Similarly, the biodigital stratum of the organisation of sex involves overcodification of other strata. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desire and the three stages of history is particularly useful in charting these relations.

In Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of history, the precapitalistic societies code desire

through inscription, and the capitalistic machine frees the decoded flow of desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Inscription entails marking bodies (human, non-human bodies as well as abstract bodies) so to create representations of things and to attribute meanings to them, which, in turn, represses the flux of desire. This process lies underneath the development of social formations, in other words, desire is socialised by coding. Deleuze and Guattari write: '[t]he primitive territorial sign is self-validating; it is a position of desire in a state of multiple connections. It is not a sign of a sign nor a desire of a desire. It knows nothing of linear subordination and its reciprocity: neither pictogram nor ideogram, it is rhythm and not form, zigzag and not line, artefact and not idea, production and not expression' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 203). This position of desire meets a new destiny under the despotic regime in the next stage of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of history. The despot appears and imposes a new alliance system placing himself in direct filiation with the deity. This can be observed in the rise of new spiritual empires, or in cases where a new empire comes to replace an old one. With this new system of alliance comes an absolute structure of hierarchy, 'In the first place, graphism aligns itself on the voice, falls back on the voice, and becomes writing. At the same time it induces the voice no longer as the voice of alliance, but as that of the new alliance, a fictitious voice from beyond that expresses itself in the flow of writing as direct filiation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 205).

The biochemical complexity beyond the nucleic DNA can be likened to the primitive territorial sign – a 'position of desire,' where the coexisting cytoplasmic (somaline) and nucleic (germline) reproductions, exchanges of matter, communication, information, and the proliferation of differences all pertain to the activity of desire in a state of multiple connections. What disrupts this primary position of desire is the process of inscription, analogous to the overcodification of the meiotic reproduction and the making of the two-parent sex, which is then turned into a disciplinary norm informing sex in the context of social production. Furthermore, the direct filiation in the new alliance system implies the cultural image of two-parent sex and the organic preservation of the germline, in tandem with the 'death' of the half chromosomes – the haploids not recombined in the two-parent sex and henceforth not preserved in the next generation, figuring as organic death. In contrast, reproduction in cytoplasm and mitochondria does not involve sexed chromosomes; it presents an order beyond the question of organic life and death. In this way, the two-parent sex introduces 'the constancy of pleasure, stopping the dissipation towards the inorganic, [which] deploys the disciplinary link between sex and death of the organic composition of capital and human body' (Parisi 2004, 111). Sex and death are brought together in a despotic disciplinary state, which dreads the flow of

production and of exchange from the primitive position of desire.

What decodes biocultural sex is the stratum of biodigital sex, which, in a strange motion, folds back to the earlier order of biophysical sex, and detaches ‘from organic death through an autonomous assemblage of desire-power of reproduction’ (Parisi 2004, 99). Taking the model of cytoplasm and mitochondria reproduction, this parthenogenesis is a *decoded desire to desire*, a power to self-reproduce, devoid of two-parent sex. In a similar conceptual movement in the Deleuzian philosophy of history, what overcomes the despot state is the capitalist machine which captures flows of desire by making them into a structural element of its own operation through the appropriation of production, and by conjuring the decoded flow of desire. Capital begets capital, bypassing the production of commodities. The capitalist machine works by conjunction to decoded flow of desire and to deterritorialised labour, and ‘engenders for its own part an enormous machinic surplus value by mobilising the resources of knowledge and information capital, and finally because it absorbs the greater part of the surplus value produced’ (Parisi 2004, 120). The most prominent example of decoded flow of desire and deterritorialised labour in the capital market is the creation of derivatives as a financial product, which Randy Martin sees as no more an instantiation of ‘the disassembly of some whole into parts and the bundling together of those attributes into something that moves away from or independently of its source’ than the social logic of derivatives itself (Martin 2015, 7). Parisi suggests: ‘[e]scaping the law of filiation, the commodity interrupts energy-forces from being channelled towards genital reproduction, intensifying reproducibility without discharge: feminine parthenogenesis (cytoplasmic sex)’ (Parisi 2004, 120).

Reflected in the contemporary technological advancements as a means and an end of production, this parthenogenesis desire can be traced in cloning, transgenetic and other genetic engineering experiments. As exemplified by Dolly the sheep, the only higher organism reproduced without reproduction to date, cloning entails inserting the nucleus of an adult organism with all its genes into an empty egg, in order to reproduce a perfectly functioning offspring with the same set of genes. In theory, this process could be repeated ad infinitum: clones made from clones from clones —reproductions without reproduction (Mukherjee 2016).

Recent inventions in genetic engineering technology manifest this parthenogenesis desire ever more clearly. In 2012, Doudna and Charpentier deployed a decoy technique called CRISPR/Cas9 to effectively cut the DNA at targeted positions on genes within organisms, which makes it possible to add a new genetic code to the genome. This could combat genetically governed diseases or even cure them. At the same time, the wish for ‘enhancement surgeries’ surges, such as changing the eye colour or alcohol tolerance of one’s offspring (Cyranski

2015). As more DNA sequences are found to correlate to particular characteristics, we are closer to targeted evolution. There are technological huddles and ethical barricades around genetic engineering technology that would alter genes in reproductive cells, producing transgenic organisms with permanently modified genomes. Yet some scientists are optimistic that the technological challenges such as establishing a reliable human embryonic stem cell, perfecting the precision of the genomic editing, or finding ways to achieve the intentional permanent modification of the genome in human organisms are on the verge of being solved. Backed by technological advancement, genetics research crosses the threshold of pathological research, stepping into normalcy research – the genetics of race, gender, sexuality, intelligence, temperament, and personality. Yet as Sidharta Mukherjee emphatically puts it in the closing statement in his book *The Gene* '[m]utants would be eliminated but so would human variation. Infirmities might disappear, but so might vulnerability. Chance would become mitigated, but so, inevitably, would choice' (Mukherjee 2016).

Not only scholars of science and technology studies have invariably taken caution on such technological developments, but also scholars of cultural studies, gender and racial studies, have articulated their concern for the hegemonic powers at play and the ever growing groups of subjugated minorities it produces. What has once harboured subversive potentials – minoritarian politics – is now incorporated into the operation of biocapitalism, so that power structures today increasingly take on minoritarian and decentralised characters. Body is the very location where fragmentation and decentralisation takes place. Not just the liberal subject that is held accountable on social and economic levels, it is now the fragmentation of the body and affects that are mined for value. Rosi Braidotti uncovers the far-reaching implications of biopolitics in the increasing fragmentation of life itself, characterised by the distribution of power and control exerted onto entities that are subcategorical to the woman subject. This is achieved by a range of means, including new forms of reproduction challenging the traditional notion of motherhood such as surrogate mothering, and the promise of cloning technology that seems to do away with generational difference. She observes, 'We seem to have slipped from the naturalistic paradigm, which is in itself a welcome relief from earlier metaphysical dualism, into the ever-receding fragmentation and exploitative traffic in organic parts' (Braidotti 2011, 184).

The outburst in popular science and mass media on ethical issues surround cloning and gene editing technologies overshadows other sets of more differentiated problems they are embedded in, most notably for the gendered and racialised subjects. On the one hand, it downplays the hard-won agency of female feminists as Braidotti rightly suggests; on the other

hand, it paints a determinist picture of the world in which genetic codes are equalled with specific biological traits, an assumption that is as reductionist as the structuralist and linguistic view of the world.

The assimilation of power and control from the macro to the micro parallels the transformation from the disciplinary society to the control society, which Deleuze has since long anticipated (Deleuze 1992). No longer based on institutional discipline, the society of control exercises control through continuous modulations from within. Galloway and Thacker analyse the characteristic of control as both within and without, as they put it, ‘The quandary is this: no one controls networks, but networks are controlled’ (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 39). Though not of the same scale, one could perhaps see the ever more fragmented body parts in an abstract kind of network of biopolitics and technology, involving both material, fleshy body parts and also technological components of visible and invisible kinds, extracting information and determining the worthiness of one person or sub-personal parts. Here, what Braidotti alarmingly voices against is coming true: the disembodiment on the level of organs, especially in light of reproduction. Or ‘from the interchangeability of organs to the symmetry - and therefore the complementarity – of the sexes, we witness the rehabilitation of one of patriarchy’s most persistent fantasies’ (Braidotti 2011, 185). This iteration of the patriarchal order takes place in the microscopic operation and in the technology-aided, deterministic vision of the bio matters devoid of its own vital materiality. It echoes once again Bergson’s warning of the extensive projection of the world, in which the parts make up wholes may be held accountable and therefore manipulate.

Now, is there a feminist alternative to biopolitics which captures the body on its many different levels? Braidotti gives a hint of an alternative paradigm for conceptualising the loss of unity of the body. This version of conceptualising the body is based on Spinozist notion of ‘bodies as collective assemblages of forces or intensities stabilised or bound for a limited period in space and time’, and as such frees the body from the form-content mould constructed by culture for much of history (Braidotti 2011, 186). Braidotti writes, ‘The notion of relation emerges as the organising principle to rethink the unity of the body in terms of the specificity of certain organic actualisations and the framing of levels of intensity such an entity is capable of sustaining’ (Braidotti 2011, 186). Relation is key here, as an indicator of the assemblage of organs and their social-symbolic meanings, it should be able to point us to other potential actualisations.

For example, it is possible to point to the problematic of technological determinism by examining the matter in relations, a (new) materialist method that runs throughout my analysis.

Relations can be ill-natured. The specific changes made possible by gene-editing technology may cause other unforeseeable changes elsewhere as the expression in biological features is determined by much more factors, for the microscopic relations between the organs concerned and unrelated may form unhealthy relations, as yet unforeseen in science.

Even though it may appear at odds with Braidotti's feminist agenda against the reduction and exchangeability of body parts, the notion of 'abstract sex' aptly identifies the critical impasse between embodiment and disembodiment theory as seen in the feminist project of speaking from embodied subject positions and the outcry of the removal of such embodied subject positions in the face of technological intervention on the biological bodies. Hence, it is important to view the continuity of feminist desire in the current stage of biotechnology. Abstract sex is a third way out of the impasse between embodiment and disembodiment, mapping 'the emergence of a new (but ancient) kind of sex and reproduction, linking these mutations to microcellular processes of information transmission that involve the unnatural mixtures of bodies and sexes. The speeding up of information trading, not only across sexes, but also across species and between humans and machines, exposes the traits of a non-climactic (non-discharging) desire spreading through a matrix of connections that feed off each other without an ultimate apex of satisfaction' (Parisi 2004, 4).

The multiplicity of the body to include the politics and desires of bodies at different scales paint a dramatically different image of the body as per first waves of feminists. It is not a matter, however, of which school of thinking is right or wrong, rather, it exposes different priority arrangements conditioned by different times. While the post-war era feminists fought for recognition and female femininity through embodied politics, and later feminists created intersectional politics with the racially othered people, we could see that bodies nowadays are implicated into networks of technology and of power and desire that may be masculine or feminine without it being attributed to male or female social constructions.

The desire for desire manifested in transgenetic engineering emerges out of a masochist assemblage. Following Deleuze, masochism is an intensity of desire that marks the autonomy of desire from the libido of sexual genitality, sexual reproduction and pleasure, and can be witnessed in other forms of reproduction, for example, capitalist reproduction and technical reproduction (Deleuze 1971). As such, it conveys, paradoxically at first sight, 'a feminine intensive desire' that Parisi speaks about. Death figures differently in the masochist assemblage of intensive reproduction and sex: 'death exposes the potential of a body to become rather than the finitude of the organism' (Parisi 2004, 98-99). Therefore, the proliferation of cytoplasmic reproduction, characterised by the autonomy from two-parent sex and nucleic reproduction,

passes through the threshold of organic death and exposes the potential of the inorganic becoming – that is, becoming no longer overcodified in the anthropocentric image and ruled by the coupling of sex/pleasure and death.

We have seen the nonlinear continuum and the organisation of sex through the flow of desire in the three strata. It should be noted that this model of abstract desire does not necessarily pass moral judgement on the feminine intensive desire. Since ‘artifice is fully a part of Nature’ (Deleuze 1988, 124), the task is not to go back to a pre-transgenetic-engineering past, but to pose questions such as: how can feminine intensive desire challenge or subvert the existing and future technologies? In the inorganic becoming – the ‘ancient’ and biodigital form of reproduction, we will see potential for a new, non-human life.

3.2.3. Biodigital Hypernature

This grand return to the inorganic becoming by way of genetic engineering takes us back to *Hare’s Blood* +, a chimera not in the image of the hare itself, but something minoritarian, akin to the inorganic becoming of an indeterminate body. The resurrection of advanced living forms through DNA engineering is not only technically impossible in complex organisms like the humans, due, perhaps, to histones, a protein wrapped around the DNA that etches permanent marks on genes so that an aged gene cannot revert to an earlier, pluripotent developmental stage as if governed by ‘molecular memory’ (Mukherjee 2016). The reviving of a full body would also fall into the biopolitical and late capitalist capture of life on the biodigital stratum.

Indeed, the capitalist desire for desire is already infused in biotechnology. A history of patenting and privatising the gene points to the way in which capitalism passes from the formal subsumption of labour to the real subsumption of life. The former is defined by the implication of human labour in capitalist machines of production, while the latter is indicated by the internal rearrangement and reorganisation of labour processes to meet the demand of capital, hence moving beyond human labour to include machinic labour, and ultimately turning the body itself into a site of production. The complex interlocking of capitalism, biotechnology and necropolitical power takes full control of the body. The patenting of genetic data is one among many forms of capitalising on life, as seen in synthetically produced DNA for medical use, or in genetically modified crops. Not only are ‘pathological bodies’ subject to medical research, and gene therapy, ‘healthy bodies,’ too, are increasingly monitored with the purpose of creating an expansive pool of genetic information. The Cohen-Boyer patents on recombinant DNA techniques filed in 1974 has accumulated a fortune from licensing the technique to other companies and research institutions. Later, the BRCA1 sequence became one of the first

sequences to be patented on a human gene sequence in 1998. The patent was invalidated in 2013 by a US Supreme Court ruling, on the account that naturally occurring DNA segment is not eligible for patent merely because it has been isolated. The same ruling however makes synthetically-produced complementary DNAs eligible for patenting. More ubiquitously, Monsanto has reaped an immense profit from genetically modified crops and biotechnology products that affect the general populace in many areas of the world.

Another form of privatising the gene takes place on our very ‘private’ genes. The pharmaceutical companies have vested interests in the pool of patient genetic data for their research, and eventually for selling the medicine or genetic engineering technology developed back to them to churn out sustained profits. Alarming, a Goldman Sachs analysis for their biotech clients from April 2018 reads, ‘The potential to deliver “one shot cures” is one of the most attractive aspects of gene therapy, genetically engineered cell therapy, and gene editing. However, such treatments offer a very different outlook with regard to recurring revenue versus chronic therapies. While this proposition carries tremendous value for patients and society, it could represent a challenge for genome medicine developers looking for sustained cash flow’ (Tae 2018). While appalling, this statement runs perfectly in line with the neoliberal logic. At the same time, accompanying genetic-specific medication is the large-scale adoption of diagnostic genetic testing, which creates a loop that returns ‘the recirculation of products (pills, testing technologies) back into information (databases, test results, marketing and media campaign’ (Thacker 2005, 85). If knowledge is a kind of credit, a promise of what is to come, and the unknown circulates as a type of debt, a way in which we are implicated in the works and lives of one another (Martin 2015, 4), the informatic capture of life – life understood in informatic ways (Clough 2008, 14) – taps exactly into the tension of knowledge and the unknown, the empirical and the virtual, the scientific and the creativity of life. This highlights the operation of capitalism reflected in exchange value, which holds true for both formal (human labour) and real subsumption (life itself).

In classical Marxian labour theory of value, capital becomes the ‘fully developed’ form of exchange-value when it subordinates or subsumes production and reproduction into its process of self-expansion, which signals the moment at which ‘the commodity-form of the products of labour becomes universal’ and capitalism becomes *systemic* (Holland 2006, 189). Marx insists that labour produces surplus-value, which is not to be understood as cost-differentials between inputs and outputs of a single production cycle that is decided by the capitalists. Surplus value is created because the exchange value of the goods labour produces exceeds the exchange value paid for the labour power itself – that is, what it costs to produce

(or ‘reproduce’) that labour power. In this way, value is produced in the extended context of the *system* of capitalist production/circulation – and under capitalism, circulation can *and must* be considered ‘an act of production,’ and it arises not from any *single* cycle of production, but from differences between the values of labour power itself *over two or more cycles*. (Holland 2006, 191-192)

This pattern of surplus value creation applies to real subsumption as well. The Goldman Sachs report on biotechnology shows exactly how genetic data from the prosumers are mined for value and then sold back to the consumers themselves, the surplus value is created through genetic and pharmaceutical research, who have an interest of offset the costs and accumulate profits in the long run. To push this to the extreme, in real subsumption, capital achieves an abstraction of life into ‘life itself;’ ‘an abstraction which reduces life to a new unit for negotiating an equivalency between the cost of energy expenditure and its reproduction or replacement’ (Clough 2008, 14). Capitalism seeks a reduction of energy resources in the informational substrate of the human body and ‘life itself’. Patricia T. Clough puts it succinctly: ‘With information providing the unit, capital accumulation in the domain of affect is an accumulation and an investment in information as the dynamic immanent to matter, its capacity for self-organisation, emergent mutation and creation. In this passage from formal to real subsumption, the tendencies of capitalism are moved by the techno-ontological postbiological threshold.’ (Clough 2008, 17) If Mbembe traces necropolitical domination in the racialised, economically and politically disenfranchised bodies that are kept in a form of death-in-life (Mbembe 2003, 21), then the dematerialisation of human bodies offers an updated image of necropolitics: decoded, depersonalised and exchangeable organs, or ‘organs without bodies’ as Rosi Braidotti calls it (Braidotti 2011). (The term is borrowed from the title of a book by Slavoj Žižek, by which he critiques Deleuze’s inconsistency in locating the Virtual and Becoming.) Imbricated in capitalism, human bodies are subsumed into the production and consumption of genetic data in order to reproduce (to be disease-free), ruled by fear and always in debt to the self-realising loop of capital circulation. Organs, subjectivity and sex are dislodged and diffused in this scheme of necropolitics. Paul Preciado traces that our global biocapitalism – which he succinctly calls ‘pharmacopornographic biocapitalism’ – depends on the global diffusion of synthetic steroids and technically transformed organs, fluids, cells, pornographic images and synthetic psychotropic drugs (Preciado 2013, 33). He hence pronounces that, ‘There is nothing to discover in sex or in sexual identity; there is no *inside*. The truth about sex is not a disclosure; it is *sexdesign*’ (Preciado 2013, 35). The subject is left nowhere to be defined other than the hollow ‘no inside’ flooded by ideas, symbols and chemical reactions. As a general movement,

abstract sex de-signifies the gendered subjects and specifies other levels on which non-discharged based sexual desire may float.

In light of this necropolitics and biocapitalism, Spiess/Strecker have created a scenario whereby the hare becomes subject to subsumption as both a means and an end of (value) production, as opposed to being only the means of (artistic) production in Beuys's original *Hare's Blood*. Precisely at this point of real subsumption, the physical, full-bodied reality of the hare is effaced by the logic of self-perpetuating production of value, attaching itself to virtualised value creation processes through energy-information. In coupling the organism's decomposition with the art prosumer's confidence in it, the artists reveal how confidence, as an essential part of affect economy, configures the organism on the informatic level thereby making a deft illustration of the commodification and virtualisation of life itself and the underlying mechanism that sustains it. Typically, an auction renders tangible the importance of confidence as a form of affect in the capitalist economy: more confidence, more value, which is decoupled from the real use value of the commodity. We are reminded of the powerful synergy between the virtualisation of capital accumulation in the financial market on the one hand, and the proliferation of the biotechnological capture of the body on the other, which marks an era where life itself is at stake. At first sight, the design of Spiess/Strecker's auction subverts the virtualisation of value creation/capital accumulation by inserting the correlation of bid value and the decomposition of the bid item. As the prosumer confidence rises, the decomposition of the organism leads to its organic death. Or does it? Isn't the organic death of the organism always already based on our anthropocentric projection of organic life and death?

Deleuze and Guattari hold that the ultimate destination of the conjunctive desire of late capitalism is death itself: 'death is felt rising from within and desire itself becomes the death instinct, latency, but it also passes over into these flows that carry the seeds of a new life' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 223). What could the new life look like? And more importantly, who is the new life for? Would we experiment to see, as Claire Colebrook urges, 'what "we" might be like if we diminished our consumptions and productions, if we reduced – perhaps to the point of non-being – all those forces that we have, until now, taken to be human?' (Colebrook 2009, 10) What life does *Hare's Blood* + hint at, if not at the anthropomorphised and overcodified organic death?

From a multiperspectivist point of view, the artists write, 'the subsequent rhizomatic burst of the GMO yeast may be experienced by the spectators as bodily decomposition, but by

the GMO as a satisfying reproduction' (Spiess and Strecker 2017, 120). Based on his anthropological research of Amazonian cultures, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's multispectivism proposes that non-human beings such as animals and spirits are humans and continue to be humans 'behind their everyday appearance' (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 466). Non-human agents and humans both perceive the world in the same way; what varies is the world which they see, effectively redeeming relationality rather than substantiality as the primary way of relating to the world (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 471-472). Based on this principle of 'one culture, many natures' the artists explore performance as ritual, where the GMO functions as a sacrificial element going through organic death, not to invite audience identification, but to make the audience realise that they are indeed in the same culture as the GMO (Spiess and Strecker 2017, 119). Here I'd like to expand on the notion of shared 'culture,' which not only implies organic death, but also channels an other-than-human desire, in other word, the desire of multiplication/decomposition, or inorganic becoming.

As mentioned above, nucleic DNA is relatively inert, archival, while non-nucleic recombination such as mitochondrial recombination makes up the forces of inorganic becoming. The latter doesn't pass through the two-parent regime of chromosomal sex and death, hence preceding and exceeding the chromosomal hierarchies of genetic filiation. (Parisi 2004, 155) In a strange way corresponding to the forces of inorganic becoming on the biophysical stratum, the capitalisation of life itself via the bio-informatic technology proliferates the rate of variation, mutation and emergence of new biological organisms. Hence the biodigital sex machines' 'double fold' the biophysical machines of unpredictable differentiations. (Parisi 2004, 159) Yet as promising as the future may seem to those who can afford it, or as dire as it might be for the rest, under the threat of biotechnical capture, this double fold does not come without cost. In the projected scenario of mammal cloning, or gene therapy, it is important to note that the technique does not just intervene at the nucleic level but necessarily involves mitochondria and cytoplasm in the cell as the organism grows, giving rise to possible intensifications of mitochondrial recombination, and, potentially, triggering mutations hitherto unknown and unimaginable elsewhere in the organism. The risk rises exponentially as we deal with the complexity of genetics, given that most phenomes are co-determined by many genes. There have been various conservative stances on genetic engineering such as the 'culture of life' movement, which Bennett has done a careful study on. She points out how the people behind 'culture of life' are against mechanistic metaphysics like the vitalists, but how they differ from the vitalists as they draw on a divine spirit that supposedly animate the matter of the embryo, thereby appealing to conservative Christians (Bennett 2009). In contrast to the 'culture

of life movement,' this scenario of inorganic becoming is firmly placed on the planes of abstract sex, of which humans are made yet do not fully control. Indeed, it entails 'a symbiotic association of bodies of all sorts unleashing the potential of a body to mutate on a hypernature of contagious encounters' (Parisi 2004, 201). As such, it offers the possibility of a non-linear overflow of the biopolitical and necropolitical machines, which, for Parisi, is 'a reversible relation between absolute control or virtual subsumption (the capture of the interval between states) and absolute deterritorialisation or molecular recombination of all machines of sex and reproduction (biophysical, biocultural and bio-technical machines)' (Parisi 2004, 159).

This may offer a fully technologically situated way for the artists to pay tribute to Beuys, whose idea of energy and life transgressing organic death distilled in the image of the hare now gains a new dimension. Rather than returning to the full-body hare, *Hare's Blood* + addresses the micro-level desire to become. It is also precisely on this level that the work as a marriage of shamanic belief and technology opens up to new ways of conceptualising and relating to matter and life. This will have repercussions in the following chapters, as they in variegated ways tackle the question of animism and animality, and the desire and violence associated with it.

3.3. Conclusion: Hypernatural Future

If the artifice is fully part of Nature, then we have seen how the endosymbiotic relation manifests 'a hypernatural capacities of a body to become' (Parisi 2004, 196). The works of Vanouse and Spiess/Strecker offer different critical approaches to this hypernature.

The scientific and cultural discursive organisation re-codes what were indeterminate body-sexes in meiotic reproduction into a filiative relation of two-parent sex. The study of language, firmly situated in a philosophy of immanence, sheds light on the mutual relation between the complex state of things/content and the discursive construct/expression, which in the case of DNA, translates into the mutual deterritorialisation between cytoplasmic realities/chromosomes and phenotypes/genotypes. In this light, the DNA fingerprint artifice crafted in Vanouse's *Suspect Inversion Center*, challenges the process of overcodification that imposes on the DNA a top-down signifier function 'beyond reasonable doubt' in the juridical context, as evident from the above-mentioned FBI spokesperson's statement.

On the biodigital stratum, overcodification renders everything as information, coinciding with the capitalist machine's tendency to subsume life itself as labour and to reduce energy expenditure in increasingly virtualised production and reproduction. Biopolitics thus becomes necropolitics. However, the definition of organic death is once again challenged by the intensive feminine desire at the micro level of mitochondrial reproduction and in complex

chain reactions that are unforeseeable in transgenetic operations. Spiess/Strecker's organism does not go through organic death, rather, its life is manifested through its indeterminate biodigital/biophysical becoming exhibiting a feminine intensive desire at the biophysical level, a desire that harbours the hypernatural potential to escape the capitalist desire of auto-reproduction and of the total capture of life through information. It is a manmade artifact that nevertheless reminds us of our own potential of becoming within the hypernature we co-inhabit with other beings.

4. Chapter Four

Strange Intimacies Caught between East Asian Feminism and Animism: On Geumhyung Jeong's choreography

*Happiness [... is] a suspended condition,
to be lived holding your breath.*

Italo Calvino, *Difficult Loves* (1970)

The last chapter maps abstract sex, a feminine intensive desire of becoming, at work on the biophysical, biocultural and biodigital strata, to reinsert indeterminate potentials of materiality into both sets of power asymmetry – the social inscription onto bodies (bacterial bodies, human bodies) taking the form of overcodification of sexed production, and the capitalisation of decoded flows of bodies, or rather, organs without bodies. This chapter continues the line of feminine intensive desire and contemplates on its relational efficacy in interpersonal and man-machine assemblages, at once indeterminate and intimate.

4.1. Geumhyung Jeong's works

Geumhyung Jeong is a South Korean choreographer and performance artist. She has built an oeuvre of works exploring the relation between human bodies and machinic objects. Her works are presented widely in East Asia, Europe and the States, with each of the contexts offering different anchor points for analysing the gazes toward her works.

One consistent line in all her works is the meticulously and laboriously executed, but very repetitive, medical or mechanical procedures. For the sake of precision, Jeong always takes time to get herself professionally trained in programmes such as excavator driving, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and rehabilitation techniques, or fire evacuation procedures. In

her works, the performance of mechanical and medical procedures, as well as the performance as an artist, blend perfectly into each other.

In *CPR Practice* (2013-2015), Jeong performs a 40-min long intensive and precise medical procedure of cardiopulmonary resuscitation on a rubber male figure, as it were, to revive him. (Fig. 4.1) In a long, thin room, often a non-theatre space such as an indoor basketball court, Jeong enters from one end of the space and walks quietly and slowly toward a rubber dummy figure lying in the other end. The dummy, dressed in pants, exposes his pale skin lit by dim light. His mouth is open (the figure is designed for cardiopulmonary resuscitation training), otherwise his facial feature is sparingly depicted. Jeong's calmly and almost expressionlessly undresses herself to reveal her frail body and lies down next to the dummy, and starts touching him. First, she caresses him gently. Then she raises her body to push his hand against her, and reclines so that his hand strolls down her smooth, naked chest, rubs her nipples, and then starts touching her lower body. For the first twenty minutes of the piece, she remains stern-faced and self-controlled in this silent, physical exchange between the two which builds up in intensity, leaving the audience bewildered as to whether her action should be read as sexually self-indulgent or an example of radical passivity.

Then she pauses. She realises that the something is not right with the dummy – that he is having a cardiac arrest. She shakes him, only to confirm that she has to take immediate action. She briskly gets up, runs to the other side of the space where a medical kit is placed in a cabinet, gets the instruments and runs back. Swiftly yet resolutely, Jeong places an assistance device on the chest of the dummy and starts pressing. The assistance device prompts the correct compression rate and pressure by giving beats and voice cues like 'continue care,' 'insufficient' or 'excessive.' She counts the numbers as she presses down on the chest to the rhythm indicated and continues for the next ten to twenty minutes. The regular chest compression in CPR practice is supposed to keep blood circulation going until the body's normal heart rate is restored.

The repetitive pressing, her counting and the automated beats and voices create a mechanical symphony, giving a dazed feeling for the audience. Momentarily suspending the ever intensive (medical) performance, she runs across the long space to reach out for other devices, first the defibrillator to deliver electric shock to the heart and then an artificial ventilation machine that pushes air into the mouth of the 'patient.' She keeps the repetitive pressing while juggling with added devices, at times stopping short to exhale air mouth-to-mouth, and at others to manually push air into the mouth with the ventilator or to deliver electric shock treatment. The scene moves into a frenzied state, when Jeong clearly has exhausted herself through by performing a series of medical procedures that have lasted for more than

thirty minutes in total. At this point, she gives up, the assistance device still beeps in the background. With a sense of solemnity, she dresses herself up and the audience applauds. As the audience leaves, she reorganises all the medical devices in silence and puts them back in the cabinet, which may be considered the proper end of the performance.

In *Oil pressure vibrator* (2008-2015), Jeong compares female masturbation to the movements of a hydraulic excavator. In a lecture performance, she recounts the story of her professional training in hydraulic excavator operation, which eventually leads to her operating a hydraulic excavator on a sand sculpture moulded on her own body. She steers the mechanical arm so that it dives straight into the private/sexual parts of the sand figure, culminating in what appears to be the orgiastic dismembering of the sand mass. (Fig. 4.2)

In *Fitness Guide* (2011-2015), Jeong engages with gym machines in (again) personal, intimate ways. In this piece, the audiences sit on yoga mattresses alongside various gym machines. (Fig. 4.3) The gym machines are partially refitted with plastic figures of man's heads, and specifically, of White man's heads. The treadmill, for example, features a head sticking up from behind the control panel, so that the trainer faces the man while training, and the machine is impersonated, as it were, by the White man. It is a strange, technologised daily 'monument' reminiscent of an ancient Greek herma statue, which features a bust of a God (originally Hermes) sitting on top of a plain, undecorated, rectangular pillar of stone. Conventionally the male genitals depicted in these statues are carved, in fine detail, on the lower part of the column, highlighting a significant contrast between the hyper-realistic head and genitals, and the smooth, bare stone pillar.

In this fifty minute piece, Jeong makes routine gym exercises with various machines, which, over the duration of the performance, take a more intimate turn. Jeong walks into the space in a plain, training outfit, and positions herself in front of the vibrating machine -- an old-fashioned machine with a vibrating belt that was used for its supposed slimming effects. The machine, styled by Jeong, features a cast of a man's head on the top that has been cut half open, revealing the brain. As with the presence of the other plastic heads refitted to the training machines, it is both grotesque and comical.

Jeong pulls the belt around her belly and starts stretching against the machine. Her face is expressionless, resembling the type of absent-minded trainers one can spot in any commercial fitness centre. She pushes her body up and down as her precisely controlled movements resound in the space. She then proceeds to lower her body towards the ground and rests her bodyweight on her hands stretched behind, her legs split on both sides of the machine/man figure. Then she switches the machine to vibration mode to the point that her whole body, strapped at the waist

to the belt, starts to tremble. The positioning of her body and the trembling effect have definite sexual associations. The intensity increases and the loosely affixed 'brain' falls into different pieces on to the floor; after which, Jeong stops the vibration function and gently embraces the machine as if it were a lover.

She then moves to a cross-trainer, also fitted with a model of a man's head. The upward-leaning upper arms of the machine, intended for better grip and body coordination during training, seem to become the arms of a man through the way that Jeong interacts with them. She drives the machine with slow, calculated moves using her legs so that one arm of the machine hesitantly moves toward her, touches her and then retreats.

The relation between the machine/man body and Jeong's body is ambiguous: is the machinic body dominating her, preying on her with the gaze? Or is it rather a silent communication between them, in which the relationship seems strangely enjoyable and satisfying for her? The repetitive nature of fitness training (doing 'reps') seems to give a symbolic suggestion to the nature of the relationship between Jeong and the machines -- progressive yet static, and always evading capture. The resolution and restlessness of Jeong's presence only add to this relationship.

Jeong continues the performance with stamina and discipline. Next, she walks on a treadmill. The machine gives a rhythmic beep, which accelerates as she goes faster. The presence of a man's head fixed behind the control panel produces an alienating, and again, awkward feeling. As the acceleration of the machine reaches its zenith, Jeong suddenly jumps off to embrace the frontal control console, her body closing the gap with the machine, and thereby fulfilling the potential of communication being established between herself and the machine/man. Although it should be pointed out that at this moment the very ambiguous relationship established between them terminates.

Fitness Guide is constructed of such moments of strange, serialised intimacy. Even though structurally there is no conventional climax in the piece, as the performance unfolds with Jeong moving from one training machine to another, a definite sense of rhythm is created. Jeong's engagement with the machines modulates the audience's own rhythms between relaxation and intensification, and fluctuates their sense of acting and being acted upon, as well as between being inside and outside of the machines.

In 2016, as laureate of the Hermès Foundation Missulsang, an annual award given to emerging stars in the Korean art scene, Jeong had a solo exhibition titled *Private Collection* in the Hermès Foundation in Seoul, South Korea. Other than the two full-body mannequins hanging from the ceiling, she has filled up the exhibition hall with plastic heads, chests and

body parts, inflated figures, various medical tools neatly arranged on white pedestals. When one takes a closer look, some of the displayed body parts are defunct: the heads are bruised, some miss one eye, and some distorted. There are inflated male body parts, suggestive of sexual self-indulgence or sexual violence. At the same time, there are more realistic human figures for medical training, with parts of the belly open to demonstrate anatomy structures and with movable arms. Despite potential shock and awe effect upon closer examination, the over-display of objects in the exhibition provokes free associations between a science lab, a museum setting, and a (sex) supermarket. Indeed, these are exactly the framing conditions of the gaze directed toward human bodies in sexual, medical and artistic context, and with the relations of commercialisation inherit in the gaze.

Strangely erotic, the image of the slender-bodied Jeong and the machines – always impersonated by male figures – may easily evoke interpretation of relations of power and domination based on sexual difference, or the other way around – that she thwarts the sexual-difference-based gender system by going out of the ways and having intimate relations and sometimes breaking the machines. While these interpretations are valid coming from particular standpoints, I would like to propose a more careful reading of Jeong's work situated in the larger context of feminism in East Asia as well as gender decoupled from sexual difference. The latter leads to the potential non-normative subject formation. To do so, however, we will first go through gender as inscribed in sexual difference, which has informed the feminist project in the second half of the 20th century.

4.2. Jeong and Feminisms in the West and East

4.2.1. Jeong the feminist?

Foucault situates his project of understanding how human beings become subjects in unpacking sexuality, namely how sexuality becomes so central to the understanding of the self, so individuals recognise themselves as sexual subjects. By focusing on the acknowledgement of the self as a subject of desire, he tries to allow man to 'discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen' (Foucault 1990, 5). He sees that starting from Greek and Greco-Roman culture, sexuality, or what constituted the 'arts of existence' for man (gendered-man) has already become not just about setting the rule of conduct, but about seeking self-transformation. These first aesthetics of existence were equivalent to 'technique of the self,' later mutating into medical and educational norms, conditioning the obligation of men as subjects of sexuality (Foucault 1990, 10-11).

Foucault's analysis is astute in revealing the normative discourse and henceforth biopolitical control of the populace based on sexuality, as well as pronouncing the end to identity politics based on the male phallus identification. His own lack of awareness to sexual difference – his speaking of the man in the universal form – has been criticised by feminists (Braidotti 2011, 169), his contributions to epistemology are profound nonetheless. Braidotti takes inspiration from him and claims, 'An ethics of relations needs to be developed, according to Foucault, that by-passes the despotic mechanisms of sexuality and redefines alternative forms of intimacy and relation' (Braidotti 2011, 172).

This call to liberate from sexuality is taken on by feminists of different generations. Feminism takes as its mission to map out multiple forms of oppression and to show the deep interconnected between them, and aims to bring into representation the oppressed and unrepresented. The feminists affirm the specificities of situated knowledge and embodied experience from women, at the same time emphasis the 'not-One' characteristic of womanhood.

Yet in practice, what emerges increasingly is what Braidotti alarmingly identifies as a new normative dominant discourse based on 'the alleged parallelism of queer identities and practices' (Braidotti 2011, 173). This implies structural equalisation, or 'flat assimilation' of all oppositional positions to the (conventional) dominant discourse of the White, male, heterosexual figure speaking a major language. The new configuration of oppositional politics flattens out differences of race, class, age, geopolitical positioning, belief system, among others, in favour of a schematic reduction of the subject versus the countersubject, hence letting in through the back door the very reductionist tendency of subjecting the inherently different 'other(s)' they set out to criticise. Such flattening tendencies are premised on the affirmation of differences only insofar as the differences can be understood as difference of the same. In light of this, Braidotti adamantly calls that 'No parallel is possible in a nomadic perspective of inner complexity' (Braidotti 2011, 173). Or as Mel. Y Chen notes, 'because of a lingering Eurocentrism within what is thought of as biopolitics—its implicit restriction to national bodies, for instance, as well as its species-centric bias that privileges discussions about human citizens—there are productive openings for transnational race, animal, and sexuality scholarship' (Chen 2012, 6-7). As we will see, Jeong's works possess an inner complexity that goes beyond identity politics of the female artist, the East Asian/Korean, and desiring toward machinist beings that are instead situated in the productive position of interstices.

Jeong's works are variably labelled as a feminist practice. An article on Korea Herald comments, 'she openly expresses women's sexual desires through the unusual performances' (Lee 2016). She confirms this feminist labelling by saying 'I like when people call me a feminist

artist. I try to be a feminist in my performances'. And then she adds, 'My works are not a fight against the male-dominated society we live in. I solely focus on the objects themselves and think of ways to express my thoughts through them' (Lee 2016). It seems that she has taken an interesting twist in the understanding of feminism here. On the one hand, there is how feminism is interpreted in the mainstream as a kind of sexual-difference-based, anti-patriarchal opposition, and on the other, how she wilfully circumvents it to turn the attention to something else, namely to the objects. This disparity foregrounds the discussion in the following on feminism and East Asia.

In the East Asian society, there are more practical concerns of feminism, focusing on the implementations of gender equality rights, which is no doubt an important constitutive part of a social program. Behind this social transformation is an expectation of how feminism should work, very much modelled on the experience of Western feminists. In this context, Jeong's 'femininity' is equated with explicitness of the female (sexual or nonsexual) desire. For a viewer with a 'Western' mind-set, because of the supposedly traditional, and therefore conservative cultural associations, her works are viewed as a feminist statement articulating female desire. (I am drawing on the 'Western' audience in a simplified, schematic manner. It has to do with the fact that Jeong's works tour in Europe and North America, much more than it does in Asia or elsewhere. And it has to do with that East Asian audience may subscribe to a view coloured by the Western mindset, which arguably could be seen in the review on her work in the *Korea Herald*.)

My reading of Jeong's works locates them on different levels of experience, one of the East Asian feminist experience, and the other of a posthumanist experience. Her works are multiplicities: at once a continuum of experiences and affects, and at the same time differential differences. As multiplicities, she is as much making as by being individuated by connections on different levels. In the following I will engage with her work on these multiple intensive levels.

4.2.2. Confucian relationality

To unpack the particularity of her works in the context of East Asia feminism, I will first give an overview of sexuality in the East Asian and Confucian context, and its relation to global feminist discourse. This position of speaking also implies a careful re-examination of the legacy of Confucianism itself, which has been criticised, relegated and later revived in the modern history, though to some degrees remaining in the cultural unconsciousness. The career of this concept is tightly entangled with vying interests in historiography, national identity building,

and control and governmentality. In many ways, there is no one position for all when speaking about a thematic complex such as Confucianism, which requires me to situate my discussions in the particularity of the contexts as they arise. In this context, my analysis of Jeong's works first reacts to the polemics when measuring her work with the benchmark of 'universal' or 'universalising' Western feminism. To do so, I draw on Rosenlee's proposition on Confucian feminism, which furthers the analysis in the direction of conceptualising reciprocity and relationality. This, I will note, is derived from historical practices, and does not warrant direct application in today's social-political context.

In traditional East Asian society, women were expected to follow particular gender roles. (The Korean women's experience in the later imperial time until the modern day is largely in common with their Chinese peers, not least because of the infusion of Confucianism in all practices in society. Hence, I draw on scholarship focusing specifically on Chinese or Korea, yet I will speak of East Asian Confucianism in a more generalised way so to highlight the tension between that and Western feminism.) This is the more rigid way of reading Confucianism put to social practice, that is to say, Confucianism preserves a hierarchy in society and attribute roles to each entity. One could argue that following the hierarchical order favouring men, there was a double standard of sexuality exercised for men and women, so that, for instance, a man's adultery would be treated differently than a woman's. It is argued that Confucian social consciousness prevails into today's east Asian society (Shim 2001). This is also true. Throughout the twentieth century, women have persistently demanded in getting equally represented in law, especially concerning sexual violence, which reportedly has been of high occurrence rate but largely silenced upon due to the traditional chastity ideology. In light of this, the crime of rape in Korea is classified under the title 'crime against chastity,' revealing a deep migration of male dominance from the traditional Confucian society to a modern society. The law against sexual violence was only legislated in 1993 (Shim 2001).

While a good number of feminists in the last couple of decades have fiercely opposed Confucianism's outdated sexual morality, it is important to differentiate the position from where one is speaking. Clearly, forcing today's standard onto a bygone past, without accounting for the specificities of the different contexts does not yield too much insight. Indeed, as Marguerite Duras remarks, 'I think that the women who can get beyond the feeling of having to correct history will save a lot of time' (Duras 1991). Duras succinctly points out the fallacy of an imaginary symmetry between genders that feminists sometimes get trapped in. This myth is effectively debunked by feminists such as Irigaray in that asymmetry perpetuates because the male figure defines what is universal, and that looking for gender symmetry results only in

reactive criticism (Irigaray 1994). This is of course not to discredit the struggles of women in demanding their rights, but a plea for drawing a cartography of the conceptual differentiations one finds oneself in today.

Traditionally, the ideal Confucian society is one where a set of relations, ranging from within the family circle to the enlarged circle of the social, are respected and practiced so that everyone finds his or her place in the society. As such, it places premium on the wellbeing of relations in the primary order, and as a consequence, the yearning for a better personhood comes, rather than the reversed way in which individual will is posited above relations. Many scholars argue that in the contemporary East Asian society, family values and interpersonal relations – *guanxi* - still are more dominant than individual wills. Studies have shown that the premium placed on *guanxi* in the social and business context, which can take the form of gift and favour exchange, and how the relationship itself is valued over any specific ‘cost-benefit’ evaluation. (Luo 2007)

Before we go into the specific case of Confucian feminism, a story recounted by Pyotr Kropotkin, the itinerant figure in my dissertation, captures in a similar way this sense of relational ties versus individualism not dissimilar to the Confucian tradition.

In his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin records an anecdote. He was asked by Russian writer Turguéneff that with his experience with French men, Germans and other people, if he had noticed ‘there is a deep, unfathomable chasm between many of their conceptions and the views which we Russians hold on the same subjects – that there are points upon which we can never agree.’ Turguéneff related that he was with in a theatre with Flaubert and other important French writers, where the play was about a woman who had separated with her ex-husband and had had a happy life with another man, and the two babies from the previous marriage. Her children had grown up taking the man as their biological father. Then came the show-down: the boy had somehow learnt about the truth of their family, and shouts at his sister when she kissed their stepfather, ‘Don’t dare!’ Turguéneff accounted, ‘This exclamation brought down the house. There was an outburst of frantic applause. Flaubert and the others joined in it. I was disgusted.’ He had then spent hours discussing with the French writers without making himself understood. Kropotkin admits this difference in his autobiography and that ‘in many other things there is a similar difference between the Russian point of view and that of other nations’ (Kropotkin 1899).

Incidentally, there is a popular Chinese opera piece, *Breeze Pavilion (Qing Feng Ting)* that depicts a similar story. The piece was performed in folk theatre for a longer time and was mentioned as early as in the 18th century in the compendium of Chinese opera. In *Breeze*

Pavilion, the orphan Zhang Jibao is adopted and raised with care by an old couple and thirteen years later, he's reintroduced and returned to his birth mother. He later rises to the most prominent government position, yet returning to the Breeze Pavilion where he is adopted, he refuses to recognise the old couple as his foster parents and treats them as beggars. The saddened old couple commits suicides, and Zhang Jibao gets struck dead by thunders. The immediate moral flavours aside, it is interesting to observe how this story contrasts the story Turguéneff saw in the theatre.

Coming from a Confucian perspective, the shock that Turguéneff and Kropotkin experienced was completely legitimate, if one focuses on the relation established between the children and the stepfather or the foster parents, which weighs more against the relation to the blood father. Here one can ask if the French audience were applauding for an essentialised 'root,' which may be in line with the quest of truth of an individual self, an Enlightenment-predicated, or even Christian project of the self, that stands opposite to relationality. This anecdote recorded by Kropotkin is not to complicate the discursive undertaking by bringing in still another comparative study, however, it does show that similar to the East Asian/Confucian mind-set, there are subconscious differences in the conception of relations.

Back to the East Asian context. Taking the largely modernised East Asian Confucian context into consideration, if sexuality in the form of freedom of sex is achieved in the society, or as another instance, if sexual violence is prosecuted consequently reducing the sense of shame endured by the victim, what is then today's lived experience of feminine desire? And what is to make of the Confucian legacy, which in itself is too immense to be rejected wholesale? How is the distinctive emphasis placed on relationality to be reconceptualised to suit today's practice?

Counterproductive examples to a more nuanced position abound. For example, once a Western sinologist exclaimed at a symposium on contemporary Chinese women that contraception in China is the responsibility of Chinese women. And another telling example concerns Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui, who openly spoke about her less than satisfactory performance due to the fact that she had her period, which is something supposedly not discussed in the public in contemporary China. The news, with a catchy title like 'Chinese Swimmer Breaking Period Taboo,' went viral in Western media including all major news outlet, as well as on social media. It even rounded up attention of and got retweeted by the likes of Melinda Gates. While the social phenomena (contraception and speaking about menstruation) are not uncommon, it is, however, a blatant generalisation to say that they are the social norm. When the news of Ms. Fu 'Breaking Period Taboo' hit China, there were waves of netizens

challenging the factuality of the article, usually relating to their own experiences that testified otherwise: that nobody really makes a fuss about speaking out and that women do openly discuss their period.

Such discrepancy in the projections and facts points to an underlying conceptual rigidity: the well-intentioned Western feminists equate the traditional patriarchal values to practices of East Asian women today. It is worth noting that the set of patriarchal value allegations themselves may originate from Western projections than from the Confucian/East Asian context, that is to say, menstruation in the Christian society – and arguably until today in a secularised Christian society – is more a taboo than they are in the Confucian context. It is misleading in conflating the dramatically changed social context, and it is especially a conceptual slippage if not a counterproductive one to mistake the social context and social unconsciousness of the West to that of another society.

Furthermore, on the discursive level, it implicates another form of conceptual domination, i.e. a self-entitled Western feminist to speak for the global ‘sisterhood,’ and at the same time there are feminists from East Asia who subscribe to this positionality. It is asymmetrical in that it uses a benchmark deriving from the Western experience to describe the problems of their Eastern ‘sisters’ in the hope of elevating them from the theme. The project gets muddier when the element of time is added. Too often, liberal values derived from the recent past are used to contrast practices in a traditional context, or a presumed continuity of tradition in a contemporary society, making the case logically flawed. While a noble cause, the very self-entitlement implicit in this position repeats the same universalisation process that the first-wave feminists fought against. This first-wave is mapped in the tripartite feminist project proposed by Braidotti based on her experience with Western feminism. The first level feminism demands the insertion of women into the patriarchal history, whence it can claim the emancipatory moment of sexual difference. The second level feminism is the feminism of difference, which questions construction of personal identities in the dispositive of power relations. The third level feminism aims to bring the epistemological and political projects together in the hope for different representation of the differences. (Braidotti 2011, 137-165)

At the same time, parallel to the three stages of feminisms, a parallel process of institutionalisation of feminism took place. As Susan Watkins incisively points out in her article ‘Which Feminism?’ (Watkins), the power of radical feminism (parallel in time to the first and the second waves) waned because of the neoliberal expansion of capitalism. In the U.S., the affirmative action works fully in line with the capitalists’ interests of expanding the body of work forces by able women and blacks, and comes at the time as the systematic criminalisation

and incarceration of the unworthy class of people for the capitalist machine under the name of war on drugs. In the 1980s, big foundations like the Ford Foundation sponsored feminist NGOs and university departments, staffed by newly created professorships and programs of gender studies. This signalled the start of an institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of feminism, just as other radical movements before them (in the 1960s Ford had already poured millions into radical black and Latino organisations), for communities which used to work collectively would now compete with each other to justify funding purposes for their own niche projects. The president of the Foundation McGeorge Bundy explained to the Congress that the support could ‘encourage young organisations towards responsible, constructive projects and guide them away from the paths of disruption and discord; “making the world safe for capitalism,” as Bundy sardonically put it elsewhere’. This aspect of economy and power underlying certain strands of cultural theories will emerge again in later chapters. For now, suffice it to say that the social-economic and political conditions for the development of Western feminism make it anything but a clean terrain of culturalist discourses. However, in order to understand the feminism in East Asia, we have to keep a working concept of culture.

4.2.3. Confucian feminism

Now it is one thing to stress the differential differences in the experience of women in Confucian societies to that of the Western counterparts – affirming that there are indeed fine differences whether in terms of content or in terms of timing, it is, however, another undertaking to speak for the differences within Confucianism itself, as Confucianism lends itself both to interpretation as a rigid differential class society and as a dynamic, non-hierarchical social field based on non-transactional reciprocities and social mobility depending on the perspective. The question here is, just what makes Confucianism nuanced enough as to be possibly compatible to and able contribute to a contemporary society?

Against the grains of Confucianism as a static hierarchy and thereby oppressive of women, recent scholars have offered new readings of Confucianism that highlights its dynamic and reciprocal nature, which sheds new light onto the feminist project.

Rosenlee (Rosenlee 2006) argues that based on a reciprocal, dynamic *yin-yang* cosmology, sexual difference between the male and female body has always been more fluid, and therefore informs a more tolerant view of gender in the Chinese/Confucian society. The biologically ‘natural’ woman, pitted against a ‘cultural’ man, such that has permeated Western society and has become the immediate target of criticism in feminist and critical race studies, has never quite existed in the Chinese Confucian society. Indeed, Rosenlee points out that ‘the

concept of male/female whose distinction rests exclusively on biological, sexual differences, in the Confucian tradition, by and large applies to animals, not humans' (Rosenlee 2006, 5). The concept of a human being, of either biological sex, is always already filial and hence social.

It is in fact in this emphasis placed on the virtue of filial piety, the continuity of the family name and ancestor workshop that is the source of Confucian female oppression (Rosenlee 2006, 9). In a way, while there was no essentialised, natural, 'othered' woman figure, there was the cultured construct of filial relationality that functioned and governed in a way close to Foucault's power dispositif. It is a governing principle which is not exercised in top down fashion, but rather bound from within, penetrating the constituent units of a society which is a family, and interrelating the constituent members of the family to each other, while binding the multiplicities of families into a social body. On every social organisational level, relationality comes before the individual. Traditionally, the valued filial continuity conditioned women's role as fulfilling the reproduction duty. As mentioned earlier, if we enforce our emancipated feminist standard upon the confined social life of women in history, we are only doing a disservice to our project of mapping conceptual parameters of feminism under a Confucian frame. Even though this relationality in history may not be 'emancipatory' enough for a modern woman, the crucial point here is that women in Confucian society has to be considered always already social beings and partaking into various constellations of relationalities.

The features that make up the core Confucian social order, as mentioned earlier, are based on pairs of reciprocal relations between rulers and ministers, father and son as well as husband and wife. The conventional view of Confucianism as hierarchical comes from a static rendering of these relations, which is not unfounded. One can identify one moment in Han Dynasty, the first long-running dynasty ruling over a vast, unified territory of China, when Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) famously proposed absolutising the three sets of relations into principles, so that what was initially a dynamic, reciprocal relationality cemented into laws to obey (Lin 2013). There were back and forth adjustments in history, suffice to say that the dynamism and reciprocity in relationality has been an ideal to achieve in Confucian society.

Expanding on this dynamic, non-binary frame deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition, Rosenlee argues that dichotomies conventionally held as causes of social oppression on women, such as that of *nei* and *wai* (private and public, in terms of physical and social space), often do not suffice as a static and rigid distinction of what women are entitled to do and what they are not sanctioned to do. (There were similar *nei-wai* distinction in Korea too: separation between the husband's quarter called *sarangchae* near the *taemun* (the gate), and the wife's quarters

(*anchae*) hidden behind the *chungmun* (middle gate). Further, widow chastity was also honoured by the government by establishing a *yollomun*, ‘a gate of the virtuous woman’). Note here that the emphasis is not placed on practices where a woman transgresses the private and public boundary, such as in the case of women dressed up as men fighting in battles, which could be read as a feminist practice of disrupting the patriarchal order by exactly occupying it. Such an act (though not unpractised in history) would signal a woman’s demand for recognition, and indeed her attempt to strike a symmetry, in the asymmetric order that systematically reduces women to the ‘other-than-men,’ hence restrained to the space of ‘nei’. While the reading is valid, it does presuppose the divide between the public and the private as such, and the as-suchness of the divide conditions the politics of transgression as a kind of ‘turning-around’ or going in between. The *nei-wai* divide would be analogous, though not synonymous to, the divide between the genders, as well as between nature and culture, both constructed through a matrix of discourse, a habitual dichotomy that Western feminists seek to break away from.

How to think beyond the divide as such in Confucianism? The practice Rosenlee draws on is voluntary widowhood, which was analogous to man’s political loyalty and hence defined as female virtue, practiced as early as Tang dynasty (618-907 AD). Rosenlee writes,

[...] the practice of voluntary widowhood, protected in imperial statute since the Tang, signified more than spousal fidelity; it signified women’s own agency where women’s moral intent in safeguarding their integrity as married women must take precedence over parental authority, which emphasised the power of the senior over the junior. The bestowal of imperial honours on the households of chaste widows institutionalised in the Yuan further elevated widowhood from a private virtue to a social virtue with practical consequences. Comparable to the civil service examination for men, widowhood became a means of social mobility for women; that is, a means through which women were able to acquire the highest honour – imperial recognition – because of their own actions instead of the deeds of their father, husband, or son. (Rosenlee 2006, 11)

In her careful analysis throughout the book, the measuring of female agency is made within a context appropriate to their means in the given era, that is to say, in the traditional Confucian society when women did not go to take office in the public and instead stayed home to fulfil their familiar and filial duties, and at the same time, nurtured their own ways of expressing their desire. Only in this way can we justly discuss feminism in a Confucian context

without disregarding what is appropriate to a particular context. And we may indeed realise, this feminism doesn't necessarily resemble on the surface radical, oppositional politics, which is the universalised image of feminism that have taken root both in the Western society and arguably in the East.

This fundamental embedding of agency in the female life in traditional Confucian society affirms that women were always already cultured. It follows that the first phase of Western feminist project, taken at the level of anti-sexism or the quest for recognition, fails to fundamentally address either the lived, nor the social, symbolic realities of the Chinese/Confucian women. In other words, the first level feminism seems to concern women in a traditional Confucian society very little, as indeed the point of exit – that women are historically and problematically viewed as the 'second sex' (de Beauvoir 1949), i.e. as irrational, pertaining to the state of 'nature,' and so forth – do not hold ground in a society based on relationality.

What Rosenlee dedicates much of her book to is the practice of reciprocity. The practice of becoming a good wife, rather than obeying the prescribed rules of a good wife figures more importantly in the ideal Confucian women. The practice leads to an inner articulation of the multiplicity of womanhood. This offers a substantiation of differential difference articulated conceptually by Braidotti in the second and third level of sexual difference theory: the transition from 'differences among women' to 'differences within each women'.

This differential view brings us back to Geumhyung Jeong. When she engages with the mannequins, machines, tools and toys, her presence as a frail-bodied East Asian woman too often attracts interpretations that take her practice as part of a project of first-level feminism that addresses sexual desire or anti-patriarchal will of the oppressed East Asian woman. Such a view is unsubtle for me for it disregards the historical context in which women were not reduced to the non-male, which still codes the society today. Even while it tries to relay a sense of care in the 'global sisterhood,' it does harm in victimising the 'othered' females of the non-West cultures and stripping them from their own agency which have been historically in place (in some forms). More importantly, such a view forecloses the possible engagements of Jeong's works on the second and third levels of the feminist project, which go beyond cultural tropes of female oppression but offer more transversal connections that are of epistemological and political validity. Such foreclosure, as we have already seen, is based on universalism, itself borne of a Western patriarchal order. The true epistemological and political potentials of the Confucian feminist project remain untouched on this level of conceptual criticism.

Resonating this complex in manner though not exactly in content, Deleuze unpacks the

binary structure in sadomasochism in his book *Coldness and Cruelty* (Deleuze 1971) and points out that, contra common conception, the uncomplimentary relation between the two sides in sadomasochism. The woman torturer of masochism is not and cannot be sadistic because she is in the masochistic situation, she is an integral part and a realisation of the masochistic fantasy. The torturess is not masochistic in person, but rather is a pure element of masochism, and thus escapes from her own masochism by assuming the active role in the masochistic situation. Similarly, the female prey in sadism is not masochistic because she is a pure element of sadism escaping her own sadism. By this strange doubling, the dynamic and potential of desire is finally freed from the echo chamber of the powerful versus the powerless.

When Jeong decided to create a new piece called *Fire Drill Scenario* for a performative program I curated which involves fire excavation procedures as choreography, she jokingly told me that some people gasped upon learning about her new piece: ‘They say there is no sex!’ This is not a point to criticise or to embrace, but it does tell the very confined notion of sex based on sexual difference. Certainly, one way of interpreting Jeong’s engagement with mannequins, machines and tools is to see it as explicating feminine sexual desire in a very straightforward way. But as discussed earlier, such view is complicated when cultural and symbolic power relations are at play. As shown by newspaper reviews, it may well be a Korean audience who holds the view on feminism of a more normative order, that is, taking Jeong as East Asian woman fighting a patriarchal order in her art. For me, the patriarchal order does not necessarily figure as the most prominent issues and the struggle against which does not exhaust the potential of her actions.

I see Jeong’s works as an enactment of abstract sex – borrowing the notion from Parisi discussed at length in the last chapter – that is, sex not based on discharge and not driven by predetermined goals, but rather on the organisation of and exchange between micro-bodies, i.e. shifting the focus from the gendered, racialised body to the pre-personal bodies, as well as the bodies of machines decontextualised from mere functionality. This shift of focus does not undermine the previous focus on gender and race, rather it serves as a new conceptual tool to tease out the ontological and political potentials harboured in the microbodies. Contra the immediate association by the public, the mannequins appear awkwardly too real to be suggestive of the anthropomorphised man-subject that informs the exchange and qualifies the relationality-building between two subjects in the macro world. The interaction between the machines and Jeong is a choreographed, or indeed almost engineered, set of procedures that allows contact, transmissions and metaphorically proliferates differences. The micro here implies the multiple bodies at metastable states that make up the artist Geumhyung Jeong’s

body and the body of the machines or mannequins she interacts with. Different from the works of Vanouse and Spiess/Strecker involving real microbes, the performances of Jeong provide a metaphorical image because there are no wet lab interventions involved, so the ‘micro’ is less technically determined (as in microscopic) than being a cultural-philosophical concept of the minoritarian. It takes a desire for becoming to enact the transversal connections between Jeong’s multi-levelled differences and the machinic beings.

In what follows I will explore Jeong’s works in relation to feminine desire beyond ‘second sex,’ or the immediate level of reasserting the female self into the patriarchal order. To do so, I will bring in another differential reading of her work – that of ‘animism,’ which points to the conceptual potential of her work but needs to be thoroughly anchored in a non-reductionist framework. With the desire for transversal connections, I see a potential for renegotiating the conundrum between embodied subject positions at the ‘natural’ as well as cultured full-body level, and the micro level of the pre-personal body.

4.3. Animism, Multiperspectivism and Relationality

4.3.1. The Orientalisation of Animism

Shamanism and animism come up in association of Jeong’s works. Again, this is not to pass a judgement on the interpretation in itself – at the very least, it’s still a fair way of describing something that one has little access to but is presumably there. But as we have tried with analysing Jeong’s works in such ways that avoid essentialist presumption of her being East Asian first-order female feminist, in a similar way we should cast animism and shamanism in a non-essentialising light. The politics behind animism and shamanism, as we will see, exposes the particularity of race to the risks of being subsumed to a flat assimilation, so that the particularity of belief system is also subject to a kind of ‘saming,’ or universalised difference.

In the introduction chapter, I have discussed various theoretical focuses of materialism, including material efficacies in composing dynamic and complex systems, in emergence in self-organisation. A further point of investigation is how the materialist agency figures or constitutes in a social context. In performance studies, new materialist and posthumanist discourses have been openly embraced. For performance studies as a field has been already dedicated to ‘tracking the various material affects of bodies, attending closely to the social impacts of repetitious patterns of behaviour and force, and trained to consider the representations of objects and persons not as happenstance but rather as meaningful sites of inquiry’ (Brisini and Simmons 2016, 193). In Latour’s Actor-Network Theory in which both human and non-human agents

assemble, inanimate things can be actants and exercise agency given to them. However, this is not a case of merely imbuing a specific object with agency, but things are rather the result of processes of negotiation between the material world, human agency and context.

In a thematic issue dedicated to New Materialisms, Rebecca Schneider maps the arena of new materialist scholarship in relation to performance. She draws on John Emigh who analyses the interrelation between masks and humans in relation to the practice of *topeng* in Bali:

When a Balinese *topeng* performer picks up a mask being considered for purchase, he [...] gazes upon the mask, turning it this way and that, making it move to a silent music, he is assessing its potential life. He searches for a meeting place between himself and whatever life is inherent in the mask's otherness. If he is successful, then a bonding takes place that will allow him to let that potential life flow through his own body. (Schneider 2015, 10)

While an empathetic treatment attending to the interrelation between humans and things, the tendency of anthropomorphising is clear in this analysis - what 'whatever'? Of course, attempting to answer what is 'in' the inherent otherness of the mask would be equally speculative and therefore devoid of political efficacy. The problem of such a claim in the form of self-conscious speculation is that it reduces the potential of things, and indeed of humans, to a structurally determined exchange foregrounding always already the divide between the subject and object; the difference is only that the conventional role attribution of the actant and the acted upon gets swapped.

There is again potential cultural discourse hegemony at play regarding such a work in the field of cultural production. The art world has embraced anthropocene-related discussions – and we should point out, largely in the West – to question and decentralise the human species' place in the world in a much broader frame of examination. This follows a longer tradition of scholarship and cultural production that attempts to break the anthropocentric and totalising image of the world by bringing, for instance, indigenous belief systems into the focal point. Yuk Hui points out that thinkers like Latour and Descola are drawn to the 'non-modern' to overcome occidental modernity especially as the age of the Anthropocene weighs down on the human race (Hui 2016, 45-46). Here, one needs extra caution not to fall prey to the co-option into a retrograde politics based on culturalist assumptions, as expounded on in the introduction chapter. The Subaltern Studies, as a branch of postcolonial theory, has provided perhaps the

most institutionalised form of critique on eurocentrism and has proposed to decentre Europe by learning from non-West peoples. Yet as Vivek Chibber points out, this can lead to new ways of orientalising the non-West, as he incisively critiques the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, who builds an entire social ontology in defence of the exotic (Chibber 2013, 289). And one needs to be especially aware of the capitalisation on such discourses in the arts and culture sector, as conjunctive capitalism incessantly incorporates new virgin lands into its operation of value extraction, discussed with the perceptive analysis from Marina Vishmidt, also in the introduction.

In this light, one can legitimately ask, is the discussion of Confucian feminism mentioned above all too culturalist? What Chibber makes clear here is that context matters. The Indians do have a cosmological view of time and the world different from the West, and yet the context in which the analysis of Chakrabarty is carried out is engrained in a modern, global economy which presents concrete and sometimes violent material conditions concerning labour that should not be ignored in the interest of advancing a cultural theory. In other words, the learning from non-West itself is a well-intentioned and noble gesture full of urgencies, but the context in which it should happen must not once again universalise or re-orientalise the other.

In contrast, the context in which Rosenlee inserts her critical analysis is a historical one, and by staying closely with historical praxis, she is able to pinpoint the contemporary critique that speaks from the present on a historical subject, necessarily effectuating discrepancy of standards. What she does is that she contributes a theoretically founded notion of relationality based on historical studies and offers it to a contemporary society without interjecting claims based on the traditional into the present. The equivalent to a culturalist position would be if a Confucian scholar analyses the social codes of rule-obeying in history, and uses it to explain away why there is little outcry for the loss of privacy in contemporary China, as the government uses omnipresent surveillance tools to control its people. This equation between historical Confucianism and contemporary Chinese society is misleading to begin with. More worryingly, it also reduces the potential of creative subversion witnessed on the internet (though the sombre mockery of Kafka's *The Great Wall of China* remains as topical as ever). Historian Pamela Kyle Crossley debunks the purported historical continuities turning China into a perennial 'big data empire'. For in imperial China, Crossley shows, there was a preference for small government. Importantly, she demonstrates that the Chinese population did not succumb to any illusions that their state was statistically precocious or an omnipresent watchful eye, constantly looking out for riots, rebellions, murders, theft and corruption, which occurred as frequently as anywhere else. The current frenzy for big data does not so much hearken back to Confucian

precepts as to the recent history of Communism and the development of digital technologies. (Crossley 2017) This urges us to examine the question, if and in which ways the tradition plays out in the increasingly transcultural world where multiple value systems intermingle, case by case instead of flatpacking everything as traditional.

As Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe scholar points out, critiquing Donna Haraway's devising the coyote as an alliance of feminist theory, that it is 'a level of abstracted engagement,' and '[w]hile it may serve to change the imperialistic tendencies in Euro-Western knowledge production, Indigenous histories are still regarded as story and process – an abstracted tool of the West' (Watts 2013, 26). This leads to the concern that 'well-meaning contemporary artists and academics recreate exploitative patterns from the past,' and that 'the Anthropocene, like any theoretical category at play in Euro-Western contexts, is not innocent of such violence' (Todd 2015, 251).

Just like the reading of East Asian female against oppression debases the actual agency of East Asian women, the attribution of animistic 'agency' to things forecloses any discussion on the sociopolitical context in which such a re-reading emerges. It seems that this is tinted by a kind of post-Enlightenment wishful thinking, showing the dialectical paradox that Adorno and Horkheimer anticipated half a century ago. It's a delegation of thinking that the 'whatever' must be the harbinger of something beyond the rationale of the human subject, and more crucially, that this wishful thinking forecloses any real attempt of engagement with the matter beyond the abstractedness and 'toolness' aspects of it. As argued by Vanessa Watts, the radical embrace of non-West tradition, as it were, by a leap of faith, reveals certain underlying power structures.

One simple and straightforward critique to this endowing of agency to nonhuman things is thinking through the extreme, fictive (or real) cases. Schneider succinctly puts this as potentially leading to 'exoneration of responsibility' in her treatment of the quotation about Balinese *topeng* performer and the mask above. She writes, 'Granting inanimate objects agency might let human exploiters, who are responsible for the excesses of the anthropocene, off the hook (this would be "the gun made me shoot it" defence, which might actually bear some analysis)' (Schneider 2015, 10). In this case, the 'who makes who' argument may remain sheer speculative and impotent to jurisdiction because of the obviously moralised context. Predicated on such a degree of subject and object differentiation instead of the relational network, it's difficult to advance a thinking focused on the potential of transversal relationalities. In response to this form of simple-minded animism, I will make an attempt of accounting for the violence in which non-human spirits and the human seem to be both implicated in history to be accounted

for in materialist ways in the following chapters, with the examples of Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers* and Royce Ng's *Kishi the Vampire*, featuring respectively the tiger and vampire as a figure moulded by a world of mutating desires.

4.3.2. From the epistemological to the ontological: multiperspectivism

Beyond the exoneration of responsibility and the complexity of culturalist assumptions, I would argue that the naïve reductionist tendency using animism as a stand-in fails to answer the question, how do we really approach and deal with the moments of relational emergence and connection beyond the conventional, 'objective' kind? Such an engagement demands not just recasting the subject and the object of knowledge, it also requires a fundamental refocusing from the epistemological to the ontological.

Philosopher Thomas Nagel asks famous question 'What is it like to be a bat?' (Nagel 1974), and points out the misleading aspect of the expression 'what is it like,' for it does not mean 'what (in our experience) it *resembles*,' but rather 'how it is for the subject himself' (Nagel 1974, 440). Shaviro identifies this affirmation of how the bat feels being a matter of its own as a move 'from the problem of access to the problem of being: from epistemology (the question of how we can know what a bat is thinking) to ontology (grasping that the bat is indeed thinking and that this thinking is an essential aspect of the bat's own being, even though we cannot hope to comprehend it)' (Shaviro 2014, 92). This resonates with the Chinese concept of *ziran* 自然, which is the common rendering of the English word 'nature' in Chinese, Japanese and Korean, and which in itself is a term used by Daoist master Laozi as a predicate meaning 'to be so of itself'. Laozi famously claimed '道法自然 Dao follows what-is-so-of-itself'. Nature is, then, what is so of itself. This can be then extrapolated to each and every individualised entity and affirms the quality of what-is-so-of-itself, or the ontology of its own mode of striving.

This ontological affirmation does not put the bat and the human on equal footing in the sense that they share the same essence, but rather in a parallel relation of manner, through which singularity can be seen to resonate with universality, without the need for any sort of mediation (Shaviro 2014, 150). This corresponds with Deleuze's idea of univocity of beings, which he describes succinctly as follows, 'not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities' (Deleuze 1994, 36). Shaviro further expounds on this, 'the being of any one thing is different from the being of any other thing, but being per se is identically attributed to all things' (Shaviro 2014, 150).

On this point, it is worthy considering the notion of multiperspectivism proposed by anthropologist Viveiros de Castro, already mentioned in the last chapter. Based on his studies of the Amerindian tribesmen, multiperspectivism is the view that ‘all beings perceive (“represent”) the world *in the same way*. What varies is the *world* that they see’ (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 471-472). In order to construct this multiperspectivist universe, de Castro recasts nonhuman beings in a radical light: they are humans in their own sphere and they see things just *as* people do. It is only that the things *that* they see are different. He uses the allegory that what to us is blood is maize beer to the jaguar; what to us is soaking manioc is, to the souls of the dead, a rotting corpse; what is a muddy waterhole to us is for the tapirs a great ceremonial house. De Castro further expounds on the relational nature between an entity and the entity that perceives it, which typically can be found in the description of kinship – a father is only a father in relation to his children. In the Amerindian perspectivism, however, substances named by substantives like *fish*, *snake*, *hammock*, or *beer* are somehow used as if they were relational pointers, something halfway between a noun and a pronoun, a substantive and a deictic. This implies that something is a fish only by virtue of someone else whose fish it is. (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 472-473)

This amounts to a paradigmatic change from the access to knowledge to the affirmation of the existence of a different form of knowledge, resonating with the shift from the epistemological to the ontological, which implies that in order to know something, we should not take it as an object of study but rather learn to take its perspective.

However, careful differentiation should go into the interpretation before drawing hasty conclusions such that we need to treat machines like human beings. Masahiro Mori writes on the relationships between robotics and Buddhism in the book *The Buddha in the Robot: a Robot Engineer's Thoughts on Science and Religion*. The opening line reads, ‘I believe robots have the Buddha-nature within them – that is, the potential for attaining Buddhahood’ (Mori 1985). Jordi Vallverdú interprets the argument as, ‘all things in the universe are related one to another, in a way that the whole can be seen in any part. Taking this further, belief in the discrete existence of beings and things, that is, between beings and their bodies, is totally flawed. The illusion of a discrete world populated by entities is simply that – an illusion. The basic life-force, called *ku*, forms and moves everything. In animist Japanese tradition, this force is present in inanimate objects and is called *kami*. *Kami* is the fundamental unit of the sacred in Shinto. This life is in animals, people and rocks, trees, rivers and mountains too. Consequently, matter has the nature of Buddha. For this reason, he argued that the Buddha-nature must also be present in the machines and the robots that roboticists make. The truth of the universe is embodied in

all its parts' (Vallverdú 2011, 177) Is the view of *kami* founded on extensiveness or intensiveness? Without going into a discussion on Shintoism, it does seem that the logical construction of concatenation from *kami* to matter to Buddhahood is too simplified and follows the scheme of distributing or imbuing spirits to matters. Another case concerns Sophia, a humanoid robot to receive 'citizenship' from Saudi Arabia government in 2017. Quickly drawing awe and shock, Sophia is dubbed the first robot to be recognised with a national citizenship, which in this case is no more than a number plate for a more sophisticated car. And on the other hand, the *kafala* system in Saudi Arabia monitoring foreign workers and Sharia Islamic law forbidding women to appear in public space without a company show the controversies and hypocrisy of such purported 'recognition' bestowed to Sophia.

If it tells us anything, it tells us about ourselves and our anthropomorphising tendency, not about technology. The question lies in the interpretation. The interpretative frame can easily be tricked to follow the extensive view that separates the human and the robot in the first place as subject and object, and merely endows the robot with spirits inexplicable in human terms, then it becomes a naïve and anthropomorphic form of animism, a mere delegation of power and responsibilities and a leap of faith. If we assume the relational arising as conditioning the robots – with or without spirit – and the human, then there is always already the technological-spiritual relation, which evolves over time and takes on new dimensions. In this way, the machines and robots with 'spirits' can escape the anthropomorphic interpretive frame, and enter into a realm pertaining to multiperspectivism – at least a weaker version of it.

Similarly, to view Jeong's practice in this light, here I do not wish to suggest that the artist attempts to quest into the world of machines of various complexities, dummy figures and sex toys, to demonstrate or to approximate how machines think or work. Nor do I wish to equalise them in essence, and by so doing, endowing the machines with spirits. Rather, her works evince a deep respect for the ontological status of the objects and dummy figures and acknowledgement that the operations and engagements with the machines, however much or little they are determined by herself, are founded on this ontological affirmation. They give a strange manifestation of the relational co-existence of two distinctive kinds of 'entities,' that of the human and machine/object, especially as they co-evolve through the performative works. The strangeness comes from her using the technical/machinic means for non-conventional ends, such as operating the hydraulic truck to 'masturbate' the woman figure made of sand. Her endeavours amount to a retuning or retraining of the way we look at the machines/objects as something existing in their own rights, beyond the utilitarian purposes they are designed for. Of course, they do exist in the first place as designed by us, but even the designing process involves

a certain degree of co-participation.

In this sense, the objects can never be isolated from the man-machine constellation that gives rise to new capacities and modes of being. But beyond the utilitarian desire, there are other articulations of desire out of the assemblage, for example, when something goes wrong on the material level, unexpected results may happen. We can push the assemblage to the speculative realm, namely the primary condition of the experience of technics which is nothing less than cosmology, which Yuk Hui terms ‘cosmotechnics’ (Hui 2016, 203-223). This will be more fleshed out in the last chapter.

A nuanced analysis on the relational assemblage concerning multiple agents casting influence upon each other can be found in Isabelle Stengers’ treatment of magic. She traces how in Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage to which everything immanently belongs, one is not endowed with agency or intention, but that the agency, or desire, belongs to the assemblage as such (Stengers 2012, 7). This debases the subject-predicate forms of mystifying the power of the ‘object’ in animism, for the ‘object,’ whatever it is, does not emanate magical power by itself but rather participates in the whole material-metaphysical assemblage that leads the observer to believe that something happens beyond the sum total of the parts.

Furthermore, David Abram examines how magic, more than something to be subjected to critical reason, reveals the creativity of our senses:

From the magician's, or the phenomenologist's, perspective, that which we call imagination is from the rest an attribute of the senses themselves; imagination is not a separate mental faculty (as we so often assume) but is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible. And yet such sensory anticipations and projections are not arbitrary; they regularly respond to suggestions offered by the sensible itself. The magician, for instance, may make the magic palpable for the audience by following the invisible coin's journey with the focus of his own eyes, and by imaginatively ‘feeling’ the coin depart from the one hand and arrive in the palm of the other; the audience's senses, responding to subtle shifts in the magician’s body as well as to the coin, will then find the effect irresistible. In other words, it is when the magician lets himself be captured by the magic that his audience will be most willing to join him. (Abram 1996, 58)

In the magician-magical objects-spectator assemblage of intensiveness, the non-sensual sense perception (as Massumi terms it, as analysed in the chapter on Lawrence Abu Hamdan and the materiality of language) casts the discussion of animism in a new light: not only is the nuance of animism implied in the multiperspectivism argued above, it also attests to the creative advance in the world, which – though largely invisible – can intensify our experiences, as incompatibles and contrasts are positively *prehended* to add to the greater complexity of the world.

In Jeong's works, the desire/agency that verges on being (mis)interpreted for sexual desire emerges out of Jeong's carefully orchestrated assemblage of machines, dummies and tools. The creativity of our senses is the very faculty that Jeong's performances enlists as we intuit the fine relation between Jeong and the material constellation she constructs, decoyed and captivated by the co-evolution of the human and nonhuman actors alike. In this way, we are intuitively tuned to sensations and senses beyond the logical order, just as Jeong, the artist herself is led and lured by what she's performing. Not focused on the mere procedures of operating machines and manipulating dummy figures, the artist – an unwitting magician – becomes part of a larger assemblage desiring or evincing an agency of a strange love.

It is therefore logically consistent that one reviewer of Jeong's exhibition writes that, '[t]his folding from inflator to inflated, from medical to erotic, and erotic to comic and ludic, created the overwhelming impression that within and between these articles a narrative is written – a script waiting to be performed. [...] Seeing both sides of this darkly erotic and at times implicitly violent mechanical mirror, we're invited to reflect on a question regarding objects and people: Which performs which?' (Carter Miles 2017) This feeling that there is an invisible script unfolding in the performance is prompted by the sensible itself, a desire that pertains to the virtual.

To conclude this part, the theory of multiperspectivism adopted creatively here helps to trace the multiple lines that the works enact: the line of Jeong, a minoritarian becoming, and the lines of the machines, each having its own modes of movement. Doubtlessly, the 'perspectives' of the machines are less comparable to the perspectives of jaguars and tapirs, for the plain reason that the machines were invented in the first place, in a network of human and material actors, to fulfil certain ends. At the same time, if we play down the aspect of the intention of design arising out of the network, and indeed replace the network with a different network, such as that enacted here, then the interdependence of the machine, the human, and the practical functionality of design do not necessarily hold true. In this way, the operations of both the animals in Ameridian belief and the machines in Jeong's works could be said to be based on

non-cognitive intentionality, though it does not imbue them with self-conscious spirits. And if we are to observe things, created by us or not, we ought to do so above the layer of cultural construction where we can find another plateau from where to view the objects as they are. This new light reveals the ‘strangeness of things,’ which is to say, ‘the ways that they exist without being “posited” by us and without being “given” to or “manifested” by us’ (Shaviro 2014, 66). To explore how the mode of univocal and relational existence functions, the following section will examine the ideas of Whitehead.

4.4. Intensive relations: prehension, perception, individuation

4.4.1. Whiteheadian *prehension* and feeling

The reductionist view singles out one relation of exchange such as the subject and object. This mode of thinking is extensive, for in the Bergsonian sense, it spatialises the participants in the moment, and by doing so relegating many other relations that are intensive in nature. Our subject-predicate mind is used to conceive extended things, which is conditioned by a generic, homogeneous notion of space. When we conceive this space, we excise our power over real space, that is, we are using ‘our faculty of decomposing and recomposing it as we please, we project the whole of these possible decompositions and recompositions behind real extension in the form of a homogeneous space, empty and indifferent, which is supposed to underlie it’ (Bergson 1998, 169).

What comes as conceptual aid is the view based on intensiveness, which is not just a reactive opposition against the view of spatialisation and extensiveness, but also fundamentally undermines the assumption of spatialisation. For Deleuze and Guattari, earth is the primary full body that is unengendered, while the territorial machine tries to inscribe or mark on the body to create filiations. The nature of this filiation is intensive, ‘this inclusive disjunction where everything divides, but into itself, and where the same being is everywhere, on every side, at every level, differing only in intensity’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 154). Only under the despotic regime does something come from on top, under whose reign the body of earth ceases to be inclusive, and instead it becomes exclusive. ‘Once this occurs, there is a dismembering of the full body, a cancelling of twinness, a separation of the sexes marked by circumcision, but also a recomposition of the body according to a new model of connection or conjugation, an articulation of bodies for and between themselves’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 155). As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the separation of the two sexes marks one such event

of extensive inscription. Here, similarly, the analytical tool helps shed light on the process through which bodies are separated and become entities for themselves in an extensive mode.

The intensive and dynamic nature between entities, no longer constrained to the preconditioned subjecthood and objecthood, also challenges what is typically exalted as the most important feature of humanism, that of thinking, which spatialises into the image of a thinking subject thinking an object. This leads to correlationism, the charge ‘according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other’ (Meillassoux 2008, 5). What this non-dualistic, and non-correlational relation amounts to is that what the ‘mind’ philosophers so relentlessly seek to locate as ‘thinking’ is nowhere but immanent to things themselves. In other words, mind is immanent to being.

Whitehead offers a systematic explanation of this paradigm of thinking through the concept of *prehension*. *Prehension*, which he defines as ‘uncognitive apprehension’ (Whitehead 1967 [1925], 69), renders legible the relational connections between people, things and their surroundings by highlighting the operation of uncognitive ‘grasping’ – a pre-epistemic, not necessarily knowledge-based operation of relating to things and environments. *Prehension* ‘does not require explanation but must enable the exhibition of the common feature of all situations in which something makes a difference for something else’ (Stengers 2011, 147). So the Earth orbiting around the Sun *prehends* the Sun, the apple falling from the tree *prehends* the ground. In light of this, no entity is ever fixed or static, for ‘[a] new entity comes into being by *prehending* other entities; every event is the *prehension* of other events’ (Shaviro 2009, 28).

A ‘feeling’ for Whitehead is ‘positive *prehension*,’ or ‘the definite inclusion of [one] item into positive contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitution’. In contrast, ‘[a] negative *prehension* is the definite exclusion of that item from positive contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitution’ (Whitehead 1929, 41). As such, the ‘feeling’ operates regardless of the human perceiving mind, as indeed the apple tree can be said to ‘feel’ the earth. This Whiteheadian ‘feeling’ is more of a non-intentional kind and can be disassociated from a human sensing subject. This does not discount the experience of the human by negating it and pronouncing it as unauthentic all together, but questions the registration of the feeling by posing a contrast ‘between a “self” and “that of which there is experience,” but without duplicating it by reference to an “I” or a “me”’ (Stengers 2011, 31). The disposition of the sense of self and that which there is a feeling is a way of describing – at the verge of the non-explicable – what happens before the ‘I’ emerges out of the assemblage.

This amounts to a new paradigm which does not favour the subject-predicate, or the ‘I think...’ as the condition of thinking, and instead refocuses on the process of feeling as preceding and conditioning the ‘I’. In other words, ‘the feeling entity is “conditioned” by, or is an “effect” of, all the other entities that it feels’ (Whitehead 1929, 236) and this entity, in turn, becomes a condition, or a cause, for whatever subsequent entities feel it in their own ways. Every entity thus ‘conforms to the data’ that it receives from the past, in that ‘it feels the data’ (Whitehead 1929, 236). In the act of feeling its data, every entity ‘also selects among, shapes, and alters these data, until it reaches a final determination’ (Shaviro 2009, 63).

4.4.2. Perception, cognition beyond senses and the body

For Whitehead, perception is the ‘cognition of *prehensive* unification’ or, more simply, ‘cognition of *prehension*’ (Stengers 2011, 47). Similar to the debasing of ‘feeling’ from a feeling subject, it follows that the intelligible process we characterise as thinking is to be untied from an exclusive and defined human subject, and is indeed to be understood as ‘nonphenomenological, insofar as it goes on without establishing relations of intentionality to anything beyond itself and even without establishing any sort of reflexive relation to itself’ (Shaviro 2014, 126). Thinking does not need to think itself, nor does it need a subject that participates in sense-perception to qualify as thinking. It just happens or passes, ‘as a sort of flavouring – of the very world that it is supposed to be “about” and whose objects it is supposed to “intend”’ (Shaviro 2014, 80). This Whiteheadian frame of human and nonhuman *prehension* lays the foundation for theorising cognition beyond sense-perception.

Importantly for Whiteheadian thinkers, ‘nonconscious experience is not an oxymoron; it is simply that more things are *felt* than can be known’ (Shaviro 2014, 79). Once we accept that perception is unbound from the sensing and sense-making operations of the human, then everything senses and perceives and it does so in its own ways. As Shaviro succinctly analyses, ‘everything is mindful, or has a mind, but this does not necessarily entail that everything is “given” or “manifested” to a mind’ (Shaviro 2014, 82). Our attempt to understand the way the tree senses by resorting to vocabulary pertaining to human knowledge and even biology will be of no avail. Echoing the bat question earlier, certainly the bat has its own form of ‘mind,’ but its form of mind is not necessarily manifested to our form of mind. This further confirms that the way things are and the way they evolve – including especially nonhuman things – are adequate to themselves and have to be no more adequate than to themselves.

Trying to strike a balance between speculative philosophers associated with the Object Oriented Ontology school and Whitehead, Shaviro emphasises that the character of mindfulness

of and among things should be recognised appropriate to their own context. The way the seemingly inanimate entities exert their mindfulness, for Whitehead and Shaviro, equals their valuing themselves, for the value of an entity lies in its ‘sense of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character’ (Whitehead 1938, 109). And the way they manifest their value is to persist through time and undergo self-transformation. Shaviro writes, ‘the value activity of an entity that persists through time is not just a matter of self-perpetuation or of the continually renewed achievement of homeostatic equilibrium. It may well also involve growth or shrinkage and assimilation or expulsion, or an active self-transformation and becoming-other’ (Shaviro 2014, 89). This is what Whitehead calls ‘conceptual initiative,’ or ‘the origination of conceptual novelty’ (Whitehead 1929, 102). The aspect of the novelty could be considered an update on Spinoza’s concept of ‘conatus,’ which is the striving of a thing to persist in being that Spinoza equates with the essence of the very thing. (Spinoza 1992) Whitehead duly expands the persistence into processes of transformation, thus bringing dynamism into the discussion.

If the way things ‘are’ is conceptualised as such, then the fallacy of reductionist animism becomes obvious. The tendency of projecting the known into the invisible and unknown, which implies concepts of self-contained entities and spatialised relations, is categorically anthropomorphising and loses its ground in the face of the nonhuman mind immanent to things.

The process of *prehension* and feeling thus puts everything in a relational network, an immanent and emergent network in the material world. In the words of Shaviro, ‘Feeling, as such, is the primordial form of all relation and all communication. [...] An act of feeling is an encounter – a contingent event, an opening to the outside – rather than an intrinsic, predetermined relationship. And feeling changes whatever it encounters, even in the very act of “conforming” to it. That is why feeling is irreducible to cognition’ (Shaviro 2009, 63).

Hansen goes further to point out that feeling is the source of the ‘feelers’ and precedes the constitution of any distinct ‘feelers,’ thereby foregrounding the process of relational encounter – feeling as the condition for feelers to emerge out of the relational network:

Rather than characterising the feeling (or positive *prehension*) first and foremost as a ‘contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitution,’ we would do better to divide feeling between two distinct standpoints, that of the objective data informing process and that of the incipient subjective polarisation. Prior to giving rise to the latter – and in order to do so – feeling characterise the pattern of contrasts of objectified data

as they bond together and converge around a congealing unity that can only subsequently emerge as the *prehender* or feeler of these feelings. (Hansen 2014, 76)

Art affords us a particular situation whereby we can explore the rich dimensions of feeling, before or aside from cognition. This is a similar process to the ritual dances mentioned in chapter two, which brings forth virtual events that are pertinent to feeling before its bodily articulation by the feelers. We can only obtain ‘a clear-cut experience by concentrating on the abstractions of consciousness’ (Whitehead 1938, 108), because ‘very few aspects of our experience are actually clear and distinct’ (Shaviro 2009, 97). We are reminded that if we exercise a heightened attention to these feelings, we are able to dwell in them longer. Yet, it is naïve and all too anthropocentric if we seek a certain spirit to animate an object so that through the mediation we get to feel something different, as if we need to find another agent that ‘feels’ the feelings. That something different is already there – in this relational network of feeling, but we often overlook this level of relation and communication due to our habitual abstraction in thinking.

Now, how does this heightened attention work so that feeling comes to be felt? Whitehead conversely describes the primitive form of physical experience as a blind emotional feeling, felt in its relevance to a world beyond, and at that stage, ‘the feeling is blind and the relevance is vague’. It functions as a ‘vector feeling, that is to say, feeling from a beyond which is determinate and pointing to a beyond which is to be determined’. The way this feeling is transmitted into higher or lower phases of experience is by way of, similar to physics, undulatory pulses through increased or inadequate dimensions of width. (Whitehead 1929, 162-163) Here, Whitehead uses the term of vectors and waves borrowed from physics to illustrate feelings, because he makes ‘no essential distinction between physical causality (the way that one entity transmits energy or movement to another entity) on the one hand, and perception (the way that one entity feels, and responds to, another entity) on the other’ (Shaviro 2009, 63).

This explanation through physics amounts to the view that consciousness is ultimately materially constituted. Shaviro threads together the various strands of thinking in Deleuze and Bergson as follows,

For Bergson, sentience emerges without reflexivity and is a kind of experience that remains ‘in-itself’ without transcendence toward an external object. Deleuze, following him, formulates that if ‘all consciousness *is* something,’ then thought immanently coincides with *matter* in ‘the absolute identity of the image and movement’ (Deleuze

1986, 59). This leads Deleuze to claim that ‘it is not enough to say that consciousness is consciousness of something’ (Deleuze 1994, 220); rather, we must move backward and downward in order to reach the primordial point at which ‘consciousness ceases to be a light cast upon objects in order to become a pure phosphorescence of things in themselves’ (Deleuze 1990, 311). (Shaviro 2014, 131)

In this physical causality-perception determination, we, among all the things, come to be (or better, become) in the world. The way to move forward in the world – the creative advance – is not to be confined to orders achieved but to intensify experiences: ‘[e]motions are intensified, and experiences made richer, when incompatibilities, instead of being excluded (negatively *prehended*), are transformed into contrasts that can be positively integrated within a greater “complexity of order” (Shaviro 2014, 70).

Yet it is imperative to stress that resorting to physics to explain phenomenon seemingly pertaining to the ‘mind’ does not mean that consciousness is purely a set of mechanics and therefore can be rendered in disembodied forms. Instead, the contrasts and incompatibilities that open to more intensive experiences take their roots firmly in the embodied experience. Therefore, feelings and perceptions are fully grounded in the materiality of the body:

For Whitehead, bodies - which are, again, one kind of society among others (society being compositions of actual entities of varying complexity) – are compositions of attained actualities or susperjects, each of which has come to exist and to wield ‘superjetal-subjective’ force because of its own self-inaugurating feeling of the entirety of the settled world to which it adds itself. Bodies, for Whitehead, can be said to have or to experience affectivity not because they respond to ‘virtual’ forces but because they are literally made up of elements that all have their respective origins in feeling and that cohere together through higher-order resonances that build upon, but do not supersede, their constitutive affective relationality. Far from being the source of power, bodies are more like hosts or channels for the force of worldly matter. As the superjetal-subjective force of the universe itself, feeling is what impels the constitution of such entities, and as such can only be felt in a mode of receptive passivity. (Hansen 2014, 74)

The view of the body as that embodied reality bringing higher-order resonances together is an acute reminder of the materiality of bodies, human or otherwise. Even though Whitehead’s theory can be easily extrapolated to the studies of information theory which in turn contributes

to a process-based understanding of cybernetics, it does show the complex interplays between embodied forms of subjectivity and disembodiment in the cybernetic tradition.

This long theoretical reflection on feeling, perception and thinking takes us (by way of critiquing naïve animism) back to the embodied choreography of Geumhyung Jeong. What we see on stage is no longer Jeong as an individual artist but rather it is Jeong as a multiplicity in a metastable state who emerges through the performance. The multiplicity, that is, the many levels of differential differences of Jeong (gender, race, age etc.) connect to the fragmented bodies of the mannequins and machines, forming an intense moment of intimacy, challenging the cultural signifiers conditioning social norms on micro and macro levels. On the one hand, we witness the intensity of Jeong's desire for becoming something different, that is, other than being gendered, racialised and perhaps determined by age. And on the other, the intensity of the desiring machinic bodies in (less articulated) terms of persisting in itself – which fails with the rather mocking scene of the vibrating machine (or does it?), and of transformation in the face of new relations and communications with Jeong's body/bodies.

Through this process of multi-layered, differential becoming, the dancer 'individuates,' to borrow Gilbert Simondon's beautiful term. For Simondon, the individual is but the momentary result from the process of individuation, and we should not, as we habitually do, take the cause as the effect. We have to understand 'the individual from the perspective of the process of individuation rather than the process of individuation by means of the individual' (Simondon 1992, 300). Importantly, the individuation resulting in the individual does not terminate the potential from the preindividual state but rather carries it on. Simondon writes,

[...] the individual is to be understood as having a relative reality, occupying only a certain phase of the whole being in question - a phase that therefore carries the implication of a preceding preindividual state, and that, even after individuation, does not exist in isolation, since individuation does not exhaust in the single act of its appearance all the potentials embedded in the preindividual state. (Simondon 1992, 300)

Simondon's individuation resonates with Whitehead's idea on the body, or the hosts or channels for the force of worldly matter. Jeong's practice bespeaks this wilful intensification of experiences by enacting the contact between herself and the machines. Co-inhabiting the stage, Jeong and the machines, and sometimes including the audience as well when they are seated on the stage, unveil and expose a creative experience based on incompatibilities. By bringing

contrasts that can be positively integrated within a greater ‘complexity of order,’ such as the machines decontextualised and transformed into other performative modes, the experiences of the audience are intensified and enriched.

When perceiving – and participating in – her work this way, the power relation between Eastern female bodies and the observer, or the man-machine hierarchy, or any reading on the symbolic level slips away. And instead, the carefully constructed choreographic co-presence and relationality open the work to be experienced on the level of ‘feeling’.

4.5. Conclusion

Geumhyung Joeng’s works present differential differences of her being East Asian, female, working shamanically with technology, yet they transgress beyond the conventional gaze. They open up to the indeterminate potentials arising from the ‘magic’ to which a world pertaining to the virtual momentarily emerges.

This chapter brings a set of culturally specific parameters into the discussion of materialism, namely the lived and symbolic realities of East Asian womanhood. The intention, however, is to establish an immanent network of relationality as the lens for interpreting interpersonal, or better, infrapersonal and man-machine assemblages. For what is commonly understood as interpersonal and between the man and machine is always already bordered, whereby discrete entities are charted in spatialised ways. As Rosenlee points out, the man-woman relation in the traditional Confucian society goes beyond the divide between the biologically ‘natural’ woman and the ‘cultural’ man, and the praxis of reciprocity is crucial for co-constituting the personhood in a relational network.

At a dramatically different scale, the naïve understanding of animism is similarly based on a presumed subject-object dichotomy. I’ve gone through Whiteheadian *prehension*, perception and cognition to situate what happens – however speculative or esoteric the question may sound – in animism and magic. What is enacted in Jeong’s works is an animism favouring the relational co-emergence with the man-machine assemblage, and the embodied reality of the body bringing higher-order resonances together. Instead of a ‘whatever’ life, but *a* life that equally imbues the doer, the material objects and the observer. A life, that is at the same time, a transversal desire that makes Geumhyung Jeong enter into a process of individuation under the condition of multiple connections with the fragmented machines and her pre-individual self.

5. Chapter Five

Immanence, Performance and History: On Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers*

*Nature, that framed us of four elements
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world
And measure every wandering planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite [...]*

Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590)

5.1. Ten Thousand Tigers and its Reception

An opening teaser: when confronted with Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen's theatre production *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014), audiences not familiar with the Chinese language may wonder, why ten thousand? Those recalling Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* may work out the math and see an image of ten tigers resting on each plateau. And those who know about Ho's more recent video installation, titled *Two or Three Tigers* (2015), may be even more perplexed with the numbering. The numbering is not arbitrary, of course. In Chinese, 'ten thousand' and 'two or three' are fictive numbers that allude to 'magnitude/multitude' and 'casual instance,' respectively. At the same time, the unspecific number references what Deleuze and Guattari draw on as counterargument against Freud in the treatment of a wolf dream: instead of counting the specific numbers of wolves and relating the numbers to cultural

significance such as the parents, they allow the patient to confess, ‘How stupid, you can’t be one wolf, you’re always eight or nine, six or seven’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 29) Wolves are always in packs, one among others, at the same time one and multiple. The wolf numeric offers a good entry into the universe of *Ten Thousand Tigers*.

This chapter focuses on Ho Tzu Nyen’s *Ten Thousand Tigers* and delves into its multitude of layers in which animistic belief, history, man, and non-human and non-organic actors intermingle into a grandiose narrative. *Ten Thousand Tigers* interweaves the history of Southeast Asia through the figuration of the tiger. In folk belief, the animal is said to possess humans under certain circumstances and make ‘weretigers;’ yet this ambiguous, more equal relation between man and tiger has changed in modern times. Further, the ruthless Japanese generals in World War II known as Malay Tigers and the many-faced Lai Teck, the Malayan Communist Party secretary who was likened to a tiger, add historical weight to the man-tiger relation.

When the piece was shown at the Vienna Festival in 2014, it garnered enthusiastic, if somewhat over-exoticising, reviews. The *Tiroler Tageszeitung* review, for example, celebrated that the piece successfully conveys the making of the Malayan world by the colonial powers; at the same time, it remarks that ‘the past and the future belong to the tiger’ and that the artist develops ‘the old myths around the secret cult animal of shamans and the miraculous’ (Online 2014). Perhaps a regional popular newspaper could be excused for exaggerating the ‘mythical’ aspect of the theatre piece, yet it evinces a general tendency for things beyond the rational frame of understanding to be categorised as ‘cult’ and the ‘miraculous.’ More alarmingly, it should be pointed out that the notion of the ‘timeless’ character of Asia slips in unquestioned, so that with a leap of faith the tiger as a figuration has to possess potential for the future. Such a categorisation is similar to the question of animism analysed in the last chapter on Geumhyung Jeong’s works.

The work was celebrated in Singapore, and the local newspaper *The Straits Times* offered a more in-depth reading of the piece. Aware of the cultural and historical backgrounds, the critic remarked that the work ‘examines the authority of folklore and its subconscious impact on the local psyche’ (Tan 2014). Here I refrain from labelling either review as a right or wrong interpretation; yet it is telling to observe how the reviewers choose to highlight or not highlight the dynamic transformation process between man and tiger, and its spiritual, material, historical and political implications.

In the following, I will pursue the unfolding of the narrative and revisit each historical station to bring to the fore the trans-historical and meta-historical scheme of *Ten Thousand*

Tigers. The analysis is situated in an expanded field of media theory, encompassing the technicality and affectivity of (inter)mediated encounters, as well as proposing a view of matter, time/space, and events as non-fixed and dynamic. In this way, I hope to flesh out the affective and philosophical dimension of *Ten Thousand Tigers*, which renders the performance both as an experience and as a kind of ‘thinking’ (Cull 2013). Based on the analysis of the work, I will further pursue a trans-historical and meta-historical philosophy of history, following the lines of thinking of Deleuze and Guattari.

5.2. The multiple transformations in *Ten Thousand Tigers*

5.2.1. The set as intermedial edifice

The piece opens in darkness. With the sound of the play button being pressed, light is shed on a magnetic tape deck on the upper left side of the stage. A voice comes from an old tape recorder, in Mandarin Chinese: ‘Most of what is known about us comes largely from spies, traitors, double agents, informers...’ (Ho 2014) The adjacent compartmental space is lit up and reveals piles of documents in it, resembling an unattended archive. Against the vast space of darkness yet to be revealed on the theatre stage that tiny window of light seems to forecast a looming presence of memory.

In *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the performance happens in an intricately designed ‘stage edifice’ with vitrines and display boxes of varying sizes stacked up to fill almost the full width and height of the stage. (Fig. 5.1) The audience only comes to see the entirety of the stage almost at the end of the performance; before that, only parts of the stage are revealed to the audience through meticulously controlled lighting. Invoking the aesthetics of a cabinet of curiosity, to the political dimension of which we will return, the vitrines and boxes contain real and virtual, mechanised and immobile objects, as well as four actors – themselves remaining immobile throughout the performance. (Fig. 5.2) The edifice on stage thus inaugurates a dense interplay of objects, bodies and variations of media technology. This amounts to what Chiel Kattenbelt calls ‘intermediality’ of theatre, demonstrated in its efficacy of inducing mutual affect, which entails ‘co-relations between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a refreshed perception’ (Kattenbelt 2010, 25).

In the close reading of key moments in *Ten Thousand Tigers* that follows, we have to perhaps come up with a more adequate terminology than ‘scenes’ to describe what we register from our experience. Duly mirroring ‘intermediality,’ Ho aptly calls the distribution of

experience in theatrical time-space ‘fragments’. In these fragments, the audience is constantly confronted with the alliance created between bodies and technologies onstage which thwarts the dominant gaze. This means seeing the technological apparatuses of media ‘performatively on stage as agents for form and content, not merely as the systems through which ideas are imparted, but as ideas, subjects, themselves’ (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 40).

Back on stage, the narrator continues in a solemn and emphatic voice: ‘He who controls the flow of stories, controls history. The art of the narrative belongs to the police’ (Ho 2014). Ho’s script is a masterfully crafted flow of texts of narration and commentary, some of which are in deep resonance with philosophical texts. The audience may be reminded of George Orwell’s remark on politics of historiography or Michel Foucault’s politics of knowledge production, and may wonder to which extent this political framing of history will condition the piece. At this point the magnetic tape deck abruptly starts fast-forwarding. Is it a sign of a living machine? We will see later. As it comes to an equally abrupt halt, music starts. Another compartmental space is illuminated on stage, resembling a cabinet of curiosities from afar. We can discern busts of Lenin and Ho Chi Minh, mannequins of other figures, skulls, and on the small flat screens tucked neatly in between physical figures, photos and three-dimensional models of heads are to be seen.

In voice-over, a story is told in Japanese about Lai Teck, Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 until after World War II, who goes by many different names: Nguyen Van Long, Hoang A Nhac, Pham Van Dac, Mr Light, C.H. Chang, Wong Kim Geok, D. Ling, Malaya’s Lenin, the right hand of Ho Chih Minh, etc. While these names are enunciated, the spotlight switches on and off on different busts and objects and the heads on screens fade in and out. This multi-media segment about the mysterious Lai Teck concludes with: ‘He is every name in history’ (Ho 2014).

Now spotlights are on a series of deformed heads as if undergoing transformation (in this segment, Ho was inspired by the painter Francis Bacon). The narrator speaks in a low-pitched voice, ‘when one does not know a man, he is a tiger to man’ (Ho 2014), heralding the theme of the piece, and its variations that trigger inexhaustible permutations – man and tiger, tiger to man, man as tiger, and so forth.

The opening scene sets the basic parameters of the performance: the stage machinery carries out calculated manipulations of the objects, the actors do not adhere to narrative personalities but are rather implicated in the timing of the machinery. Here, we are confronted with mediality both in its technological constitution as media device and, in the expanded sense,

mediality as process of transformation – transforming from one format into another in the case of the tape recording, and from one form of being into another in the case of the Bacon-inspired deformed figures. This further adds dynamics to our understanding of intermediality, in which the matrix of transformative and transforming participants may be said to enter into ‘a becoming that changes both the work and the world as representation or differential repetition’ (Cull 2013, 5). The variety of objects – digital or analogue machines, screens and showcases – that are to sustain the curiosity of the audience in the entire performance posit a challenge at the same time: ‘What can we learn about bodies and technologies through their exchanges?’ (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 51) The question of ‘liveness’ and ‘life’ itself also comes into play; the two at times follow separate paths to reinforce the separation of the theatre and its audience, and at times intermingle and prompt philosophical questions.

5.2.2. Transformation of Man and Tiger

Subsequently, other parts of the stage machinery are lit. We see a silhouette of two squatting figures against a light box and hear a quiet voice in Malay: ‘No one here calls the tiger by its proper name, unless in a whisper. For speech is spell, and words warp the weave of the worlds’ (Ho 2014). The squatting figures are in the dark and their faces illegible; their postures are steady and unmoving. In the enticing whispering, it is conveyed that ‘Man is not a being but a place. Of ceaseless divisions’ (Ho 2014). The transformation, or transmogrification, between man and tiger is deeply imbued in the narrative of *Ten Thousand Tigers*. More than a folk belief that confers magical power to man while allowing man to elude responsibility from potentially inhumane actions, it rather paints an entirely different worldview in which the tiger and man are both immanent to a grand process of transformation and, to a certain extent, on an equal footing. What this means, and more importantly, what this feels like, will be explored throughout the piece.

To shed more light on the transfiguration of man and tiger into each other, it is said that ‘in the river, the tiger bleeds, into the shadow of man’ (Ho 2014). A key element in the *Ten Thousand Tigers* cosmology is thus introduced: water. The squatting figures – now we could take them for weretigers – further recount, ‘The being of animal in the world is like that of *water in water*. This is why in the midst of crossing a river one is able to dissolve into a tiger’ (Ho 2014). They further relate, in almost a chanting way, ‘I touch, but I never touch my hand touching,’ ‘Am I a tiger among men? Or a man among tigers?’ (Ho 2014)

These poetic lines give an indication of the univocity of being: multiplicity within univocity. In which way is the being in the world univocal? It is, to be sure, not an erasure of

difference. As Deleuze puts it, ‘In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities’ (Deleuze 1994, 36). It is best grasped in the image of water in water – ‘A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings’ (Deleuze 1994, 304).

This image is important for Bataille too. In the *Theory of Religion*, Bataille uses the term ‘animality’ to refer to immediacy. ‘The animal is not a separate consciousness defining itself in opposition to the world but is, rather, ... fully continuous with the world. Each animal is in the world like water inside of water’ (Bataille 1992, 24-25). The encounter between Bataille and the animal happens as follows: in the movement of the waters, a lion is only a slightly bigger wave, overturning other, smaller ones. Bataille writes: ‘the animal opens before me a depth which attracts me and which is familiar to me. In a sense, I know this depth: it is my own’ (Bataille 1992, 22). Yet the undifferentiated continuity glimpsed in the animal is also ‘that which is farthest removed from me... which is unfathomable to me’ (Bataille 1992, 22). The emergence of a subject-object relationship between the human being and the world signifies, for Bataille, the end of the intimacy which envelops and dissolves the animal in its environment. The rupture in our intimacy with the world is consummated and made irrevocable by the human use of tools. The tool forces the subject/object split and indicates the end of the ‘indistinct continuity of the animal realm’ (Lushetich 2016, 122).

The emergence of tools in the name of scientific objectivity rewrites the relation between man and the world in the modern period, even though for a much longer period of time, the relation remained intact in societies of the nomads or the Chinese. The animal is relegated to the depth of the unknown and irrational, hence presenting itself as ‘familiar’ at times, and horrifying at others. The animality and desire embodied by the tiger is far from the only case where modernity takes myth to issue. For example, the exercise of rationality and instrumental reason is captured in Horkheimer and Adorno’s allegorical reading of the Siren myth. For them, when Odysseus sails past the Sirens bound to the ship so that he will not be lured to shipwreck, he is the model for an individuated, isolated subject exercising his ability to think rationally (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 26-27). In contrast, the image of water in water perfectly captures this relation of continuity, not based on individuated subjects or objects in the first place but always already part of a larger whole.

At this moment, another part of the stage awakens. We see a transparent water tank mounted on the upper part of theatre machinery; in it, vibration-induced black torrents continuously shoot upward and mingle with clean water. The two different liquid substances

swirl and dance without mingling to become one body of liquid. This creates a sensorial image of two bodies of water entwined – or is it the tiger bleeding into the shadow of man – being one of the same, of water, yet differentiable. More than a theoretical concept, the ‘indigenous’ belief offers a practical instance of univocity in the moment that tiger bleeds into the shadow of man in the image of the squatting figures.

The power of theatre lies in the affective enaction. Now, even if we put ‘water in water’ as an ontological inquiry aside, the audience can still approach the affective space that water opens for us, which is to say the dissolution of the delimited body of the subject in the water, phenomenologically. Performance scholar Jose Gil proposes a wonderful exercise: ‘Let’s immerse ourselves completely naked in a deep bathtub, leaving only our heads sticking out of the water; let’s drop onto the surface of the water, near our submerged feet, a spider. We will feel the animal’s contact on the entirety of our skin. What happened? The water created a space of the body defined by the skin-membrane of the bathtub’s water. From this example we can extract two consequences pertaining to the properties of the space of the body: it prolongs the body’s limits beyond its visible contours; it is an intensified space, when compared with the habitual tactility of the skin’ (Gil 2006, 22).

Water here becomes a medium that allows a sensual experience of univocity, whereby the affective image of water in water triggers our projection of our own manner of being in the world – there is a parallel, not of essence, but of manner.

5.2.3. The Camera and the Uncanny

The water segment is neatly followed by the introduction of the camera in the context of Malaya: in 1906, the first photograph of a Malay weretiger was taken by the English anthropologist Walter William Skeat. In the conception of the staging, the photograph serves as a reference for the posture of the squatting weretiger figures against the light box. Another segment on the left side of the stage edifice with an old-school camera is revealed; its flash bulb is suddenly activated, creating a burst of light. At the same time, the squatting weretigers on the right side of the stage are lit up by a flash, making the figures momentarily visible and appearing paper-flat, as if they were captured in a photograph. The flash recedes quickly, and the weretigers voice a meditation on photography: ‘Men love tigers for the same reason they love the photograph: the love of the dead. Every photograph preserves the future death of a captured object. Every photograph promises the return of the dead’ (Ho).

As put forth in the chapter on Geumhyung Jeong, animism, being a belief of a belief, symbolises the retraction of the modern mind in the face of a bifurcated world. Art, in the

moments when it activates its world-producing potential, can render these different worldviews legible, or perhaps more than legible, experienceable. For this reason, this moment of photography and gramophone is worth unpacking in *Ten Thousand Tigers*.

In the West, nineteenth century rationalist science frequently referred to the soul as an image:

It is a thin, unsubstantial human image, in its nature a sort of vapour, film or shadow; the cause of life and thought in the individual it animates; independently possessing the personal consciousness and volition of its corporeal owner, past or present; capable of leaving the body far behind, to ash swiftly from place to place; mostly impalpable and invisible, yet also manifesting physical power, and especially appearing to men waking or asleep as a phantasm separate from the body of which it bears the likeness; continuing to exist and appear to men after the death of that body; able to enter into, possess and act in the bodies of other men, of animals, and even things. (Tylor 1871, 429)

In his study on animism and its relation to images, Anselm Franke points out that the way the soul is rendered in this account is similar to photography: ‘Though substantial, the photographic image, too, moves through time and space, appears as a phantasma bearing likeness, continues to exist after death, and has a certain physical and mediumistic power to “possess” other bodies, as any observation of a crowd in a cinema suffices to show’ (Franke 2010, 26).

Here, the retraction of the rational mind meets the ‘irrational’ other, strangely resonating each other. Photography assumes the status of an ‘actor’ on stage in *Ten Thousand Tigers* against a two-fold background. On the one hand, photography was institutionalised in the scientific program of colonisation and implicated in the hierarchy of the gaze, which renders the subject – weretigers, or the indigenous people in general – in the anthropologist’s eye as nothing more than the prey in the eyes of a hunter. Through its mechanical appropriation of the colonial gaze, the theatre performs and enacts the conditioning of the objectified human bodies, to subsume the bodies ‘as a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional, (discursive and nondiscursive) power’ (Grosz 1994, 116). Yet on the other hand, the weretigers do not shy away from the camera; their comment on the camera and its user – the (implicated) Western men – rather thwarts the domination of the dominating gaze in that it returns photography to its pre-rational image of photography-soul.

In light of this, the comment of the weretigers on technology contaminated by colonialism seems to thwart sheer dominance of Western technology; here the camera harbours something uncannier. The love for the dead is a perversion that does not allow much rationalisation; one may recall how it was believed, in the early days of its invention, that photography may capture the images of ghosts, just like it was believed that telegraphy may channel messages of the dead. Is this not one of the moments when the rationally-minded inventors, users and worshippers of technology are suspended from the rationalising frame of technology? Similar to Geumhyung Jeong's relation to the machines in the previous chapter, here we are confronted with a media critique of photography that rather de-rationalises the technology and returns it to an assemblage that does not see the camera as a singled out entity, but part of a constellation.

I'd like to draw on an extended case concerning camera and photography. While the West has ridded of the animist view on photography, for people in some parts of the world it continues to hold true that photography could capture the soul, or even steal the soul. The Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig recently commissioned a wax figure to be made based on a photograph of an indigenous shaman from Australia to be placed in their permanent collection display (despite the obvious racialising gaze implicated in such a gesture). Upon consultation, the shaman demanded that the figure be destroyed upon his death, for no other reason than that if his images would remain in the world, he would not be able to depart from this world after his death. The museum, hoping to make the most out of their financial investment on the display object, then suggested that they would make a figure with a face that morphs the features of both the shaman and his son, who was also a shaman. In this way, they hoped that the 'expiration date' of the figure could be extended for at least one more generation. This suggestion was accepted by the shaman and his son, and it is a figure with their morphed face that is on display in Grassi Museum. Such examples abound and are not constrained to ethnographic contexts. Chinese 'superstition' also stipulates that one should not use the photo of one's junior children as background on the smart phone, for the 'metallic' energy associated with electronics will transduce harm to the well-being of the junior.

Donna Haraway's cyborg project as a weird marriage between the subjugated 'other' and technology resonates here: just like the feminists, the indigenous subject of colonialism has no eyes for a state of purity and does not want to return to a fictive origin, a supposed state of nature (Haraway 1985). For the delineation of nature and culture, organic and inorganic has always been there and negotiated differently. This makes possible the emergence of cyborg subjectivities – the weretigers and the recreated shaman figure, conceived as 'othered' bodies,

now form close kinship to photographic, computer or medical technologies, which ‘begin to shift and crack, exposing the materiality beneath such conceptions’ (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 98).

This case of the shaman widens the discussion of media and ‘animist’ technology. The linking of image with the soul for Franke is ‘an expression of the modern belief in the continuity, as well as the rupture between magic and technology’ (Franke 2010, 33), even though as I have argued earlier, the attribution of soul to image is itself already embedded in a spatialised pre-conception of the world, affirming what Franke calls ‘belief in belief’ (Franke 2010, 33). In this light, it is more pertinent to look at the relational practice emerging out of the assemblage of indigenous people, photography and the world that can be objectively captured or not.

If we take the indigenous perspective in this assemblage of desire seriously, we do not in fact go to quasi science to account for the transmission of ‘soul’ to the technologically mediated object of photography on a particle level. Instead, we allow ourselves to see that the relation between the shaman and the photographic rendering of him is one of continuation that he himself affirms. The making of a ‘cyborg’ wax figure morphing features from both himself and his son would amount to a creative act of unknown consequences for them. While this intervention from the museum may invite protests from post-colonialism minded critics, it may indeed be something of subversive potential from the perspective of the people concerned. The question is rather, how can we elevate the differences in perspectives and make them matter, or concretely, act on existing political structures?

This leads to another case study on the film *Les Maitres Fous* (The Mad Masters, 1955) by anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch. In the film, Jean Rouch records a possession in Ghana called Hauka, a ritual in which the colonised people perform military ceremonies of their colonisers. The documentarian images and the subjective experiences of being at the ritual interweave, gradually introducing the audience into a reflective mode, whereby the violence induced by colonialism is correlated to another kind of violence, that of the gaze. At the same time, the possessed participants in the ritual assume the roles of the ‘colonisers,’ i.e. the soldiers, doctors and governors, and enact what seems to be a business meeting between them. For the local colonised people, the supernatural power is exactly in the hands of the colonisers, in the way they exercise their will to subjugate other peoples, to change the natural environment, and to carry out scientific interventions. The film was expectedly controversial, as some anthropologists celebrated the Hauka as subversive, and others, notably some African audience saw it as racist. Anthropologist James Ferguson points out that for the latter group, within the cultural politics of the colonial order, imitation was less about sympathetic magic and accommodating white power within indigenous cultural orders than about claims to

membership within modern society and negotiations of the rights proper to such membership (Ferguson 2002, 557). The question of ‘who can speak for whom’ still lingers, though with his reflexive anthropology, the angle and scope of the perspective should have been enlarged. Without going deeper on questions pertaining to the anthropological discipline, this study is intriguing for a cultural philosophical reflection on the parallel perspectives that may seem excruciating from a certain postcolonial point of view, or at the same time subversive for others, but that nevertheless is a valid perspective for those concerned. The fact that the locals enact the scenes of their colonial masters shows that in their world order, there is still the man-heaven alignment, and changes are assumed to be activated through the shamanic ritual. This world order pertains to the despotic regime in Deleuze and Guattari, which I will analyse more in detail. As such, this kind of world view acts as acute reminders of a bygone order, though it should not be romanticised – which is to say, this discussion does not in the very least endorse a view they don’t deserve to be elevated out of colonisation, as discussed in Chibber’s stance against orientalisising tendency in some strands of postcolonial theory.

5.2.4. Tiger and Transformation in War

On the upper part of the stage edifice, we see a vitrine containing a diorama representing a battlefield, with stroboscopic lighting effects suggesting bombing. A deep-voiced Chinese-speaking person chronicles the fall of Malaya under the Japanese in WWII, and pronounces the name under which the Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita is known – ‘The Tiger of Malaya’ (the second ranking officer, Takuma Nishimura, was known as ‘the other Tiger of Malaya’). The weretigers relate this to the fact that, ‘the Japanese shed the prison of their human form, becoming tigers’ (Ho 2014).

At this point, a vertical compartment dimly lights up. A soldier can be discerned amidst a thick forest. He speaks Japanese in distress, and recounts horrendous events of killing and how vulnerable he has felt. A ghastly presence of a shrouded human body emerges into the light in a compartment on the lower part of the stage. As if alluding to the events of WWII too terrible to relate, one of the weretigers pronounces, ‘In man live two animals that never coincide. The first is an internal machine of respiration, assimilation, excretion. The other is a being of relation to the external world. In man, these two animals live together, but they do not coincide. Unless you are a weretiger, and your skin is made of cloth’ (Ho 2014). This is followed by a detailed account in Chinese and Japanese of how one transforms into a tiger and returns as human. The appalling feeling induced by the unidentifiable, shrouded body gives way to the suggestion that

the body in the cloth has yet to transform. This triggers in the spectators a strange, tantalising feeling, related to their own bodies.

Moments later, the centrepiece of the stage edifice comes partially to light, and indeed through light – it is a massive shadow puppet theatre screen presenting a composition of intricate, monochrome cut-out figures. (Fig. 5.3) A selective light source creates shadow plays out of the chosen elements, so that the audience can discern the contours of trees, a human figure, and a tiger individually. These puppet figures are made of buffalo skin, lending texture to the translucent material when projected on. As a later piece of Ho Tzu Nyen, *One or Several Tigers* (2017) reveals, buffalo is popularly depicted in shadow theatre in Southeast Asia, while the puppet figures are often made of buffalo skin and sometimes bear patterns carved by buffalo horn. This gives a strange footnote to the question of immanence: a distribution of being, or doing your own undoing.

Now something rather curious happens. The weretigers burst into crying at the end of the shadow play as if they are undergoing transformation. At one point, however, they stop wailing but the wail continues as a recording – the voice is separated from the body. After the weretigers resume the mode of chanting speech, they offer a meta-commentary, ‘The death cry of a tiger detaches itself from flesh, and falls outside the world of man, like a vow unredeemed. Perambulating the surfaces of the ocean and the earth. Lingering, awaiting, the taste of fresh blood’ (Ho 2014).

This is an astute enactment of what could be dubbed ‘a technological capture of infinities’. One has to unfix technology from the rational framework of thinking as I have already hinted at; in this case, the recorder captures the weretiger’s cry, but not just the weretiger’s cry. Similarly, the camera captures the face of the weretiger, but not just the image. The reading of this enactment as a capture of the infinities is based on the view that the object of the technological capture and the technology are part of the univocity, part of the order of immanence. Hence, the divide between the object of technology and technology itself is blurred. The imbrication of scientific instruments in material bodies is best conceptualised in terms of affect, or ‘the preindividual bodily capacities to act, engage, and connect – to affect and be affected’ (Clough 2007, 2). The body’s capacity of affectivity is what informs our perception, which is famously attested by Spinoza – we do not know what a body can do but our thoughts come from being affected (Spinoza 1992). Patricia Clough and Mark Hansen argue that focusing on the affective capacity of the material body allows us to grasp how technology enters the human subject, namely by ‘tingeing or flavouring the embodied perceptual present’ (Hansen

2004b, 605). The performance of scientific instruments is imbricated into the material body by way of exerting affect, which ‘inserts the technical into felt vitality’ (Clough 2007, 2), before it is captured in conscious registration. Only when this conscious registration of affectivity happens does there emerge an observing/feeling subject, who ‘perceives’ a certain object. Hansen aptly describes this as ‘feeling without feeler’ (Hansen 2014, 65), a force traversing the dichotomy of material body and inorganic technology, nature and culture that is none other than the ‘dynamism of matter’ itself in the picture Clough paints.

Here, the enactment of ‘technological capture of infinities’ does not refer to the wailing of the weretiger as sound transmitted by radio, which would invoke an image like the RCA trademark in which the dog Nipper answers faithfully to a gramophone replaying his master’s voice. This would be a mechanical capture, or one-to-one transference of the sound of the cry. What the scene hints at is a second-order nature: it is what informs the cry of the weretiger that is made visible through a technological intervention and that underlies technology itself, however poetic and speculative this intervention is. In other words, it enacts the affectivity that is in excess of the weretiger (hence articulated as the cry), and that, ‘registered by’ the radio and presented to an audience, is equally in excess of a person’s consciousness and sense perception, and rather signals a pre-personal, pre-conscious space. This space is similarly indefinable and untraceable as that which informs the cry: hence the loop is completed.

This lingering cry of the weretigers resonates conceptually with the animist view on photography, analysed above. An affective analysis on both is key to understanding the material continuum that is in excess of technology. Hansen regards the reign of digital information and digital images as opening new ways for the body to engage affectively, for the body’s capacity of embodied perception can ‘in-form’ what seems to be disembodied information, i.e. giving form and framing to them. (Hansen 2004a) Hansen draws on the scene in *Blade Runner* (1982), where Rick Deckard puts a two-dimensional photograph of a room to a reader/scanner, and the scanner renders a three-dimensional space on a monitor which Deckard can navigate as if he were going into the physical room. He could locate miniscule objects and change the view angle. Hansen analyses,

As fascinating as it is puzzling, this scene of an impossible rendering – a rendering of two-dimensional data as a three-dimensional space – can be related to the crisis brought to photography by digitisation in two ways. On the one hand, in line with the film’s thematic questioning of photography as a reliable index of memory, this scene foregrounds the technical capacity to manipulate photographs that digital processing

introduces. In this way, it thematises the threat posed by digital technologies to traditional indexical notions of photographic realism. On the other hand, in what has turned out to be a far more prophetic vein, the scene presents a radically new understanding of the photographic image as a three-dimensional ‘virtual’ space. Such an understanding presupposes a vastly different material existence of the photographic image: instead of a physical inscription of light on sensitive paper, the photograph has become a data set that can be rendered in various ways and thus viewed from various perspectives. (Hansen 2004a, 92-93)

It would be futile to examine the scientific possibility in the two moments, that of the three-dimensional space rendering in *Blade Runner* and that of the lingering voice of the tiger attaching to the recording, just as it is futile to see the wax figure of the shaman in Australia as harbouring his soul. What they do share in common, however, is an imagined relational space that blurs the boundaries between the visible material space with technological mediations and the spaces beyond. In *Blade Runner*, it is an entire data space, ‘the whole repertoire of possible images it could be said to contain’ (Hansen 2004a, 95). This space, when accessed, gives rise to new realities and sensations. In the wailing of the weretigers, it is the wail of the tiger itself that perambulates and transduces through suiting media into new realities. Note that although Hansen’s formulation is based on his proposal for the digital image versus traditional media, here it is nevertheless fruitful to draw a parallel to the ‘analogue’ wailing and the technologically remediated recording of the wail. This relational view – as miraculous as it is and precisely because of that – is made tangible by the artist and is captured by the sense perceptions of the audience.

5.2.5. The Japanese, Communists, Violence, and History

The transformation between man and tiger is nontrivial in that it does not stay in the realm of mythology or folk belief; rather, it has to account for concrete consequences in the realm of history and politics. As the transformation between man and tiger dismantles the border between nature and culture, is there a way to read the history of man and nature together?

On stage, the narration goes into ‘The Red plague’, the communist guerrilla resistance against the Japanese during WWII, and the Japanese soldier repeatedly shouts, ‘Kill all. Burn all. Destroy all.’ Following that, he frantically recites variations of the verse, ‘When you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha!’, and finally, ‘Only thus will ye attain deliverance. Only thus will

ye escape the trammels of material things and become free' (Ho 2014), as the shrouded bodies can be spotted moving.

The variations of the 'Kill the Buddha' reference the famous Zen Buddhism *koan* which is said to help a person rid themselves of rational thinking to directly attain enlightenment. In this context, the killing of the Buddha may be interpreted as a vehicle to transcend the mind's fixation on the material world. The rhetoric of 'killing' anything that hinders the way to enlightenment and the context of WWII in Southeast Asia make an uneasy juxtaposition. It is all the more uneasy if one recalls that Colonel Ishiwara Kanji's rationale for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria to use it as social laboratory before WWII was also based on Buddhist principles.

While the audience is left in this moral ambiguity, the narration goes on to relate the mysterious stories of Lai Teck, the man of 'every name in history,' who is said to have been a double agent for the French, close to the British, risen to become Malayan Communist Party leader, and turned into a triple agent by the Japanese during WWII, only to be denounced after the war for causing the arrest and execution of at least 105 of his colleagues. A few scenes later, we will see a man's head drifting in spotlight aloft in one of the compartments, and we will recognise this head as that of Lai Teck. He voices his deep hopelessness in a soliloquy: 'We have always marvelled at the existence of demons and spirits: but we no longer marvel at man. What causes a man to move and to speak? What makes me believe in the root of my beliefs?' (Ho 2014). These earnest questions present the moral ambivalence between a location-based and situated history and a meta-historical narrative that penetrates the course of history and the constitution of humanity.

Lai Teck confesses: 'As for me, I have always attributed my lack of success in this life to the influence of my previous life. The six paths of transmigration are inscrutable indeed, and I have no right to complain' (Ho 2014). Is his attempt to attribute his brutal decisions to the influence of a previous life a convenient yet insufficient interpretation of Buddhism or a similar school of thought? The theatre piece makes no immediate judgment. I will explore the implication of relating Lai Teck to the tiger in detail at the end of the chapter.

These two moments are poignant reminders of a history that in some ways continues to shape present-day Asian politics. Post-war Southeast Asian countries took Japan's model in hopes of a similar economic boom, and Japan still has its firm economic and political ties to Southeast Asia. The post-war Communist struggle in Southeast Asia was to be situated in a global Cold War context, and has left haunting marks in many Southeast Asian countries. The Japanese generals and Lai Teck are singular figures and at the same time part of many serial

figures and events, which all share the tiger-man transformation arc. It would be superficial if one treated the tiger as an allegory for human moralism – or the absence of which, as seen so often in the tactic of introducing spectre figures in literature. This makes it all too easy to condemn the nightmare of humanities. Instead, Ho offers a meta-historical commentary that goes beyond immediate judgement of good and evil and makes possible the comparison between distinctive historical periods, figures and events. The review in *The Strait Times* makes explicit the association with Singapore being dubbed as one of the four ‘Asian Tigers’ in economic growth (along with Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan), which may suggest yet another episode of the tiger figuration in the age of a global economy. I will return to the economic history in the following chapter on Royce Ng’s work.

5.2.6. Divine Machine against Modernity, and Intermediating Immanence

Referring to the expedition party led by the Irish civil architect George Dromgold Coleman in 1835 into the Malayan jungle, in hopes of charting a new road, one weretiger narrates, ‘A tiger erupted into their midst. And attacked. Not the men but only the theodolite. The instrument of measurement. Of mapping. Of order’ (Ho 2014).

The shadow puppet tableau at the centre of the stage is revealed again, and what appeared earlier as colourless cut-out figures comes to life through projection – piece by piece, the video projection maps onto the men, the tiger, and finally, the theodolite and gives colour to each cut-out piece. What is revealed is the complete composition of *Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore*, a dramatic wood engraving after Heinrich Leutemann from 1885. (Fig. 5.4)

The weretiger further relates: ‘Modernity is the disappearance of tigers and myths as a constant state. But the tigers never truly vanish. They linger on in the world as spectral reproductions’ (Ho 2014). As stated earlier with regard to cyborgs, this is no romantic sentiment advocating for returning to a pure state of nature. For if it compels us to think of that force in its variant articulations beyond our understanding, or a Deleuzian desire that subsumes the writing of history, then the only way for such a force to exist is to continuously transgress and take on new material agents. Hence the tiger perambulates in the world and assumes other incarnations, from a primordial half-mystified unruly creature, to the violent Japanese war machine, and Lai Teck, the triple agent.

All ten mounted television screens are now switched on, resulting in a visual symphony that shows tiger imagery in its natural habitat, while an ode to tiger is delivered collectively, in Malay, Chinese, and Japanese:

A tiger is inhabited solely by singular moments, each one sinking into the night, passing into another moment, another world, another history... Undying, the tiger simply expires, transpires, shifts its animus to other bodies. Each animal is an extension of another. Each animal an undying swarm, unfolding, enfolding in a limitless continuum, returning anew to the world in another figuration, a different conduit, a new medium, each time, a divine machine. (Ho 2014)

On the note of ‘divine machine,’ all of the media machines come back to life – the magnetic tape deck, the radio sets and the gramophone, each channelling sounds of the tiger. They awake with all the different temporalities they embody, the politics of gaze they are embedded in, the coloniality and decoloniality they represent, and they also bear non-traceable remainders of the dynamism of matter they are part of. This is again a nontrivial moment, for it activates the ‘dynamism of matter itself’ without falling into the trap of literal enactments of technological objects. Tiger as a machine – the collective enunciation is as mesmerising as its implication is utterly complex.

5.2.7. The Epilogue of Ten Thousand Tigers

Every water tank on stage is revealed, bubbling, vibrating, spurting: a tide of sensations. The performers sing an ode to the Malayan Archipelagos. Water represents the univocity of being. The human desire to manage water, however, gives rise to cultivation, and in turn leads to urban settlement, to modernity, and to wars. The weretigers, the Chinese-speaking person, and the Japanese soldier join forces in chanting to a humming background music, ‘Kings and murderers. Gods and monsters. The coming of one evil spirit after another. The return of same spirit in different form’ (Ho 2014).

All the backlights slowly go on to put the entirety of the intricate stage edifice on display. Each integral part, including the vitrines, water tanks, objects, media technology, humans and their mannequin counterparts, models and scenography can be appreciated as part of one coordinated theatre machine. The piece ends with a grandiose history of the cosmos, uttered by the weretigers:

3.8 billion years ago, life began in the waters. The source. The origin.

2 million years ago, the first tigers dispersed across a single land mass, the Sunda Shelf.

And the seas rose. And the land sundered.

Malaya. Sumatra. Java. Bali. Borneo.

100,000 years ago, the first men arrived. (Ho 2014)

A tour de force narrative of tiger and man in Southeast Asia thus comes to an end. The conceit of Ho Tzu Nyen's *Ten Thousand Tigers* is the transformation between man and tiger. Yet it does not replace the qualitative differences between the human, tiger and machine, nor does it argue for a connectivity or continuum between them that can be reduced to the image of some kind of flow of elements that binds and conjoins. The operative force is already at play in things and phenomena, manifested as it does as affectivity in human, in animal and in technology alike. In establishing a theatre edifice and conflating the unfolding of the narrative into the co-operation of the objects, machines and narrators, *Ten Thousand Tigers* achieves a truly intermedial form. Not only does it highlight the interplay of technological objects and performance resulting in new sensibilities of theatre watching, but it also renders into experience a radically anti-binary philosophy of immanence or univocity, so that everything partakes in transformation processes without bifurcating into fixed entities such as actors and objects, human and animal, the organic and inorganic. In the remainder of the chapter, I will dive deeper into the philosophical dimensions that *Ten Thousand Tigers* tease out concerning time, history and agency/responsibility.

5.3. Ten Thousand Tigers and history

5.3.1. Tiger and time

Up until now, this chapter has unfolded following the structure of *Ten Thousand Tigers*, which, though not a chronicle of Southeast Asian history, does place a few temporal markers and interweaves a narrative between them. This part of the chapter takes a distance and observes the piece as a whole, in the hope of teasing out the philosophical dimensions of the work, especially the line of philosophy of history.

Ten Thousand Tigers is an elegant example that interweaves philosophical reflections on media and questions with concrete political, historical and cultural weights, which makes it particularly pertinent to my research on new and old materialisms. The theatrical edifice in *Ten Thousand Tigers*, being a complex assemblage of display vitrines, acts as a potent site to locate the multiple threads of history. Everything is on the stage from beginning to end, though not at once brought to light, suggestive of a world of immanence where nonlinear crossings take place. Quietly resonating Deleuze and Guattari, 'earth is not one element among others but rather

brings together all the elements within a single embrace while using one or another of them to deterritorialise territory' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 85). As such, the set resembles a geological body more than distilled historical moments. The narrative that Ho threads together has historical anchors that lend themselves to be read in a linear historical way, yet such an understanding is merely factual. I'd like to suggest that the artistic affectivity and conceptual rigour of *Ten Thousand Tigers* conjoin in presenting a materialist, contingent and beyond-human take on history.

In *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the figuration of tiger becomes a medium of transformation, a channelling of the 'dynamism of matter'. It posits a fundamental challenge to our generic perception of time and space. Henri Bergson sees time not as clock-time that is taken as generic and spatialized time, and pertains to order and eternity and that stands, as it were, outside of time and conditions of our being and perception. Bergson's theory of time as *durée* is a powerful way to reconceptualise time. Bergson writes, 'Just as we separate in space, we fix in time. The intellect is not made to think evolution, in the proper sense of the word – that is to say, the continuity of a change that is pure mobility' (Bergson 1998, 163). This pure mobility, or duration, refocuses our bodily being and bodily perception as that which informs our mental registration of time. This way of highlighting the body in relation to the mind also indicates that there are other images, pertaining to the infinite variations of beings that are not captured and henceforth perceived. They make up the 'virtual,' which allows for emergence and creation. As such, 'it does not prefigure or predetermine the actualities that emerge from it. Rather, it is the impelling force, or the principle, that allows each actual entity to appear (to manifest itself) as something new, something without precedence or resemblance, something that has never existed in the universe in quite that way before' (Shaviri 2009, 15-16). A practice of heightened attention is due, if only to 'dissociate the permanence of my body, here, from a world in which things happen, there' (Stengers 2011, 65), or in other words, to probe the construct of the self vis-à-vis the happenings in general.

In *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the continuous being can be seen to assume variations of forms, depending on its passing into variations of images. There are no traceable threads that help us out draw the contours of what traverses the images, indeed we cannot assume that the Japanese general is one 'image' and the Communist leader follows from him. No one passing remains thoroughly one, so we can, at best, recognise the commonality between figures, events and objects. In the affective realm, certain characters of heritage are discernible, however speculative they are. These are exactly the liminal moments that the theatre piece aims to highlight and zoom in on: the affective lineage between the water, the roar, and even the evils

in history. It depicts a world in the image of a smooth, transforming, continuous surface; figures and events emerge out of this surface and become temporarily legible. *Ten Thousand Tigers* hence enacts mutual affect and gives an intermedial form to this practice of heightened attention; one that gives us affective as well as intellectual tools to reconcile history, morality and time that remains open to the outside. An infinity, but also in general.

Deleuze and Guattari, following Bergson, adamantly oppose the spatialised time, and proposes instead a 'stratigraphic' time (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). The geophilosophy once again figures prominently here. Like geological strata stacked upon each other with necessary fissions and shifts, time is translated into materialist sedation. This materialist approach to time is pitted against the purely conceptual clock time and historical linearity, despite or precisely because of the image of the rational distribution of equally sliced blocks. Though this scheme does not replace clock time and linearity with loops, such as in the Indian conception of time, which is to say that time points marking on the historical line do exist (once) and are relevant. The strata allow the folding of before and after, and on the vertical axis, there is always a continuation that builds on the before. Colebrook uses the stratigraphic time to draw a diagram of history, composed of different strata each having different speeds:

These intensities require non-linear models, for it may be the case that one series of becoming (such as technological development) may create a slowing down in another (so that the expansion of human efficiency machines in factory labour might lead to forms of corporeal impoverishment precluding the development of language skills), and these in turn would need to be connected to geopolitical timelines, such as the 'development' of Western consumer cultures and their increasing efficiency through the connection of their sign systems, economic modes of production and military regimes with geographic milieus, whose histories operate at different speeds and intensities. (Colebrook 2009, 6)

Ten Thousand Tigers operates as a machine – both physically and metaphorically, for it enacts the differential speeds of different historical strata while at the same time making cuts to the flows on some of them. The stratum of British colonisers and the stratum of the indigenous, for example, meet at a confrontational moment when colonisation takes place and the camera captures the weretigers on photographs, but at the same time, they both exist on their own strata with their own speed, and the contact point of colonisation effectuates an irrevocable change in the speed of the weretigers. Hence, it pertains to the artistic nuances of the piece that the contact

points are never depicted as actual contact points, and that the actors are always speaking facing the audience, for the enactments through lighting, films, diorama, puppetry and figures are all aligned on the same surface. This artistic choice only highlights the impossibility of a linear and purely causal construal of history. In doing so, the artist affirms what thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda and to some extent, Marx, deem of history: that it is contingent and material. This leads to the central idea of desire that underlies life and history in the scheme of Deleuze and Guattari, to be discussed in the following section.

5.3.2. Flow of desire, the schizo

In the following, I will examine the flow of desire, which serves as the fundamental lens of interpreting history proposed by Deleuze and Guattari.

As I have briefly mentioned in the introduction, this is not an exclusive take on the philosophy of history, but rather builds on the different modes of relations to desire, namely in the primitive society, the despotic society and the capitalistic society. Desire to connect and expand is the natural state of things. Whereas precapitalistic societies code desire through inscription, the capitalistic machine frees the flow of desire. Inscription entails marking bodies (the human, the non-human bodies as well as abstract bodies) so to create representations of things and to attribute meanings, and this in turn represses the flux of desire. This process lies underneath the development of the social formation, in other words, desire is socialised by coding. In the next stage of their philosophy of history, the despot comes in and imposes a new alliance system and places himself in direct filiation with the deity. This can be observed when there arises a spiritual empire or when a new empire replaces the old one. The despotic state dreads the flow of production and exchange and tries to rule by tightening control. Yet what will overcome the despot state is the capitalistic machine, which captures these flows of desire by making them part of its own operation, that is, through the appropriation of production - capital begets capital, bypassing the production of commodities.

Following the flow of desire, we are led to revisit history through the means with which history is cast in terms of production, conjunction, affiliation. In typical Deleuze and Guattari fashion, they turn the relation between cause and effect on its head and rather place them in a non-causal relation, or on a plane of immanence they draw. With regards to the flow of desire, they maintain that it is inscription, and not exchange, that lies underneath the development of the socius. In fact, exchange is created in a society in which bodies of things are so inscribed that creating a universal standard as foundation for exchange is made possible.

Twice in *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the idea of exchange in the form of bounty comes up:

once during the colonial development of the Malaya, when bounty was offered on tiger to give way for human settlements, and another time, when the Malaya Communist Party leaders and guerrillas have retreated into the forest and as rebellious forces, they are ordered to be arrested. In the latter case, there is a succinctly composed commentary: ‘And like tigers, they were once again to be subjected to the deadly law of exchange, when a bounty was offered for the capture of their leader’ (Ho 2014). Before the deadly law of exchange, there is only the continuous flow of things. Deleuze and Guattari comment thus:

...exchange is known, well known in the primitive socius—but as that which must be exorcised, encasted, severely restricted, so that no corresponding value can develop as an exchange value that would introduce the nightmare of a commodity economy. The primitive market operates through bargaining rather than by fixing an equivalent that would lead to a decoding of flows and a collapse of the mode of inscription on the socius. We are brought back to our point of departure: the fact that exchange is inhibited and exorcised by no means attests to its primary reality, but demonstrates on the contrary that the essential process is not exchanging, but inscribing or marking. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 186)

This provides a helpful insight on the nature of non-exchange forms of bargaining, which pertains to the order of flow of things and desire, and the consolidation of exchange based on inscription into things in the flow. The latter leads up to further developments such as commodity, though exchange and commodity may not necessarily develop into capitalism, as seen in traditional societies which forbade trade and put merchants in low rank. Ray Huang’s study on Ming dynasty tax stations on the grand canal provides good insights on how goods were taxed according to a fixed yearly amount rather than by percentage (Huang 1964). Similarly, there were restrictions on commerce and maritime activities in pre-modern Japan (Benedict 1946).

The body without organs emerges as an instance of antiproduction to the production of hierarchical structures, such as the familial tripartite of father-mother-me that defines the Oedipus in psychoanalysis. Instead of triangularisation, disjunctions are established on the body without organs, which makes the subject escape identities based on social conventions. The body without organs is pertinent to the schizo, a figuration that Deleuze and Guattari prefer to Oedipus: ‘A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s

couch' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 2).

The schizo is the result of the flow of desire in the society, especially under the capitalistic regime where all forms of desire are subjugated under the productive machine of capitalism. The way it manages to do so in a way that pre-capitalistic societies did not manage is through the differential relation between value of labour and value of capital. There is no longer a determination of correlation between both. Capital becomes 'filiative' and 'suddenly presents itself as an independent substance, endowed with a motion of its own, in which money and commodities are mere forms which it assumes and casts off in turn' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 227). In light of the creative flow of the capital, the schizo is the thing that registers its destructive power through its own psycho-social being and pushes its limit. Examples of the schizo derive from psychoanalytical literature and personal accounts. Antonin Artaud, for instance, 'discovered this one day, finding himself with no shape or form whatsoever, right there where he was at that moment' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 8).

Ten Thousand Tigers suggests a way of viewing the tiger as a schizo, or body without organs. This tiger-schizo takes various forms, many subtracted from folkloric stories and recorded in ethnographic accounts: the appalling chants that simulate the roar of the tiger, the meticulous instruction that family members of someone who turns into a tiger have to follow in order to resurrect him when he returns from the forest, and the deep-rooted alertness to water due to its purported transformative capacity. And in the comments the weretigers make on photography: 'Men love tigers for the same reason they love the photograph: The love of the dead. Every photograph preserves the future death of a captured object. Every photograph promises the return of the dead' (Ho 2014). Still further, the tiger, captured under the scientific structure and labelled primitive, is also participating in a regime of un-enlightened, illogical actions, for it attacks not the British but the theodolite they use to conquer nature. All these moments demonstrate the embeddedness of the weretigers in a world in which a transgressive desire is invested in the social field, the body of the socius, in both its organisation and disorganisation. There exist no longer the boundaries between man, tiger, and their natural environs, and instead they are connected and disconnected by relations of production and antiproduction. This could be compared to a similar moment Deleuze and Guattari observe in George Büchner's story 'Lenz,' in which Lenz, the protagonist modeled on a real person with mental disorder – who exemplifies the schizo, is out for a walk in nature and identifies, or rather, feels the consciousness of the rocks, the clouds and the sun. Lenz's existence turns the conventional image of the world around, as Deleuze and Guattari comment:

Everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines— all of them connected to those of his body. The continual whirr of machines. [...] Lenz has projected himself back to a time before the man-nature dichotomy, before all the co-ordinates based on this fundamental dichotomy have been laid down. He does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production. There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 2)

In Lenz we see the shadow of the tiger-man or weretiger: ‘Lenz is *Homo natura* because he feels he is at one with the production of nature, but he is *Homo historia* inasmuch as he registers that production of nature as though it were somebody other than himself who was witnessing it’ (Buchanan 2008, 42). What happens in the process of transmogrification is that ‘there is no Lenz-the-self, author of dramatic works, who suddenly loses his mind and supposedly identifies with all sorts of strange states of being (blissful contact with rocks, metals, plants, and so on); rather, there is the Lenzian subject who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with the elements of nature as so many names from history (there is in this regard little difference between saying “I am a rock” and “I am Attila the Hun”)’ (Buchanan 2008, 42).

In another case, Deleuze and Guattari analyse the cure in the Ndembu communities in the study of Victor Turner (1964). They reveal the subterranean layers of desire at play in the process, instead of the tripartite structure of Oedipus that Freud holds to govern the desire in the social convention. In the case study of the Ndembu community – a matrilineal society, one man, who was at the same time son, husband, son-in-law, and tribesman, became ill. The native healer located the illness in the ill-wishes of the man’s wife, mother-in-law, his diseased father and the whole community. The healer then summoned the whole community to perform a ritual of exorcism.

Deleuze and Guattari highlight the role of desire in making the socius in the recorded case, ‘[it] is not only a question of discovering the preconscious investments of a social field by interests, but – more profoundly – its unconscious investments by desire, such as they pass by way of the sick person’s marriages, his position in the village, and all the positions of a chief lived in intensity within the group’. This stands in stark contrast to the inscriptive structure of the Oedipal, which the Western psychoanalysis resorts to when confronted with the case of

Ndembu:

We said that the point of departure seemed Oedipal. It was only the point of departure for us, conditioned to say Oedipus every time someone speaks to us of father, mother, grandfather. In fact, the Ndembu analysis was never Oedipal: it was directly plugged into social organisation and disorganisation; sexuality itself, through the women and the marriages, was just such an investment of desire; the parents played the role of stimuli in it, and not the role of group organisers (or disorganisers) – the role held by the chief and his personages. Rather than everything being reduced to the name of the father, or that of the maternal grandfather, the latter opened onto all the names of history. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 168)

In still another case, Deleuze and Guattari draw from the study of Claude Lévi-Strauss on prohibition of parallel cousins and approbation of cross cousins in marriage in the book *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* by adopting a simple rule where each marriage between two lines is marked with a + or – sign. In general, a man cannot receive a wife except from the group from which a woman can be claimed, because in the previous generation a sister or daughter was lost. (As Deleuze and Guattari note, it does not matter if the regime is patrilineal or matrilineal.) What this amounts to for a cultural philosophical reflection is that the prohibition of incest is based on familiar relations, which are but socially constructed and do not universally hold true. They claim that the placenta is a ‘substance common to the mother and the child, a common part of their bodies,’ resembling the full body of earth before it is inscribed. The placenta conditions the relation between the mother and son so that ‘these bodies are not like cause and effect, but are both products derived from this same substance, in relation to which the son is his mother's twin: such is indeed the axis of the Dogon myth related by Griaule. Yes, I have been my mother and I have been my son’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 158). This ‘I have been my mother and I have been my son’ is the ‘natural’ state of relations before the socially inscribed norms of mother and son comes about. It resonates with the ‘delirium’ of the schizo only because the schizo has access to the same continuous flow of bodies.

The distinction between the flow and scission in this case results in two configurations of bodies, the one ‘continuous and germinal,’ and the other ‘discontinuous and somatic, it alone being subjected to a succession of generations’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 158). A parallel pattern can be identified here between the generational differentiation and the social-cultural attribution of sexes in eukaryotic cells, as discussed in the third chapter, following Parisi. The

radical embrace of a state before the separation is tantamount to reclaiming the true nature underlying desire: ‘What is desired is the intense germinal or germinative flow, where one would look in vain for persons or even functions discernible as father, mother, son, sister, etc., since these names only designate intensive variations on the full body of the earth determined as the germen’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 162).

The wandering body without organs is at play here, whether in the Ndembu society’s rituals or the continuum of mother-son, so much so that it opens to all the names in history. This is an important change of perspective, not least because it was made first by Nietzsche that echoed in Deleuze and Guattari – Nietzsche’s letter to Jakob Burckhardt dating 5 January, 1889 reads, ‘What is unpleasant and a strain on my modesty is that in fact I am every name in history’ (Nietzsche 1986).

In his letter to Cosima Wagner on January 3, 1889, Nietzsche writes, ‘Among the Hindus I was Buddha, in Greece Dionysus–Alexander and Caesar were incarnations of me, as well as the poet of Shakespeare, Lord Bacon. Most recently I was Voltaire and Napoleon, perhaps also Richard Wagner ... However, I now come as Dionysus victorious, who will prepare a great festival on Earth ... Not as though I had much time ... The heavens rejoice to see me here ... I also hung on the cross ...’ (Nietzsche 1986) To the schizophrenic, as we have seen in Lenz, the names of history do not designate persons living or dead, but states of intensity, or ‘effects’ – ‘God is *the feeling* of omnipotence, divine fury, judgement, and so on, while Napoleon might be the *feeling* of triumph, persecution, victory, defeat and so on’. (Buchanan 2008, 80)

This ‘feeling,’ or state of intensities is paramount to understanding the tiger world, and ‘every name in history’ in *Ten Thousand Tigers*. For the tiger, or weretiger, bears every name in history, precisely because the tiger is a state of intensities that pass into or is passed into different momentary figures. The tiger, weretigers, or human agents in *Ten Thousand Tigers* should not be taken literally as individuated entities (as the opening teaser suggest, they are rather in the context of packs) such that the passage between them can be likened to a line connecting individuated dots. Rather, the line is everything there is, and the dots – the Japanese general, Lai Teck, and so forth – are temporary articulations.

Lai Teck, the Malaya communist party chief, for example, is a weretiger capable of passing through multiple states of intensities and acquiring various identities. He’s known as Nguyen Van Long, Hoang A Nhac, Pham Van Dac, Mr Light, C.H. Chang, Wong Kim Geok, D. Ling, Malaya’s Lenin, the right hand of Ho Chih Minh, among others. In one way, this suggests that a weretiger, readily transforming into as many personifications as it likes, is

exactly the embodiment of the schizo, the body without organs, the multiplicity that sees it as every name in history. At the same time, it counterbalances this transgressing of states with the weight of history, so that the passage deliberately opens up to a dark side – treachery and betrayal, as Lai Teck the triple agent caused the arrest and execution of at least 105 of his colleagues. This leads us to a discussion on violence.

5.3.3. Cruelty and animality, tiger and spy

The lingering schizo – embodied by Lenz or Lai Teck – serves as a figuration for the continuous desire that has been tamed in the despotic regime and appropriated by the capitalist machine. The antiproduction that they instigate opens a wild field of deterritorialisation and possibilities of becoming beyond the strictures of human subjectivity. This process, however, has concrete violent implications. It thus adds layers of complexity to the discussion of desire, life and animality.

Animality in Bataille, as discussed earlier, is an experiential dimension that is not exclusive to non-humans. If anything, it makes us realise the continuum between our purported humanhood and animality. The notion of ‘a life’ in Deleuze, captures this sense of animality in that it presents ‘an indeterminate vitality,’ a ‘pure a-subjective current’. The pure power of a life can manifest as beatitude but also as ‘an unspeakable, sheer violence’ (Bennett 2009, 53). This is a poignant reminder that new materialism should not disregard the dark side of becoming. In this sense, the tiger manifests different facets of ‘a life;’ it can be the unconstrained source of flow that precedes taming through civilisation and modernisation, yet, importantly, it can also assume the power of violence that civilisation itself imposes on it. Deleuze and Guattari write:

Cruelty has nothing to do with some ill-defined or natural violence that might be commissioned to explain the history of mankind; cruelty is the movement of culture that is realised in bodies and inscribed on them, belabouring them. That is what cruelty means. This culture is not the movement of ideology, on the contrary, it forcibly injects production into desire, and conversely, it forcibly inserts desire into social production and reproduction. For even death, punishment, and torture are desired, and are instances of production (compare the history of fatalism). (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 145)

Without exonerating individual responsibilities in history, the passage locates cruelty in the generic movements and developments of the human civilisation. Inscription is always

already repressive. And the scission of the man from the continuous flow that encompasses man, animal and other organic or inorganic things, similar to the inscription and encasing of the earth in the first place, is equally repressive. A production always comes with an anti-production, and a doing always comes with an undoing. The passage into different states of intensities may reveal the force of nature, but it may also induce the dark side of it – multiplicity and/in one in the case of espionage. Under this light, these moments of *Ten Thousand Tigers* posit the tiger as a figuration embodying the primary flow of desire confronted by forces that try to capture and tame it. The desire in itself is multi-directional and connective (conative), yet it is also constantly ‘shackled to, or worse converted into interest, and as interest it is susceptible to capture, domestication and pacification’ (Buchanan 2008, 11). Hence the most important question for Deleuze and Guattari, how it is possible for desire to act against its interest (Buchanan 2008, 21)?

Can we say here, that the theatre of Ho Tzu Nyen presents an updated version of ‘theatre of cruelty’ by presenting the historical movements of desire, hence offering a non-moralist sense of cruelty? Antonin Artaud’s ‘theatre of cruelty’ confronts the audience with an acute sense of immediacy through acts of violence, madness and other forms of agitation, thereby waking up with a compelling force their dulled senses and expectations. For Artaud, cruelty signifies ‘rigour, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination’ (Salter 2010, 107). And performance is a savage exorcism of the darkest latent forces inhabiting human experience. The ontology of performance lay in its confrontation with ‘the revelatory aspects of matter’ (Salter 2010). The absolute determination in revealing the matter itself, in the body, the flesh and the spasms of savage acts is the enaction of a restless desire overspilling the reign of codification. In this way, cruelty is embedded in history as this history unfold in the dreamy chants of the weretigers.

5.3.4. Espionage, judgement and history

We have reconciled the relation between the ‘savage’ tiger and the various human figurations it takes. Lai Teck, the Communist Party chief and triple agent appears as the most complex figure to unpack. Fascinated by him as the person bearing ‘every name in history’, Ho Tzu Nyen has dedicated a series of related works to him, such as the video installation *The Name* (2015) and *The Nameless* (2014), both presenting Lai Teck with found footage from various films featuring Tony Leung, a famous Hong Kongnese actor, who not infrequently stars as spies in films. Ho has also produced a live performance piece, *The Mysterious Lai Teck* (2018).

If the Japanese general in World War II coincides with the state of intensities of the tiger, then Lai Teck structurally approximates the tiger – he passes through different states and takes on different names, like waves after waves or water in water. A triple agent is never morally acceptable. Yet the artist leaves some leeway in situating him in history. He makes Lai Teck confess in *Ten Thousand Tigers*, ‘What makes me believe in the root of my beliefs?’ (Ho 2014) Questioning the authenticity of his judgement, Lai Tek relates to Buddhism, ‘I have always attributed my lack of success in this life to the influence of my previous life. The six paths of transmigration are inscrutable indeed, and I have no right to complain’ (Ho 2014). Of course, one cannot be exonerated of one’s responsibilities by resorting to influences of past lives. But what does it mean to fully judge a situation? In order to answer this, I will go into a seemingly abstract field – mathematics, and relate it to a Confucian perspective on the question of judgement and responsibility.

In his book *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, Alexander Galloway proposes a cultural philosophy of digitality. Of particular interest is how Galloway focuses attention on movements and changes in history in the model of digitality. The digitality is the process of bifurcation and differentiation: ‘The digital is the basic distinction that makes it possible to make any distinction at all. The digital is the capacity to divide things and make distinctions between them. Thus not so much zero and one, but *one and two*’ (Galloway 2014, xxix). Instead of reducing worldly matters to mathematics, Galloway brings nuances from the field of mathematics to the notion of differentiation. In this light, *Ten Thousand Tigers* is carefully crafted to show the bifurcation of the human kind against the body of earth – a full body in the Deleuzian sense that the humanity always falls back on.

A brief allusion to the discussion of the digital and the analogical can be discerned in Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Deleuze 2005a), in which he comments on digital synthesisers as ‘integral,’ that is, ‘their operation passes through a codification, through a homogenisation and binarisation of the data’ (Galloway 2014, 95).

Here the ‘integral’ and the related process of ‘integration’ are borrowed mathematics concepts in the studies of calculus. Imagine a curve defined by $f(x)$, the integral of a and b is then the sum of the area between the curve and the x-axis, when $x=a$ and b . The reason why Deleuze likens the digital device to integral seems to lie in the condition through which the operation of a digital device happens: that it has to codify an input data (in this case, sound, analog sound) into homogeneous units to be processed henceforth. The codification qualifies the integration by anchoring the curve in a set of homogeneous values, each value of x

accounting for the curve of $f(x)$.

Deleuze contrasts digital synthesisers with analogical synthesisers (as exemplified by hardware modular synthesisers): ‘Analogical synthesisers are “modular,”’ and further, ‘They establish an immediate connection between heterogeneous elements.’ (Galloway 2014, 93) Galloway comments, ‘What this means is that different elements, remaining relatively whole and heterogeneous to one another, are nevertheless able to interoperate immediately. They can touch each other directly, despite their differences’ (Galloway 2014, 103). Here we either have to do away with a curve $f(x)$ attributed to the account of x-axis values, for the immediacy of interoperations does not need to resort to the x-axis, or we have to find a new way of looking at the curve.

Galloway proposes to expound on the digital and analogical divide in Deleuze by going one step further into mathematics:

Let us return briefly to the mathematical theme. Although Deleuze does not say it explicitly, neither in the ‘Postscript’ nor in the book on Francis Bacon and painting, it is possible to infer that the digital means integration and the analogical means differentiation. Thus, while integration means area under a curve, differentiation or ‘taking the derivative’ means instantaneous slope of the tangent line. Instead of summing the area under the curve defined by $f(x)$, one extrapolates a secondary function derived from the first function, a secondary function consisting of a straight line tangential to any position $x = a$ on the curve. The logic is slightly counterintuitive; do not be fooled by the curves of integration, for it is still a question of *solving* via a multiplicity of regular slices, and hence it is digital. Likewise, do not be fooled by the semantic similarity between the words *differentiation* and *difference*. Differentiation is an analogical event because it brings together the immediacy of two modular and heterogeneous spaces: (1) the space of the function curve and (2) the adjacent virtual space of all the tangent lines that can be derived from the curve. (Galloway 2014, 104)

Here, Galloway connects a different function and treatment of the curve – differential calculus, the tangent – to the discussion of the analog. The invisible tangential line to any visible point on the curve measures the tendency of change at that point in the curve. On the one hand, integral calculus seeks the derivative, or the tangent of the point in the curve; on the other, the future of the curve can be read by the slope of the tangent – the tendency toward bending. In this regard, Galloway rightly draws the allegory between the tangents to the virtual space, and

henceforth, between all the possible tangents at a point before it moves on and all the possible futures of the curve.

What is important in this question of digitality is how it works on the univocity that the chapter invokes earlier:

[T]he digital is a transformative process in which a universe grounded in the univocity of an identity of the same becomes a universe grounded in discrete distinctions between elements, elements that, although divided, are brought together and held in relation, suspended opposite each other like cliffs over the banks of a great river. (Galloway 2014, 102-103)

This process lies underneath the transformations between tiger and man. The univocity is figured in the tiger, as water-in-water and as a roar in the many roars in nature, which gives rise to concrete entities such as humans.

This line of thinking is aligned to the non-deterministic, non-teleological view of history and points to a way of seeing events as pertaining to ‘vitalist geneticism’ that is shared by Deleuze. Colebrook emphasises the genesis of the present as follows, ‘one ought not to accept any already given and actualised form but should ask how such a form emerged, what that emergence can tell us about the life from which any actuality has taken shape, and how such a life – beyond its already created possibilities – might yield other potentials.’ (Colebrook 2009, 9) The fields of virtuality are there as an event actualises and concretises, and harbours potentials for other outcomes as the event evolves.

The mathematical lucidity may easily give way to the messiness of real world events, when this principle is applied to culture. It seems vigilant avoidance is in order when it comes to mentioning the course of real world affairs and the continuation of an abstract curve in one breath. This recalls the moment when cybernetics, first theorised as a set of principles of information, control and communication that can be identified in living or cultural systems and intended to help better interaction between men and machine, is taken as a universal principle and is reverted to apply to understanding human beings. This is done through a movement of ‘reflexivity,’ whereby ‘that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates’ (Hayles 1999, 8). In this sense, cautiously, one could see the movement of reflexivity in applying the principles of integration and differentiation in mathematics to life itself.

The question then becomes how to reconcile between tendency and contingency, and how does the judgement of a conscious subject figure there. Following a materialist line, however, the question seems to pertain to different scales: what happens at particular moments is fully contingent, but in retrospect, may be read as showing certain tendencies.

and that the idea of tendency probably comes before there is a mathematical model for developments and change. It is only tricky when we try to project certain events in the world completely in a diagrammatic way – that is to say, in representative values on the x, y, and even as many axes as you wish, within generic planes made up by the axes. The sheer number of factors in real-world events rules out attempts of such kinds. (Despite this, world-systems theorists are not shy to use diagrams to explain the macro-scale rise and fall of different cultures.)

The virtual space as harbouring potentials for changes in the form of latent tendencies enters in fruitful dialogue with the idea of *shi* 勢, tendency, in Confucian philosopher Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692). Chinese philosophers have a long tradition of contemplating on change, particularly situated at the intersection of the ‘natural’ realm of observable changes in the environment and the ‘cultured’ realm of political and social affairs. Starting from the *Yijing/ I Ching, Book of Changes*, Chinese philosophers have positioned everything in dynamic processes.

Wang Fuzhi, a thinker and writer with multifaceted interests has a particularly interesting formulation when it comes to philosophy of history. He has made proliferate commentaries on the voluminous historical books, most notably *A Treatise on Reading Tongjian (Du Tongjian lun) (Tongjian, or Zizhi Tongjian* is a chronicle going back to circa 400 BCE) and *A Treatise on the Sung Dynasty* (history of the Song Dynasty, 960-1279 CE). Through careful examination of historical events, he infers the principle of change – a dynamic process between chaos and prosperity. Importantly, this is not to establish a transcendental order outside of the realm of the human that determines the fate of particular human beings or groups, but one that requires one’s agency in instigating changes. There is no state of perfect standstill either, as everything and anything is always and forever in flux. In order to act wisely in particular situations, one has to understand the *shi*, or ‘tendency’ of the moment. If in earlier time, intellectuals have always believed in a closely entangled relation between ‘natural’ phenomena and human affairs, Wang offers deep readings into particular moments of the latter, and yet is not dismissive of the idea of natural-cultural synthesis.

Wang Fuzhi describes tendency as follows: ‘All tendencies of the world are such that if one follows a tendency, it will grow to its extreme; once it reaches the extreme, the opposite

will come'. And elsewhere, 'What is natural according to principle or tendency is simply what is right for that time'.

It is important to reiterate that the introduction of tendency does not diminish human agency. Chan emphasises on the action in accordance to tendency: 'In reality, each historical event results from a certain developmental tendency (*shi*). Therefore, to be able to judge the correct orientation in the developmental tendency is crucial for the fulfillment of any goal of action' (Chan 2011, 93). It is on this emphasis of judging the time and taking the right action where a righteous man's conduct lies. Wang Fuzhi examines numerous occasions in history in his commentary on history when the action of someone is seemingly against codes of Confucian conduct or even general codes of conduct, for instance, when one starts a coup to overthrow a regime, as opposed to being loyal to the emperor as prescribed by Confucianism. Yet measured by the tendency of the moment, it is often revealed that the emperor himself is too corrupt so that the tendency of affairs bends in favor of an opponent. Note that to be able to say that the tendency at one moment is changing without the appearance of things necessarily changing (as if the slope of the tangent of a curve bends even when the curve seems to go headlong into one direction, and also if as the virtual world interfaces with the real world and opens up new possibilities), one has to sum up an inherently complex situation in such a way that reductions are necessary. Hence historical judgement and commentary in retrospect always have the thinking movement of 'digitality' in Galloway's definition of the term, i.e. differentiation from a situation. Galloway himself sums up the course of development of the Soviet Union as from differentiated to one, and that of Maoist China as one to differentiation (Galloway 2014, xxxi), which may be too simplistic and stays only on the level of ideology than accounting for the complexities.

Notwithstanding Galloway's take on the Soviet Union and China, here we have to understand that Wang Fuzhi's tendency is not a tool crafted to evaluate history in hindsight, more importantly, tendency is to be understood as momentary articulation through self-practice of understanding and judgement within the very moment. Liu comments, 'With a tendency, either one eventually brings it to its completion, or one does not eventually bring it to its completion; it is all up to one's judgment' (Liu 2001, 333). This immanent understanding of tendency at each particular moment before things ripen to have manifest outcomes, is firmly against any transcendental claim on history. The tendency is not a grand narrative: in Liu's interpretation of Wang Fuzhi, there are ups and downs, and they rotate is a general way of change, or 'global determinacy,' instead of 'atomic determinacy' (Liu 2001, 329). They are the generalised material outcome, but not the cause of any embedded moment under

investigation. Liu puts it thus, 'Wang Fuzhi's assertion describes a formal principle of history; it does not make any causal claim on the existence of this formal principle' (Liu 330). And in describing the local, situated moments in relation to tendency, Liu comments, 'In Wang Fuzhi's philosophy of history, it is not possible to obtain atomic determinacy. For a local tendency to have its global effect, it depends not just on its own force, but also on the interplay of other competing tendencies. The interplay happens both diachronically and synchronically' (Liu 2001, 334).

The discussion on tendency as an immanent understanding of the situation and on the virtual as harbouring unactualised potentials for events may seem purely theoretical, yet it is precisely this distance held between philosophy and historiography/history that allows one to take a more critical position beyond the dominance of linear developmental model of history, and at the same time, to not fall into nihilism or pessimism.

To return to Lai Teck, the figure that is most difficult to place in *Ten Thousand Tigers*, the artist deliberately avoids a simple, moralist judgement on him, and instead uses him to raise the question of our own judgement. It may be the case that judging from the tendency of the time, Lai Teck was lured into judgements that eventually ended up on the wrong side of history. In China, Wang Jingwei, the leftist governor of Kuomintang who chose to collaborate with the Japanese to run a puppet government during WWII, partially out of the reason that he didn't see China winning the war and partially for being ousted and threatened by his archrival Chiang Kai Shek, would be another case of such kind. Lai Teck, at any rate, is a darkly figure, having blood on his hands. However, *Ten Thousand Tigers* raises our attention to the moral conundrum of the time, conditioned by the violence in and of history itself. Perhaps this is why in the chanting at the end of *Ten Thousand Tigers*, it mentions in one breathing the unlikely poles of kings and murders, Gods and monsters, and it is iterated that 'The coming of one evil spirit after another. The return of same spirit in different form' (Ho 2014).

If, as discussed earlier, the relay of responsibility from the coloniser to the unruly tiger is too simplistic a view, then the social mechanism around the unconscious reveals a deeper-rooted problem. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is not the unconscious that pressures the conscious; on the contrary, it is the conscious that pressures the unconscious (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 371). For them, oedipus is colonisation pursued by other means, or interior colony. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 170) It is not the tiger appearing from somewhere in the deep sea of the unconscious that comes haunting the humanity, but that the human socius always consciously oppresses the underlying flow of desire. This is, as Buchanan puts it, a head full of unruly

thoughts that have been made to look into the mirror by a domineering conscious only to be told they are something other than what they see (Buchanan 2008, 27).

This sheds light on the double-folded nature of colonialism, as it involves both the expansive operations in overseas colonies and the oedipisation at home. I will expound more on the question of desire and necropolitics in the context of colonialism and war – with the vampire as figuration – in the next chapter on Royce Ng’s work. Again, the work operates both on a concrete historical ground, and also on the meta-level of desire in/of capitalism to suggest how it returns to the body and the psyche.

5.4. Conclusion

In its richly layered narrative of Southeast Asian history, *Ten Thousand Tigers* enacts a materialisation of the field of potentiality at various moments. In fulfilling this, it doesn’t make the most explicit claims, such as posing the blatant question of how history could unfold differently? What would have been the social form of Southeast Asia, had it not been colonised? What relation of man and nature would have been possible, had the mitigation not happened in the first place? *Ten Thousand Tigers* also does not venture into providing answers or writing alternative histories. Instead, it hints at the very subtle tendencies where the flow of desire escapes the common governing structure that explains it.

The omnipresence of the tiger, corresponding with its modern brother – the schizo, is at the same time an ancient figuration and a modern/contemporary embodiment of the free flow of desire. When the voice of the weretigers detaches from the bodies of the weretigers and meanders into the technical (and colonial in that particular context) apparatus of the gramophone machine, more than bothering with any quasi-scientific justification, it gives an artistic rendering of the flow of desire that transverses the boundaries of the apparatus made to capture and delimit. The flow of desire is an important lens through which historical developments could be revisited, as we will see in the following chapter. Even though the flow of desire cannot be anthropomorphised and should not be taken as a physical compulsion that pushes for the limit of things, but is constituted by and emerges out of the materialist assemblage in question – the tiger emerges out of the man-earth relation.

Finally, as a continuation to the discussion on immanent materialism and multiperspectivism, this chapter also gives a sensational rendering of how univocity is at work in the poetic image of water in water, a reminder of the univocal world before and below bifurcation, and at the same time an allegory to the analogue and digital divide.

6. Chapter Six
Manchukuo, Capitalism and the East Asian Modern:
Transhistorical Desire in *Kishi the Vampire*

Gazing at the western capital, my mind is ill at ease
I grieve for the splendor of ages past:
Ten thousand palaces are returned to the earth.
In the flourishing state, the masses suffer
In the fallen state, the masses suffer

Zhang Yanghao (1270 – 1329) ‘Meditation on the Past at Tong Pass’

This chapter focuses on Hong Kong-based Australian artist Royce Ng’s *Kishi the Vampire*, a lecture performance on the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo (1932-1945) and the invention of East Asian capitalistic system under its finance minister Nobusuke Kishi (1896–1987), portrayed as a vampire. (Fig. 6.1 and 6.2) Closely reading *Kishi the Vampire*, the chapter investigates the question of nationalism and Pan-Asianism in Manchukuo, Kishi’s invention of state-guided capitalism and its implication for East Asia, to further move to a theoretical reflection on the mutation of desire under capitalism, manifesting in the perversion of desire in the erotic-grotesque culture and necropolitics. These interlocking questions are anchored in concrete historical annotations and at the same time construct a meta-level historical materialist frame of transhistorical flows of desire. The artistic project offers a fruitful site where these questions are explored, sometimes by way of interlocution, and sometimes tangentially.

6.1. Kishi the Vampire

Manchuria, the modern name given to designate the vast area roughly encompassing north-eastern China today, was the homeland of the Manchu nomadic people who overthrew the Chinese Ming dynasty and established Qing in 1644, the last dynasty of imperial China. Qing intentionally kept the vast land unpopulated to have a buffer zone to Russia. Starting in the 19th century, large influx of Chinese peasants from the inland moved into the area to nurture the fertile virgin land, Korean peasants too, moved from the peninsular. Russia's geopolitical interest in the Pacific ports led to the construction of the eastern part of the Transsiberian Railway through Manchuria, which Japan seized after the Russo-Japanese war and re-established as South Manchuria Railway Company to infiltrate its political and economic control into this area abundant in natural resources. On September 18, 1931, the Japanese Kwantung army staged a detonation on the rail route near Mukden as excuse to effectively occupy Manchuria. In 1932, they installed the last Qing emperor Puyi as emperor and established Manchukuo as a constitutional monarchy. Though formerly independent and with necessary alliance with local Chinese warlords and elites, Manchukuo was run de facto by Japanese technocrats and the military. The narrative of *Kishi the Vampire* takes Nobusuke Kishi, the finance minister of Manchukuo, as the main protagonist.

Ng, as the narrator, takes the audience through different historical chapters consisting of grotesque assemblages of spaces and scenes. In the 1927 segment, a heavily industrial landscape emerges out of a haze as the narrator recounts Nobusuke Kishi's absorption of Western economic organisational models in the face of increasing Japanese economic stagnation. Nobusuke Kishi served as the vice minister of industry and deputy chief of the Office of Administrative Affairs in Manchukuo from 1936 to 1939. Kishi adopted a syncretic economic policy and implemented state-guided capitalism, while the government ran an opium monopoly. The economic success of Manchukuo largely provided for the Japanese war engine in the years that followed. Kishi's lavish sexual appetite is explicated in the animation. The dark interiors of brothels are permeated with a sickly atmosphere, with scenes from Japanese monster and erotic manga as backdrop, where a young girl's body is consumed by a ghastly vampire-like figure, and where enlarged sexual organs and splashed blood can be spotted. In the second segment, we move to the year 1937, which marked the beginning of Japan's war on China and the proliferation of production in Manchukuo as the end and no longer the means; this is accompanied in the animation by the full revelation of the interconnected spaces—the industrial structures, brothels, and drug dens form but one monster body with an ominous skeleton in the centre. In the third segment, the narrative fast-forwards to 1987 and finds Nobusuke Kishi on his death bed while East Asia's political future is being shaped. Here, a skeleton figure dances

to a backdrop of what looks like a Pan-Asian conference room, with national flags of postwar Asian countries in the background and fleeting images of Nobusuke Kishi's grandson, Shinzo Abe, as well as Park Chung-Hee, anticipating their impact on the Asian political arena. It's narrated that the legal heir of Kishi's economic policy is postwar South Korea, as Park steered the country into industrialisation following the model Kishi set forth.

In *Kishi the Vampire*, Ng appears on stage with an original Japanese propaganda kimono produced in the late 1930s, featuring on its backside the map of Japanese-ruled Manchuria and Korea, with a piece of newspaper clipping portraying the Mukden Incident. (The kimono was kindly provided by Johan Jacobs Museum, Zurich, which acquired it from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.) The sheer historical weight of such a rare historical artefact amounts to the unique performativity of *Kishi the Vampire* as a 'performative museum'. This is in part because of the museological nature – explicitly pertaining to ethnographic museums – of the kimono piece. At the same time, an affective history is embodied in and enacted by the museological object – the kimono used in *Kishi the Vampire*. If displaying such a kimono in a museum setting affords a critical distance with which questions of history and modernity could be reflected upon, then the immediacy of wearing the kimono in this piece conjures up the militarist and nationalist frenzy that still haunts postwar East Asia today. This is where the affect of a museological artefact transgresses historical timeframes and lends itself to new syntheses – syntheses that point to new forms of domination and violence.

Moreover, embodying the museological object brings into focus the materiality of the body and the biopolitics and necropolitics it is implicated in, pertinent to the piece. This works in synergy with the grotesque animation in the backdrop as Ng pieces together a compelling narrative with historical facts, told through real and fictive personal accounts. The animation illustrates with arresting details a series of architectural assemblage, where the spaces of brothels, cabins, offices and industrial structures flow into each other, and where Kishi the protagonist moves through. At the same time, bodies of human labour, bodies exploited in sex and acted upon with violence make up part of the assemblage and momentary stations visited in the animation, suggesting the connection between slave labour and death, and the perversion of desire under the capitalistic machine, which will be analysed later.

Thinking along the notion of a 'performative museum' and how a historical, or perhaps transhistorical museum could be enacted differently, the artist writes, 'This is done to avoid the inherent problems of the museum, namely the power inscribing practices of collecting, labelling, teleological narrativising, embalming and encasing of objects as well as eschew the colonial history of the modern European museum by positing an unstable, immaterial place

whose architecture is ephemeral and its living exhibits speak of a disordered history of ghostly objects, spaces and subaltern voices which is a history of the modern Asian state without the corrupted ideological underpinnings of the traditional museum' (Ng 2017).

In this way, the artist creatively follows the way anthropologist Michael Taussig retells the history of Columbia within the history of Spanish imperialism through the optic of cocaine. In the parallel context of South America, Taussig's book *My Cocaine Museum* is presented as a counterpoint to the official Gold Museum housed in the *Banco de la Republica* in Bogota representing the official hegemonic narrative of Columbia through the history of gold. After decades of fieldwork amongst Indian communities in the jungles of Columbia, Taussig dedicated the 'Cocaine Museum' to the indigenous inhabitants whose labour and natural environments were exploited under imperial rule to construct the museum of gold but were excluded from its history. (Taussig 2004)

In *Kishi the Vampire* and in other works, Ng actively engages with historical research and skilfully transforms objects of anthropological interest into quasi objects – at once material and immaterial, blurring the lines between historical research, critical ethnography, artistic production and presentation, thereby questioning the politics of representation.

6.2. Opium, Manchukuo and Kishi

6.2.1. Opium and the global economy

The Qing emperor Yongzheng banned the smoking of opium in China in 1729. In 1764, The British East India Company seized the monopoly of opium cultivation from the Mughal rulers. There was ballooning trade deficit effected by the demand for Chinese tea, porcelain and silk, while the Chinese wanted nothing from the British and only accepted silver as currency. Consequently, the British foreign currency reserves were being depleted. In order to redress the imbalance, the British established opium as a commodity. Despite the official ban, opium flooded into China through smugglers. Opium, or 'black earth' as Bengali opium is called, was cultivated in poppy fields in Bengal and processed in the British East Indian Company's sprawling factories in the town of Patna and near Benares. From there the refined opium was transported to Calcutta, capital of Bengal and until 1912 capital of British India, where it was stored and auctioned, and then shipped on to China. In 1830, the sale of opium made up a sixth of the gross national product of British India. (Koester 2008, 142)

To give a contemporary weight to the historical figures, trade deficit between British East India Company and China in 1879 was equivalent to 2.8 billion US dollars in today's

currency. China's manufactured goods exported to the West leads to mounting trade deficits in the West. Trade deficit between US and China in February 2018 amounted 375 billion US dollars. China holds 3.12 trillion foreign currency reserves as of late 2017. In 1838, just before the First Opium War, annual import of opium into China was 40,000 chests. By 1858 they had risen to 70,000 chests, approximately equivalent to global production of opium for the decade surrounding the year 2000.

In the face of trade deficit, British merchant William Jardine went back to England and convinced Lord Palmerston to petition the British parliament to wage war against China in order to open up the country to free trade. This led to the First Opium War and the opening up of China and the seceding of the island of Hong Kong to become a British colony, essentially established as a holding bank for British opium profits. In order to compensate for administration expenses, the British resorted to force again at the excuse of a minor incident. The consequence of Second Opium War was that the Britain and the French forced the Chinese state to legalise opium, which they did in the form of placing a levy on the import of opium, and the British also forced them to be as low as possible. These government run 'opium monopolies,' in which opium control was 'farmed out' to government licensed drug dens, became the dominant system through which opium was distributed in the European colonies throughout Asia. The system the British established in Hong Kong was used in French colonial Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos), and the Cocaine Factory run by the Dutch being supplied by the East Indies. The colonial system of constructing government controlled narcotic economies as a form of pacification of the local population, while using that same population to farm the raw material, at the same time extracting profit from the sales of the drug to that same population was deployed by the Japanese when they acquired their own colony of Manchuria in North-East China.

In Manchukuo, around 50 to 55 percent of the government's revenues came from drug sales, and by 1944, 20 percent of Manchukuo's Chinese population of forty million was seriously addicted (Driscoll 2010, xiv) As Kaneda Sei, former Manchukuo Minister, testified in China in 1954, 'The sale of opium was both a huge source of capital to support our military imperialism and a means to weaken and kill Chinese people... The way we accomplished this was through the market, where we used our military strength to buy opium as cheaply as possible and then sold it at astronomical prices to desperate addicts' (Driscoll 2010, 227).

The necropolitical economy of opium is made explicit when Marx cites the English reformer M. Martin: 'Why, the slave trade was merciful compared with the opium trade: We did not destroy the bodies of the Africans, for it was in our immediate interest to keep them

alive. But the opium seller slays the body after he has corrupted, degraded and annihilated the unhappy sinners' (Marx 1858, 213-214). Marx describes that the opium business made 'gold out of nothing' and '[g]reat fortunes sprang up like mushrooms in a day,' consequently, 'primitive accumulation went on without the advance of a shilling'. Primitive accumulation marks the beginning of class differentiation, between the capitalist possessors, and the proletariat non-possessors. It happens through the proceedings of colonialism, violence and war: 'The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production' (Marx 1990, 915) What follows the stage of primitive accumulation is the full flung machine of capitalism, as we will see later.

6.2.2. Manchukuo in the context of nationalism and Pan-Asianism

East Asia in the first couples of decades in the 20th century was brimming with discourses of modernisation, various strands of nationalism, anti-imperialism and republicanism. The case of Manchukuo affords a lens for understanding the East Asian modern, as Prasenjit Duara's seminal study on Manchukuo reveals. The state-building project of Manchukuo and its quest for national identity was born of the post WWI international order, as the institutional consequences of imperial nationalism in an emergent postcolonial time of mobilisation and identity politics. (Duara 2003, 77) It was the time when nationalism and national identity served not exclusively the will of the people under the principle of self-determination, but was more used as a leverage of imperialist enterprises of the developed states, mostly European nation-states and in this case Japan.

Following the Bolsheviks' 'Declaration of the Rights of Peoples,' in which peoples of the empires were bestowed the rights to national self-determination and essentially to forming sovereign states, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson embraced the self-determination principle and popularised it as the fundamental way for a postimperial world. Yet as Michael A. Reynolds rightly points out, the principle was accommodated when it served the interests of the great powers and bent when it did not. Consequently, backed by the British and French, Poland was strategically attributed a part which is ethnographically one-third non-Polish so to create a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. In the Middle East, out of interest of connecting with the overseas colonies as well as creating power balance against Russia, the British and French created 'mandate' zones and effectively took control over Iraq and Palestine, and Syria and Lebanon respectively. (Reynolds 2011, 254)

Under this light of national self-determination, it is possible to understand the Japanese effort of narrating a continuous history of one nomadic/semi-nomadic people under different names, with a history going back to second century BCE, to which the Manchurians are attributed to. Duara sharply observes that by comparison, the Chinese historical account of Manchuria in the 1920s did not appeal to, or was not yet conscious enough to appeal to a ‘deep history’ ethnography testifying that Manchuria had always been Chinese. Instead the account emphasised practical facts – that 30 million Chinese immigrants had been living in Manchuria at the time – more than historical claims. (Duara 2003, 54) The recent debates around ‘New Qing History’ is interesting to follow yet beyond the scope of this chapter, especially in comparison to the constructed ‘deep history’ of Manchuria for the purpose of installing Manchukuo.

At the same time, Japan profiled Manchukuo as a nation based on the alliance of five ethnic peoples, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Manchurian and Mongolian. For example, it tolerated different religious practices and in fact mobilised religious leaders of the respective peoples. Yet most of the time the polyethnic alliance appeared merely rhetoric, when Japanese privilege could be seen from wage to access to goods, not to mention the wartime fascist mobilisation of non-Japanese forced labour, which we will see later.

The other discursive resource for the polyethnic Manchukuo was Pan-Asianism. The Kyoto School has been largely condemned for association with the idea of Pan-Asianism and ‘Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere,’ an economic, cultural and political collective entity encompassing parts of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia guided by Japan. The Kyoto School is a group of 20th century Japanese thinkers who developed original thinking based on interlocation of Eastern and Western philosophies. Kyoto School thinkers have drawn on Confucian ideas of *tenmei* (*tianming* in Chinese), or the ‘mandate of heaven’ to characterise a regime whose rule is legitimised by destiny, moral authority, practical effectiveness and raw power (Williams 2014, 24-25). Further, they have illustrated a ‘regional leadership by consent,’ which entails that the elites should ‘inspire, lead, support and listen if the requisite measure of public cooperation and economic effectiveness, at the level of the individual member of society, was to be attained’ (Williams 2014, 54-55). They saw this ‘Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere’ as both end and means based on the prediction that the permanent solution to Japan’s global vulnerability lay in the sustained improvement of its capacity to wage a protracted defense of its regional base in East Asia and the Western Pacific. (Williams 2014, 55-56) The Kyoto School thinkers rejected implementing this idea through force, yet militant Japanese ultranationalists used it to their end and led Japan to wage wars. Recently, however, scholars

have called for reading the Kyoto School beyond apologetic positions, in a similar move that rescues Heidegger's philosophy from his biography tainted by the Nazi chapter.

Meticulously combing through texts of the key figures in the Kyoto School, Christopher S. Goto-Jones attempts to investigate their philosophy as philosophy in itself. Not to take a revisionist approach, he evaluates the validity of the 'world-historical standpoint' (*sekaishiteki tachiba*) developed by the Kyoto School as 'an attempt (qua intellectuals) to transcend the question of national loyalties' (Goto-Jones 2005, 13). En route, we see the world-historical standpoint as presented by Keiji Nishitani as following the historical movement from the Mediterranean, Atlantic to arrive at the Pacific: 'Naturally, this does not mean that the Mediterranean and the Atlantic have lost their meaning, but only that the Pacific, which has not played a world historical role before, has graduated onto the stage of world history – which is to say that these three aforementioned oceans have now reached the point of communicating as though they were a single living creature. In other words, the world's major oceans have, in political terms, united to form a single ocean' (Goto-Jones 2005, 107) Carefully weighing the historical context of this writing and reading it without the synthesis to the imperial ambitions, Goto-Jones posits that, 'Nishitani does not go so far as to argue that the Japanese nation should impose its will on the world, but his caution revolves around his doubts about whether Japan knows what to do, rather than about the morality of such action per se' (Goto-Jones 2005, 109).

I will return to the philosophical proposals of the Kyoto School and the idea of the resonance between major oceans to form a 'single ocean' at the end of the chapter. The way that ideas of Asian alliances translated into military plans, however, was utterly another story. The Japanese ultranationalists were motivated by the vision of an evitable holy war between the East and West and took to their task to rescue and help the East Asian and Southeast Asian neighbours. This was reflected in the gesture of Japan renouncing its extraterritorial rights in Manchuria and elsewhere, while in daily practice, in the labour conditions and governmental structures, it's clear that the Japanese superiority was the norm and hierarchy was cutthroat. In the 'colonial' daily business of administration, it is impossible to fully understand why the military encouraged the rapid modernisation and industrial buildup in Manchuria without grasping its framing within pan-Asianism and without working closely with alliances (Duara 2003, 267-268).

It is worthwhile mentioning the conceptualisation of Asia from other major Asian geopolitical players to provide a counterpoint to the world historical of Japan. Here, I take China as example. During the period of modernisation, the notion of Asia was informed by its member regions' common struggle against the western and Japanese imperialist forces, and thus it was

underpinned by nation state transformation projects, as, for example, proposed by Liang Qichao. Furthermore, as an ultimate goal, it should lead to internationalism in the case of ‘Great Asianism’ of Sun Wen and ‘New Asianism’ of Li Dazhao. There is an element of transnational alliance in the ultimate vision; for example, Wang Hui characterizes Li’s vision as ‘not alliance among states but rather an alliance among “the masses as a whole”’ (Wang 2007, 13). Where is such an alliance to be found? Certainly this has influenced the course of postwar China in creating alliances with the Third World in the spirit of the Non-Aligned movement. All in all, these are short-lived sparks of conceptualising Asia in Chinese intellectual history; yet, in general, a horizontal way of thinking about Asia culturally and socially has not taken deep root in practice.

It is noteworthy that a populist version of *tianxia* is on the rise; yet what is less discussed is that it is under the fully transformed structure of China as a nation state, and this further complicates the discussion of China’s relation to Asia. Korean scholar Bai Young-seo thus claims that ‘there is no “Asia” in China’, in reference to the absence of horizontal conceptualisation of Asian neighbours. Baik advocates for cross-border ‘intellectual praxis’ in the context of East Asia: ‘Intellectual praxis means here to conceptualise East Asia not as a fixed entity, but as a way of thinking that understands East Asia to be in a state of flux, always subject to self-reflection, and it includes a process of practice on the basis of this understanding’ (Baik 2002, 278).

If the lack of ambition or interest on Asia on the part of China contrasts starkly with the Kyoto School and Japan’s move in Asia, then another early modern Chinese thinker’s challenge on the Confucian order of governance contradicts the view of his contemporaries. As mentioned earlier, thinkers of the Kyoto School justify the leading role of Japan in modernising Asia with the Confucian mandate of heaven. Taixu (1890-1947), who would later become a widely respected Buddhist monk and thinker, proposed in the 1910s to modernise Buddhism. He was inspired by anarchism in general, and Kropotkin’s ideas of mutual aid in particular, which puts forth that mutual aid is instinctive and a kind of innate conscience, but gets distorted by the structures of authority. When the anarchist utopia is fully implemented, the Buddhist pure land of bliss will appear. He especially took up names (*ming*), profit (*li*) and boundaries (*jie*) as things to rid of in order to achieve the utopian Buddhist pure land. Under names, he understood both the old imperial system as well as the new Republic of China, and under boundaries, national borders. He saw that ‘the authority of the state rests ultimately on force, but political names serve to mask that fact, augmenting its power and even leading people to participate in their own exploitation. In imperial times, dynasties were founded by force of arms, rather than

the charismatic virtue attributed to them by the Confucian doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven' (Ritzinger 2014, 231). Taixu's account of power is close to the historical materialist analysis that this dissertation tries to follow as one of the core threads, even though the Confucian mandate of heaven may appeal to war-time intellectuals.

Having examined the cultural-historical background of Manchukuo, the following section traces the rapid industrialisation of Manchuria and its postwar resonance.

6.2.3. Kishi and the Industrialisation of East Asia

In the backdrop animation, office spaces, factories and brothels are abstracted and assembled around a giant skeleton to form one machine. (Fig. 6.3) They are rendered in splashy colours and infused in a mysterious, sickly haze. Royce Ng narrates the Japanese plan of industrialisation in Manchuria. Nobusuke Kishi served at prominent positions as the vice minister of industry and deputy chief of the Office of Administrative Affairs in Manchukuo from 1936 to 1939. A strong believer in state-led industrial capitalism, he used Manchukuo as his test ground and organised its economy with guided investment plans, utilising forced labour and funds from drug trade that largely provided for the Japanese war engine later. Big conglomerates such as Nissan made profits by following the governmental guidance to invest in key sectors. Having observed industrial organisations in Western countries, Kishi admired American Taylorist labour management, economic planning, and industrial rationalisation and Germany's adaptation of technologist-engineers together with business management and planning. Combining these methods, with Soviet-style Five-year plan, Kishi's 'industrial rationalisation' kick started the Manchurian industrialisation. This came down well with Japanese ultranationalists in the army, who had legalised the possibility of overtaking Japan's economy in the case of war, and were on way to implement this. For them, 'economic planning was explicitly war as a continuation of business by other means' (Driscoll 2010, 267-268). Kishi's plan was so successful that the heavy industry in Manchuria accounted for up to 90 percent of Chinese GDP in the postwar decades.

Kishi was notorious for his racialisation of the Chinese as inhuman and in effect treating them as low-cost or unremunerated labour to the point of dehumanisation, or as 'robot slaves' (Driscoll 2010, 266). Mark W. Driscoll's study, taking a materialist historical perspective, illustrates the bodies of coolies, tenant farmers, opium addicts under the Kishi regime, which powered the Japanese wartime economic engine. These economically and politically disenfranchised bodies are captured in a machine of necropolitics, and form a shadowy counterpoint to Kishi the protagonist. I will discuss this necropolitical aspect in detail later.

The historical significance of Manchukuo did not stop when it dissolved. After the war, Kishi was imprisoned as a 'Class A' war crimes suspect but was never indicted for he was believed to be capable of steering the country in a pro-American direction. He made his political comeback and became Prime Minister in 1957. His post-war vision for Japan followed the same logic of state-led capitalistic economy to make the country's economy strong, and ultimately, to seek rearmament for Japan to achieve true independence from America's influence, which his grandson, Shinzo Abe is committed to. The Korean military dictator Park Chung-Hee, father to the impeached Korean president Park Geun-hye, who was trained in Japanese military academy in Manchukuo, befriended Kishi in the post-war period and normalised the relation to Japan, through which Korea received aids, loans and commercial credits from Japan to kick start the economic rebuild (Delury 2015).

With a dancing skeleton animation in flashy pink light in the background, Ng reveals the post-war political DNA of East Asia and Southeast Asia as flashbacks to Kishi in his deathbed. The narration goes,

Kishi lay dying on the tatami mat, his wife, children and grandson surrounded him. Yoko had married well, and he was proud of his grandson, he had already spoken with some of his friends from the wild Manchukuo days and Shinzo's political career was mapped out. (Yoko was the daughter of Nobusuke Kishi and mother of Shinzo Abe) [...] By the 1960s every Asian government had come grovelling to Japan and asked for expertise and capital to fund their own version of the Japanese developmental state. His crowning achievement had been when the Korean President Park Chung-Hee, who he'd known in Manchukuo, had agreed to turn over reparations for suffering inflicted during colonialism into Japanese foreign direct investment. The wartime plan to create a 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere' had come to fruition with the rise of the East Asian Tiger Economies who had all learnt from Kishi's Manchurian experiment. (Ng 2016)

The implication of Kishi's policy in office during and after Manchukuo attested to the underlying political landscape of East Asia: the death of Manchukuo was the birth of East Asia. Duara puts it in a larger political frame as follows, 'While imperialism was certainly preserved in this hegemony, it also dictated relations between center and periphery different from those of the older colonies. The new program involved more alliance, autonomy, investment, development, identity, and competitiveness. In many ways, Manchukuo prefigured the

phenomenon of a junior partner or a client state dominated by hegemonic states such as the United States and the Soviet Union in the postwar period' (Duara 2003, 78).

Ultimately – though it was implicit in the performance – Kishi's model is exercised to the maximal scale in today's China, which has become the world's second largest economy within three decades of economic reform. At national and global levels, Chinese capitalism has the characteristics of both fully-fledged market economy and strong state intervention with state-owned enterprises and state-guided public-private investments in strategic sectors. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced in 2013 as a platform for regional multilateral cooperation, interlinks China with regions on the ancient Silk Road(s), the trade routes through greater Central Asia and the maritime trade routes connecting East Asia to Africa and Europe. To date, the BRI has expanded to around 70 countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Oceania, incorporating one third of global GDP and one quarter of global foreign investment flows. The economic policies and specifically, the more favourable and less political conditions of investments, lend themselves to an interpretation as alliance and brotherhood, while at the same replicating the structural logic of the hegemonic states. This will be expounded on in the section on Asian economy.

6.3. Transhistorical Movements: Desiring production

6.3.1. Desire and capitalism

This part takes a historical-materialism-inspired Deleuzian perspective to unpack the operation of capitalism and organisation of desire and power in the rapid development of Manchukuo and beyond. This meta-level theoretical lens here focuses on the materialist arrangements of labour, goods and desire to analyse the operational logic of capitalism and its consequences on the human bodies in relation to desire. It offers a theoretical reflection that takes a tangential line of flight from the concrete historical, political-economic studies on Manchukuo undertaken above, and moves into a field where movements of materialities account for the emergence of social phenomena like *hentai*. This is in turn made tangible by the erotic grotesque aesthetics employed in the artistic work.

In Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of history, a multi-connective desire submerges everything. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the precapitalistic society codes desire through inscription, the capitalistic machine frees the decoded flow of desire. Inscription entails marking bodies (the human, the non-human bodies as well as abstract bodies) so to create representations of things and to attribute meanings, and this in turn represses the flux of desire.

This process lies underneath the development of the social formation, in other words, desire is socialised by coding. There is only desire and the social, for social production is molar and consolidated, and desiring-production is molecular, dispersed and unruly (Buchanan 2008, 89).

In the next stage of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of history, the despot comes in and imposes a new alliance system and places himself in direct filiation with the deity. This can be observed when there arises a spiritual empire or when a new empire replaces the old one. What comes with it is an absolute structure of hierarchy that the blocks of debt become 'an infinite relation in the form of the tribute' (Buchanan 2008, 194). The despotic state dreads the flow of production and exchange and tries to rule by tightening control. Sometimes this takes the form of creating an absolutist national identity in order to tame the people, as seen earlier in the creation of a multi-ethnic Manchukuo with Japanese taking up the *tenmei*. Yet what will overcome the despot state is the capitalistic machine, which decodes these flows of desire. The decoded flows must encounter and form conjunctions: flows of decoded soil sold as private property, flows of decoded money that circulates as capital, flows of workers who are now deterritorialised to be mere labour in the service of work itself or the capitalistic machine. Capital always needs new territories, be it new overseas markets or the once solid entities now liquidated, decoded, like the human body in the service of a necropolitical machine. Ultimately, capital begets capital, bypassing the production of commodities.

Working by conjunction to decoded flows of desire and to deterritorialised labour as it does, how does the capitalist machine still need the state? The role of the state is not to be underestimated because the state widens the limits of the capitalistic economy, especially within an order of military expenditures. 'The role of a politico-military-economic complex is the more manifest in that it guarantees the extraction of human surplus value on the periphery and in the appropriated zones of the centre, but also because it engenders for its own part an enormous machinic surplus value by mobilising the resources of knowledge and information capital, and finally because it absorbs the greater part of the surplus value produced' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 235).

As a capitalist machine, Manchukuo was able to absorb forces that may seem to otherwise undermine it. Normally what amounts to subversion of the central power is a form of nomadic, decentralised organisation. In history, the appropriation of maritime tributary routes proves this theory. Out of the official historical tributary system that tied China and its neighbouring countries symbolically, and to varying degree politically, emerged what Japanese economic historian Takeshi Hamashita calls the 'inner organicity of Asia'. He highlights the offshoot network that thwarts the official tributary system, which, after a long process, had

transformed into a private trade system at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Hamashita 2008). Furthermore, studies suggest that the form of trade activities in Southeast Asia at that time included smuggling and arms trafficking. This development signals a ‘breaking out’ of the tributary system. Here, the historical development of networks is precisely the result of shifts in the existing relations between centre and periphery (Wang 2007, 22). A century later, Manchukuo’s governors utilised for their own benefits the connection to the Japanese hustlers and traffickers, who had established a local network of intelligence and trade (Driscoll 2010, 232-233). The network of traffickers signals the nomadic mode of operation, breaking out of the pyramidal power structure and following its own decoded flow of desire with ‘an alternate current that disrupts signifying projects’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 257). Exactly this decoded flow was deftly appropriated by the Manchukuo state, showing a new stage of power structure that Galloway and Thacker call empire: ‘like a network, empire is not reducible to any single state power, nor does it follow an architecture of pyramidal hierarchy. Empire is fluid, flexible, dynamic, and far-reaching’ (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 27).

Manchukuo’s ideology-ridden nation-building project was characteristics of a despotic state that installs and subjugates its people to an absolute power, yet the economic policy of extracting infinite surplus through perpetuating production – and the production itself becoming an end and no longer the means, fell closely in line with the capitalistic machine. The primitive, despotic and capitalist societies do not follow any teleological or linear, development and the ‘earlier’ orders may well live in symbiotic relation to a ‘later’ order. Hence Manchukuo conflates the despotic and the capitalist machines, making it on the one hand totalising and immanent, and on the other conjunctive and expansive, as seen in the unprecedented efficiency of postwar Tiger Economies and later in Chinese state capitalism.

6.3.2. Necropolitics: desire, death and erotic-grotesque aesthetics

While *Kishi the Vampire* makes a compelling revisit to a particular chapter in history, the aesthetics that Royce Ng adopts, inspired by the erotic-grotesque culture of Japan and especially its visual manifestations from the early 20th century, marks an equally important pathway to unpacking the Manchukuo complex in the context of capitalism.

As analysed in the last chapter on the tiger, the figure of the schizo emerges out of the capitalistic stage of decoded desire. Deleuze and Guattari’s study on schizophrenia as materialist consequences on the subconscious level of the subject suggests a philosophical parallel to understanding the erotic grotesque culture in the Modern period in Japan.

Inspired by Mark Driscoll's study on the connection of capitalism and the erotic-grotesque in Japan, the marriage of which erodes the nerves and infiltrates into the human sensorium, a grim-faced blood-sucking Kishi, bodies of exhausted young girls showered in blood, bony opiumnated bodies of Chinese workers loom in the animation in *Kishi the Vampire*. Fetishism around female bodies coupled with *hentai* – perverted – desires, exemplified by the novels of Endogawa Rampo filled with psychotics, perverts and vampires, prevailed the urban life of interwar Tokyo.

Sociologist Akagami Yoshitsuge (1892–1953) theorised this phenomenon in his *The Face of Erotic-Grotesque Society (Ryōki no shakaisō)* published in 1931 as the new 'immediate society' (*chokusetsu shakai*) (Driscoll 2010, 140). This is when '[h]uman desiring production in its neuro-political mode of fascination and enthralled stupefaction is sold to the worker-consumer for the wage substitutes of pleasure, pleasure which now comes with ideological instructions on how to be an obedient purchaser in this new regime' (Driscoll 2010, 141). The fetishism around bodies and sex goes beyond the original stage of Marxist commodity fetishisation, which is defined by commodities severed from its production process thereby appearing to have a life of its own. The lure of pleasure coincides with the furthering of capitalism where bodies are mined for value under the condition of the new mediated 'immediate' that substitutes more authentic, unalienated modes of desire. This heralds what would come to be known decades later as affect economy. For what makes these fetish images and the actions they provoke desirable goes almost unnoticed in the flow of affect effectuated by media, which captivates and invokes emotions before our cognitive registration. This continuous modulation, variation and intensification of affective response in real time attests to the fact that 'bodily affect is mined for value,' (Clough 2008, 16) forming the ever-pervasive intimacy between economy and our daily lives. Clough's comment on the affect economy rings true almost 90 years after Akagami's diagnosis on the production of desire: 'the circuit from affect to emotion is attached to a circulation of images meant to simulate desire-already-satisfied, demand-already-met, as capital extracts value from affect – around consumer confidence, political fears, etc., such that the difference between commodification and labour, production and reproduction, are collapsed in the modulation of the capacity to circulate affect' (Clough 2008, 16).

Further studies in the field of sex and fetish culture point to deeper connections between the body, desire and the social. Drawing on medical studies, spearhead of Japanese sexology Tanaka Kogai suggested that the erotic drives expressed in *hentai*, including sadism, masochism and fetishism, are but products of modern civilisation and capitalistic material culture, so much

so that he ‘called it the height of hypocrisy for modern states to attempt to repress that which their advanced capitalism constantly stimulates: new affects and new pleasures’ (Driscoll 2010, 150). Similarly, the figures around Japanese Psychiatric Association held the view that humans expressed aspects of *hentai* because Japanese and global capitalist society were themselves fundamentally *hentai*. Consequently, they recast crime as multicausal, relative to the metropolitan environment that it is embedded in. They even normalised and de-pathologised ‘split-personality disorder’ as simply ‘multiple personality’ (Driscoll 2010, 157-159).

This line of argument brilliantly anticipated Deleuze and Guattari's study of the close relation between capitalism and schizophrenia in their *Anti-Oedipus*. Here, as we've seen above, different stages of history are interwoven through the materialistic analysis of desire and desiring production, to arrive at the current world order in which capitalism most effectively rides on the flow of decoded desire and appropriates production for the production of capital. Deleuze and Guattari identify that the social and political repression permeated by desiring production results in schizophrenic, neurotic or perverted behaviours, effectively expanding the configuration of the subject beyond the Freudian libidinal drive and linking psychic repression with social repression. Deleuze puts it thus in an interview, ‘we have never seen a schizophrenic delirium that is not firstly about race, racism, politics, that does not begin in all directions from history, that does not involve culture, that does not speak of continents, kingdoms, and so forth’ (Guattari 2009, 80) The cure then, in a strange resonance with Tanaka decades earlier, is ‘rather an affair of desiring-production, of getting it going and giving it somewhere to go other than into the void’ (Buchanan 2008, 30). This is not to diverge into a study on pathology and psychoanalysis, but to suggest that there is a material assemblage in capitalism conditioning the individual's behaviours, and that the schizophrenia serves as a conceptual figuration for the organisation of self-reproducing desire.

In the latest stage of the omnipresent capitalist machine, ‘[d]eath is felt rising from within and desire itself becomes the death instinct, latency, but it also passes over into these flows that carry the seeds of a new life’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 223) In the streets of Asakusa, where *hentai* pleasure was consumed in the interwar period, sociologist and ethnographer Gonda Yasunosuke questioned how the purchase price of pleasure in this new stage of capitalism seemed to be human life itself (Driscoll 2010, 143). This force of capitalism operates not just in tandem with biopolitics that discipline bodies in particular production settings or social relations such as the factory or school, but it further incorporates life itself as the abstracted site for production. This new necropolitical domination of the racialised,

economically and politically disenfranchised bodies keeps them in a form of the living dead (Mbembe 2003, 21).

It is on the level of necropolitics that bodies of the coolies, workers, opium addicts and the young girls, whether in Japan or in Manchuria, are implicated. The theorisation of erotics and normalisation of borderline fetish behaviours were co-extensive to the wars and violence (both sexual and general) in the time of Japanese imperial expansion, which returned to the metropolis capital of Tokyo in the form of the erotic grotesque visual culture. For Ng, this invokes the parallel in the argument made by the German sociologist Iris Darman that the practice of sadomasochism that emerged in 19th century Europe is a transferal of the master/slave dialectic and the mediating disciplinary tool of the whip lashing the bodies of slaves from the colonial periphery back to the hegemonic centre (Ng 2017).

Ng's own appropriation of the erotic-grotesque aesthetics is productive for it renders the perverted desire effectuated by necropolitics tangible. If according to Deleuze and Guattari the schizophrenic process manifests how decoded desire works, then such stark visual and aggressively sensual presentation following the *hentai* aesthetics becomes a potent enactment of the flow desire that transpired the urban areas of Tokyo and Hsinking (capital of Manchukuo), the bodies of factory workers, sex slaves and opium addicts, as well as the seemingly endless stream of capital. Ng aligns his motivation behind exploring the erotic grotesque to the larger colonial social-economical context and asks 'whether opium produced an aesthetic of 'erotic-grotesque' culture based on subjective indigenous responses to the unnatural economic relations of modernity into which Asian peoples were suddenly implicated' (Ng 2017). Ng further draws on the research of Michael Taussig in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, which analyses the production of magical concepts as a reaction to capitalist development in Third World countries (Taussig 1980). Reading the style of Latin American 'magical realism' as one which expresses 'the seemingly opposed perspectives of a pragmatic, practical and tangible approach to reality and an acceptance of magic and superstition' (Bowers 1994, 24), Ng speculates on an analogous model for the subversive culture of the 'erotic-grotesque' in Asian art and popular culture.

In the last scene of *Kishi the Vampire*, a ghastly skeleton dances to the backdrop of a Pan-Asian conference room, with national flags of postwar Asian countries in the background. (Fig. 6.4) Ng voices the last line in the performance, 'Kishi began coughing and savoured the taste of blood on his tongue and remembered the stories by Rampo that he read as a young man in the 1920s, they weren't tigers, they were monsters, vampires that would suck the life from workers, the attention of consumers and even the pleasure from sex to drink of that flowing red

blood' (Ng 2016).

From the perspective of necropolitics, Ng's depiction of Kishi as a vampire is a logical extension to what he is known as, '昭和の妖怪', or 'the Shōwa era monster'. It is no coincidence that Deleuze and Guattari render the capital in capitalism as vampire: 'Capital is dead labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 228). Kishi embodies the blood sucker who tirelessly extracts surplus value from industrial productions on the one hand and fulfils his excessive sexual appetite on the other. Death, or more precisely, death-in-life is produced in Kishi's necropolitical machine. The vampire is hence the perfect variation of the schizo, both producing and is being produced by decoded flows of desire set loose by capitalism, looking to form new conjunctions and no longer obeying the law of subordination and filiation. In Deleuze and Guattari, a pathological schizo wanders through fields of intensities and 'identifies' with different names in history. In fact, the names don't signify real people, rather states of intensities, and are 'effects', for example, 'God is *the feeling* of omnipotence, divine fury, judgement, and so on, while Napoleon might be the *feeling* of triumph, persecution, victory, defeat and so on' (Buchanan 2008, 80). In the last moment of Kishi's life rendered as a state of delirium by the artist, Kishi passes the states of intensities and 'identifies' with the flow of conjunctive capitalism, a force set in place by him in Manchuria later influencing the Four East Asian Tiger economies.

It is important to note here that the comparison of Japanese war machine to the conjunctive operations of desire of a capitalist machine is not a way to play down the horror of militancy, nor is this likening Kishi to vampire, the latter itself a creature gone awry in the schizo capitalistic order, to exonerate Kishi from his wilful decisions. Rather, the vampire is a figuration of capitalistic desire, used in a personal and impersonal sense. Similarly, analysing living networks, Thacker and Galloway hold that the contemporary capitalistic system we live in contains 'an anonymity, a nonhuman component, which consistently questions common notions of action, causality, and control' (Galloway and Thacker 2007).

6.4. Capitalism today

This section follows from the method of dynamic interpretation and immanent critique to examine Manchukuo and its postwar heirs in the context of capitalism and the capitalist global order. I will also try to tackle the extent to which the protectionism and state intervention can be said as a rupture to the capitalist system. This is done by bringing Manchukuo, Japan,

later East Asian players, and most recently China into the picture. The aim is not to write a history of capitalism in East Asia, but rather to show the operations of authority sometimes working in tandem and sometimes against cultural tropes, so to constitute an immanent critique that teases out inherent contradictions and deconstructions. Clearly, this special regard for political economy grows out the methodology pertaining to historical materialism, and as such offers a chance to bring the discourses from the ‘old’ and ‘new’ materialism together.

6.4.1. Manchukuo and Confucianism in political economy

As we have seen with Kyoto School’s reworking of Confucian governance, the modernisation of Confucianism is not without contest. Here, I will only focus on the economic aspect. The history of modern China is intricately associated with debates on tradition and modernity. Ideologies ridden, the two often seem to be mutually exclusive, creating conceptual and cultural borders. The debate underlies political, social and technological movements since the late 19th century, when Western-minded and Western-trained (including Japan) politicians, intellectuals and entrepreneurs initiated the process of China’s modernisation. The anti-traditionalist movements in China experienced its first heyday in the May Fourth movement in 1919 where science and democracy was upheld against traditional, primarily Confucian ideals. Communism, following the Soviet political line, drove the country further into modernisation. The divisive, dogmatic binary ideology, a stiff version of dialectics of Soviet and Chinese Communism, seen in the divide between classes, traditional and modern culture, idealist and materialist positioning, prevailed in China, peaking during the Cultural Revolution with a long aftermath.

The vehemently anti-traditionalist ideology based on class-struggle was replaced since the 80s and 90s by the ideology of integration and proved to be the driving force behind the social and economic reforms. Since then, China has embraced market economy successfully practicing a ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’. After a period of skill and knowledge transfers, China is not shy to pronounce its vision to be a world-leading technology innovator in the near future.

There seems to be delineation between the traditional China and a modern, capitalistic and technologised China. Or is there? Contra any clear definition, China’s modern history is multi-layered and sometimes irreducible to Western experiences. For some scholars, the decisive factor has been the successful if not somewhat dubious marriage between traditionalism/Confucianism and capitalism. According to scholar Gan Yang, the modernisation of China is a struggle to fuse or communicate Confucianism, socialism, and

liberalism (*tong santong* 通三统). Crucially, the transition from socialism to capitalism went rather smoothly, as opposed to Russia and post-socialist Eastern European countries, because decentralisation of power was already in place in Mao's time so that at the local level people could take their own initiatives. (Gan 2007) In this sense, the economic success of China owes to remnants of Confucianism with a certain feudalist connotation. Here feudalism should be understood not as a backward form of governance but one that rather affirms the distribution of power and local rule, at the same time bound by the Confucian concept of *da yitong* 大一统 – a common pursuit and respect for unity, effectively creates what can be called Confucian capitalism. In parallel, since the 2000s, there has been a revival of traditional Chinese culture. As a consequence, renewed efforts have been put into teaching classical Chinese literature and public address made by top politicians not infrequently cite classical texts.

However, what exactly does tradition and Confucianism mean in a modern society? It seems that Confucianism becomes a go-to theory to conveniently explain (or not) both 'retrograde' attitude and a 'progressive' one depending on where one stands. On the one hand, Confucianism is often taken to be the moral backbone and ideology that helped the emperors ruled China (and influenced East Asia) for almost two thousand years, based on a purportedly rigid differential, hierarchical society. Some have attributed the economic boom of East Asia states to the Confucian work ethic, whereby the individual worker is subordinated to the social hierarchy and collectivity. On the other hand, Confucianism can also be interpreted as a dynamic, non-hierarchical social field based on non-transactional reciprocities and social mobility. So, is Confucianism naturally traditionalist in political economy? And do we mean protectionist by traditionalist? Scale and context is crucial for an engagement that is neither naively anti-(Western-)modern nor self-orientalising, which may be a criterion when revisiting the Confucian capitalism and the legacy of Manchukuo today. With this in mind, let's turn to capitalism and East Asian economics.

Deleuze and Guattari provide an excellent exposition on the contradictory way that capitalism works on the ruins of the previous orders in tandem with the image of schizophrenia, or desire in a free-flow state:

[S]ocial machines make a habit of feeding on the contradictions they give rise to, on the crises they provoke, on the anxieties they engender, and on the infernal operations they regenerate. Capitalism has learned this, and has ceased doubting itself, while even socialists have abandoned belief in the possibility of capitalism's natural death by

attrition. No one has ever died from contradictions. And the more it breaks down, the more it schizophrenises, the better it works, the American way. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 151)

Later in the book, they offer a sharp account on the relation between the schizo and capitalism:

Hence one can say that schizophrenia is the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push it back or displace this limit, by substituting for its own *immanent* relative limits, which it continually reproduces on a widened scale. It axiomatises with one hand what it decodes with the other. Such is the way one must reinterpret the Marxist law of the counteracting tendency. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 246)

By identifying the tendency of capitalism which works by substituting its limit with schizophrenic free-flow and reproducing the latter to enlarge the scope of its own immanence, Deleuze and Guattari exhibit great foresight in unpacking the mutation of capitalism into neoliberalism: its ability to contradict itself, to bend, in order not to break. A history of protectionism and the neoliberalisation of trade and finances can be approached through this model.

6.4.2. Trade protectionism

The ‘mother country and bastion of modern protectionism’ as the economic historian Paul Bairoch called it, is nowhere other than America. In the nineteenth century, it was on way to industrialisation and its average tariffs in the late nineteenth century were nearly as high – 45 per cent – as the steepest ones the Trump administration promises to slap on imported electronic goods in 2017. (Mishra 2018) The philosophical father of economic protectionism is, as Mishra points out, Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804), the founder of the American financial system who proposed a protectionist strategy for national development after America broke free from the British control.

In his ‘Report on the Subject of Manufactures’ submitted to Congress in 1791, Hamilton used the potent term ‘infant’ industries to argue for economic protectionism. Hamilton’s father was Scottish. Born in the West Indies, then a British colony, Hamilton was keenly aware of

how the British practiced protectionism: preventing colonies from competing while selling their own goods around the world. In his view, infant nations needed room to manoeuvre before they could compete with established industrial powers. The United States embraced many of Hamilton's recommendations; the beneficiaries were, first, the textile and iron industries and then steel. [...] It was Hamilton's formula, rather than free trade, that made the United States the world's fastest-growing economy in the 19th century and into the 1920s. And that formula was embraced by other nations coming late to international economic competition. (Mishra 2018)

Hamilton's pupils included the Germans, the Japanese and, ultimately, the Chinese. The German economist Friedrich List (1789-1846) lived in the United States from 1825 until the 1830s and observed that young industries must be nurtured first in a protective environment before they can excel in a free market. Applying List's lessons, Germany moved with spectacular speed from an agrarian to an industrial economy after its unification in 1871. Japan, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, modernised the nation with Western knowledge and caught up with Western industrialisation within a few decades following Germany's path. (Mishra 2018) Japan defeated Russia in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, marking the first time in history a 'non-Western' power winning over a Western powerhouse. Japanese militant nationalists quickly moved to an expansionist agenda, as the history of Manchukuo evinces.

Fast forward to the postwar era. The International Monetary Fund was founded in 1944 in Bretton Woods as a supranational economic institution to regulate international monetary cooperation and to preserve the stability of international financial markets. It stipulated, among others, that all currencies were pegged to the U.S. dollar, itself convertible into gold. In 1971, the U.S. unilaterally terminated the pegging to the gold standard, followed by an era of lifted restrictions on capital flows. Now the IMF has drifted away from its original mission, as it is committed to globalisation of trade, financialisation of markets and global integration of the circuits of production. As Hardt and Negri point out, 'The IMF is thus charged with developing a way to govern the new forms of global social production (which are now post-Fordist, postmodern, and defined by the biopolitical condition of the multitude) through financial mechanisms. The basic project of the IMF has become forcing states to abandon Keynesian social programs and adopt monetarist policies. It dictates for ailing and poor economies a neoliberal formula that includes minimal spending on public welfare, privatisation of public industry and wealth, and the reduction of public debt' (Hardt 2004, 173).

Hardt and Negri identify the connection between dropping the gold standard in 1971, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty signed by the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1972, and the first

oil crisis in 1973, as they signal a period of great social and economic transformation. Importantly, the global order was in the remaking: ‘war itself had begun to be transformed – less oriented toward defending against a coherent mega-threat and more focused on proliferating mini-threats; less intent on the general destruction of the enemy and more inclined toward the transformation or even production of the enemy’ (Hardt 2004, 39). We have seen such production of the enemy in the concrete, such as in the Near East, which results in the political turmoil of a region serving as background to the work of Abu Hamdan, discussed in the second chapter.

Political interventions continue through financial means. Trade wars and financial interventions born out of trade deficits are means of the strong states to their own ends just as international institutions are liable to manipulation of strong states. This is where the state-guided capitalism of Manchukuo, with the continuation of its logical heirs into the present, most notably in China.

6.4.3. Japan’s lost decade and Asian financial crisis

China, though a dedicated member of the World Trade Organisation, offers a potential counter point to the model of neo-liberalisation. Since 2017, China has imposed stringent capital controls to shield its economy from volatility, a move often rebuked by Western neo-liberal institutions. In order to understand how China positions itself, it is important to revisit the 1991/1992 economic meltdown of Japan and 1997 Asian financial crisis, which in many ways has presaged China’s path of development as a latecomer to the game of industrial and economic modernisation. As said, the IMF and the capitalist world order go hand in hand. Its role in the financial disaster of Southeast Asia comes to the fore, showing that ‘a monetary policeman is never neutral and always supports a specific political regime’ (Hardt 2004, 174).

Japan proved a postwar economic miracle and rose to become the world’s second largest economy in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Japanese export of electronic consumer goods and automobiles in the U.S. enjoyed sweeping success; at the same time, there was mounting trade deficit to Japan. This triggered the Japan Panic in the 1980s, an updated version of the Yellow Peril racialism rooted in stereotypes of the mass hordes of Japanese or East Asians, but within a new context of global trade and postmodern technological advances. In one infamous instance, a Chinese American man named Vincent Chin was beaten to death outside Detroit in 1982 because a laid-off automobile worker believed he was Japanese and hence responsible for the U.S. automobile industry’s plight. At the same time, there is always a sense of awe within the fear. As captured in Michael Crichton’s novel *Rising Sun*, the Japan Panic of the 1980s ‘focused

the American gaze toward the postmodern, high-tech, Japan-dominated future' (McKevitt 2017, 68). Against the background of sushi's huge popularity in the U.S., the film adaptation of *Rising Sun* tellingly features a scene of *nyotaimori*, the obscure practice of serving sushi on a naked woman's body. The naked white woman in the film became 'not just servants but objects of servitude', a token of Japanese culture's 'colonisation' of America (McKevitt 2017, 157).

In the face of the ballooning trade deficit, major industrial players in the US lobbied the Congress to consider protectionist policies, which led to the Plaza Accord signed in 1985, resulting in the depreciation of the US Dollar against the Japanese Yen by 51% from 1985 to 1987. The strong appreciation of the Yen triggered a recession in Japan and further triggered the crash of the asset price bubble in 1991/1992. Japan suffered from an economic stagnation for the ensuing two decades – the 'lost decades'.

Further ripple effects abound. Japanese investments in the 1980s kickstarted the strong economic growth in Southeast Asia. In the 1990s, economic growth rates in Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, hovered above 5% and showed signs of overheating. At the time, Japan's expansion had slowed down to 3.6% in the wake of a recession. The boom of Southeast Asian nations started in the late 1980s and early 1990s thanks to textile, food, automobile and semiconductor manufacturing industries. Prior to the 1997 crisis, the currencies of the Southeast Asian nations were already exposed to the risk of devaluation because of the slowdown in export and the risk of debt defaults. They had attracted up to half of global capital inflows into developing countries due to high return rates and liberal capital control policies, which allowed domestic banks and offices of foreign banks in the region to absorb unrestricted foreign credit. Hot money was pouring into Southeast Asian real estate and stock markets and bubbles accumulated. There had been growing current account deficits, meaning that countries imported more goods, services and capital than they exported. The disproportionately high amount of foreign debt added growing pressure on the domestic markets. In late 1996, Thailand's short-term foreign debt amounted to \$47.7 billion, while the foreign exchange reserves of the country at the time stood at \$37.2 billion, making Thailand effectively insolvent even before the actual crisis broke out.

Most of the Southeast Asian currencies were pegged to a basket of currencies, predominantly the US dollar. In contrast to floating exchange rate systems based on supply and demand compared to other currencies, this requires the national bank of the respective nation to intervene in foreign currency purchases in order to balance its own currency. For example, when there is a growing interest from global capital to invest in Thailand, the demand for Thai

baht increases, and the Thai central bank needs to buy foreign currency with Thai baht to increase the supply of the currency in the global market accordingly. This system requires the country to sit on substantial foreign currency reserves to adopt to the changing climate of the currency market.

In 1997, when the confidence of lenders dropped in response to a variety of factors including a slower growth rate, higher U.S. interest rates and China's role as an emerging manufacturer, it precipitated a mass withdrawal of credit and led to huge capital outflows, putting depreciative pressure on the currencies. Speculative assaults on the currencies exacerbated the situation. Currency speculators like Soros began heavily shorting the currencies. This means that he turned a profit by betting on the devaluation of a currency. On July 2, 1997, after the Thai government spent tens of billions of foreign exchange reserves to stabilise the baht to no avail, it was forced to float its currency, resulting in the depreciation of the baht by 15.59% on the first day. This triggered a ripple effect in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the following months, the Indonesian rupiah lost more than 80%, the Malaysian ringgit 45%, the Singapore dollar 20%, the Korean won 50%, and the stock market plummeted by 75% in Indonesia, 50% in Malaysia and 30% in Taiwan.

The consequences were grave and far-reaching. Governments in Indonesia and Thailand collapsed. Numerous businesses went bankrupt, millions of workers were laid off, over ten thousand committed suicide in Hong Kong, Japan and Korea alone. Not to mention an entire generation that would grow up in the shadow of a financial crisis without a perspective. The International Monetary Fund stepped in and offered a series of bailout packages, most notably to Korea, on condition the recipients continue to liberalise their financial sector and open domestic markets. Saskia Sassen interprets the Asian financial crisis as 'global systemic disciplining, even punishment for pursuing their own type of policies aimed at keeping their economies under firm control by national capital owners and to some extent the state. Rather than seeing the imposition of further "liberalization" and deregulation on their economies made possible partly by the "crises" of these economies, as state adaptability to the global era, I would interpret these crises and the ensuing liberalisations as an imposed systemic adjustment to the current global economic regime' (Sassen 2006, 227). She identifies the model of 'participation in the global economy' represented by the United States as the current global economic regime (Sassen 2006, 228).

Sassen firmly stands by a liberal global economic order and attributes the crisis to strong national capital controls of the economies. The question remains: How open should emerging economies be to global capital? After two decades, perhaps only one strong alternative to this

logic has arisen. A surging China has certainly learnt its lessons from the Asian financial crisis. At a national and global level, with the world's biggest middle-class consumer market as its base, Chinese capitalism displays characteristics of both a fully-fledged market economy and strong state intervention, with state-owned enterprises and public-private investments in strategic sectors. Before the Asian crisis, Beijing had considered opening China to international capital flows by the 2000s, but ever since, tighter measures against capital outflow were being implemented, reaching an apogee in 2017. According to a *Financial Times* opinion piece, 'in this way China is embracing international capital strictly on its own terms and neutralising the power of latter-day Mr Soros. It is a vision of capitalism in which capital is trussed and bound, incapable of punishing those who violate its animating algorithms' (Kynge 2017).

The 2008 financial crisis was precipitated by financial deregulation promoted by the likes of Alan Greenspan. The core of the crisis, being defaulted sub-prime credits, shares similarities to the Asian financial crisis, only that the U.S. banks were 'too big to fail' and needed to be bailed out. There have been many voices against unfettered liberal capitalism, calling for more intrusive regulation, more proactive interference and wishing for a new Bretton Woods to control the global flow of capital. The national capital controls of China was born exactly as a reaction to this problem (among other political and ideological justifications, beyond the scope of my dissertation here).

Admittedly, the war-economy-politics machine in our current era has taken on new characteristics. Yet the underlying logic, if we look at it in a long enough timeline and through a lens of abstract machines, has always been the same. Incessant decoding, dislodging, untying desire coded and overcoded by the previous regimes, capitalism replaces all the territorialising tendencies with the non-limit of schizophrenia itself, that is, it bends, embodies contradictions and ruptures, and continues business as usual. It has no exterior limit, but only an interior limit that is capital itself and that it does not encounter, but reproduces by always displacing it.

6.5. Terror and Territory: Resonance beyond capitalism?

Kishi the Vampire has come to an end. Yet the 'aftertaste' of what the artist calls an 'economic horror story' can be profound. Beyond the figure of vampire that Kishi embodies, there is a sense of horror or terror grumbling underneath, a terror of a systematic kind as we have traced in the history of capitalism. Under this light, is it possible to reground ourselves amidst incessant motions?

6.5.1. Regrounding and the earth

Writing from the present moment of planetary climate change, Latour reflects on how geological history has accelerated to the point of non-return as a result of human exploitation. He calls for an ‘Earthbound’ becoming, which demands the human to ‘rematerialise our belonging to the world,’ or a kind of regrounding that has been highlighted in various philosophical propositions as we will see now (Latour 2017). This entails embracing the possibility that the Earth may take its tolls on the human. At one moment, Latour comments on ‘terror’ and ‘territory’:

Geohistory would need a visual representation as good as the old representations of geography and history, finally fused. It is as though every limit, every border, every boundary marker, every encroachment – in short, every feedback loop – has to be simultaneously and collectively recounted, traced, replayed, and ritualised. Each of the loops registers the unanticipated actions of some external agent that comes in to complicate human action. Owing to this reactivity, what a ‘territory’ signifies has been totally disrupted: it is no longer the old pastoral landscape of well-marked fields on which harvests ripen slowly and reliably – ‘*Et in Arcadia ego.*’ Far from being ‘land-appropriation,’ the *Landnahme* celebrated by Carl Schmitt, it is rather the violent *reappropriation* of all human claims by the Earth itself – as though ‘territory’ and ‘terror’ had a common root. (Latour 2017, 276)

As put forward in the chapters concerning the constructions of history, this earth is the primary body on which the socius inscribes itself. In the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, the earth is the element that brings together all the elements within a single embrace while using one or another of them to deterritorialise territory. On this body, things continue to differentiate, or divide, but only onto themselves. Thinking and being, similarly, as seen in the nomadology that Deleuze and Guattari put forward, is in the first place immanent to earth (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

The connection between geological movements of earth and politics has a long history in anarchist geography. At the height of scientific explorations of Central Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century, when cartography serviced the military and designs of roads and railways met the interest of capitalists, French anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus (1830–1905) saw geology and geography being mined for geopolitical leverage. He attempted to write the story of the earth and of humanity as one, or as he terms it, the story of ‘nature

becoming self-conscious'. Integral to this history is an account of the forces of domination that emerge in human history, only to restrict the future self-realisation of both humanity and nature. (Clark 2013, 6) Incidentally, Kropotkin, the Russian founder of anarcho-communism who befriended and was influenced by Reclus, was also a geographer before he turned an anarchist. Kropotkin's greatest contribution to geography was working out the main structural lines going through Central and Northern Asia. He had also contributed to the study of biology by proposing the idea of 'mutual aid' instead of the Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' as the principle underlying evolution, which we have seen earlier. Both anarchist geographers explored the parallel territories of geographical movements and social movements and attempted to debase social domination by creating self-organised bodies of communities. They saw the basic underpinnings are class struggle, the search for equilibrium and the sovereign decision of the individual. (Jun and Wahl 2010, 221)

As John Clark, the translator of Reclus' seminal texts points out, 'Reclus would certainly recognise the significant differences between human and primate hierarchies, yet he sees the use of such terminology as no threat to his anarchist principles or his hopes for humanity. In his analysis, such language draws attention to a certain continuity between phenomena in the human and natural worlds. Yet from the history of humanity one can learn that social hierarchies are contingent, historically developed institutions that may be rejected if human beings choose to organise their communities in other ways' (Clark 2013, 19). On the historical level, the contingent character of social hierarchies as a historical formation perfectly anticipated Deleuze and Guattari's idea on the contingency in history. And on the philosophical level, anarchist geographers are in line with geophilosophy's basic underpinning that thinking takes place in relation to earth and territory, and before the definite deterritorialisation of concepts, it happens immanent to earth and territory. This leads us to the philosophical proposals of the Kyoto School, founded in the 1910s and partially concurrent to the events leading to Manchukuo.

6.5.2. The Kyoto School, Confucian cosmotechnics and modernity

To grapple with the desire of the time and shifts in power is exactly what the Kyoto School thinkers set out to do. Kitaro Nishida theorised an idea of absolute nothingness inspired both by the Buddhism concept of Śūnyatā (emptiness) and Western philosophy. The fundamental emptiness lies underneath everything and as such, it is a primary concept and not secondary to being. Nishida models the world in such a way that there is not an individual that has the experience, but that there is an experience that has the individual. Methodologically, instead of establishing a continuum beyond subject and object from the inside-out, Nishida re-casts his

method, moving from the outside-in, he hence adopts terms like ‘pure experience’ to talk about the anonymous, impersonal quality of experience. (Thacker 2015, 51).

In his book *The Question Concerning Technology in China. An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, philosopher Yuk Hui traces various modernisation attempts in philosophy by East Asian thinkers. He seems to read that the total war serves as an accelerationist strategy and as such, provides an answer to the philosophy of negation in the Kyoto School. (Hui 2016, 257) A philosophical historical account should use caution when reading history through ideas to qualify each other, as in this parallel reading between the Kyoto School and Japan’s war engagements. Even though some discourses may have indirectly led to grave consequences, following a materialist standpoint, total war is less the cause than the effect of expansive capitalism. Eugene Thacker has also worked through the absolute nothingness in the Kyoto School, and sees that therein lies the potential of a ‘post-national, global philosophy’ (Thacker 2015, 49). The ‘single ocean’ rhetoric mentioned earlier may ring true here. This connection to a global axis reminds me of Confucian scholars in 19th century Nanjing mentioned in the introduction chapter, who believed that ritual and self-cultivation can achieve moral betterment that ultimately radiates to the whole empire. They hence promoted virtuous conducts by repairing shrines commemorating historical persons and engaged vigorously in compiling local gazetteer. The idea of *ganying*, resonance, was crucial, for all the work done in the self-nurturing could influence the cosmic harmony of *qi*, energy, and hence had a direct relation to enhancing state power. In this sense ‘local actors could engage in attempts at state building’ (Wooldridge 2015).

Ultimately, it comes to the question of cosmotechnics in Yuk Hui’s book. Hui argues against the Eurocentric and universal understanding of technics, and that precisely because of the cosmological and moral dimension imbedded in Confucianism, technics as such never existed in China. He then proposes ‘cosmotechnics’ as ‘the unification between the cosmic order and the moral order through technical activities’ in order to overcome the conceptual dualism of technics and nature (Hui 2016, 19-20). Cosmotechnics enters in fruitful dialogue with philosopher Gilbert Simondon and anthropologist Tim Ingold, who attempt to reground the human into the world, thereby reuniting the figure and the ground. The cosmotechnics, in this way, can be seen as a reunification of the technics (器 *Qi*, tools) and cosmos (道 *Dao*, the way, order). Hui’s own version of cosmotechnics takes the materiality of technics into account which pushes the possibility of matter to its limit (Hui 2016, 43).

Drawing on Bernard Stiegler, Hui discerns the different approaches to time in the West and China. Whereas the concept of time serves as technics enabling exteriorisation of memory in the West, traditional China did not develop such a geometric or spatialised concept of time, which in turns conditions the impasse to its development of technics in the Western sense. The Chinese concept of time could be seen in the unceasing efforts of court historians of interpreting ancient texts to give advice to emperors. Hui then makes a plea for regrounding technics into the cosmology, following Simondon and Leroi-Gourhan, who have argued that the experience of technics is related to and partially conditioned by cosmology, and that technology is a bifurcation of magic in the first place (Hui 2016, 203-223). (This aspect of technology seen in the direct lineage of magic is pertinent to the chapter on Ho Tzu Nyen.)

Modern China, in Hui's account, has shattered the Qi-Dao unity. Hui traces the various attempts of integrating Qi and Dao in New Confucian thinkers of 20th century, most notably in Mou Zongsan's idealist proposition, who strove to bridge the 'phenomenon' and 'noumenon,' or what is observable and what is analogous to Dao, which failed to overcome modernity for he did not take the question of technology seriously. Yuk Hui highlights the study of Mou Zongsan's idea of 'the self-negation or self-restriction of *liangzhi*' – the cosmic mind or righteousness knowledge to be extinguished from the knowing mind of objective knowledge, comparable to the intellectual intuition in Kant. The upshot of Mou's theorisation of Confucianism in the 20th century is in his formulation of Confucianism as a moral metaphysics, invested in the cosmic knowledge – or intellectual intuition and *noumenon* that Kant claims to only pertain to God and not humans. And this cosmic knowledge is always already moral. The modernisation project for Confucianism Mou sees involves a lapse of this *liangzhi* / cosmic mind so that it can transform into a 'subject of cognition,' able to carry out cognitive and analytical activities and gain objective knowledge in the world of phenomenon. He terms this 'one mind opens two gates'.

This would indeed provide an initial condition for the development of speculative reason. Yet, Mou returns to the grand scheme of concentric circles whereby the efforts of an individual can be extended to encompass the world. There he proposes not to take the traditional way from the self-nurturing of the emperor extending to the well-being of a nation, but by taking a detour from outside in. This, may be seen as a counter-movement of the scholars in Nanjing one century before him. Yuk Hui summarises Mou's position as idealist, 'Qi 器 is a possibility of Dao', or the technics is a possibility and remains subordinate to the sagely way/intellectual intuition.

Here's I'd like to postulate the fundamental problem with this *liangzhi*, or moral metaphysics by bringing in the concept of speculative reason in Whitehead's process philosophy, which is crucial for technological thinking. Confucian philosophy resonates very much with process philosophy in revealing the internal dynamism, the constant flux and transformation of things. Whitehead famously formulates the exercise of speculative reason as follows: 'The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalisation; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation' (Whitehead 1929, 5).

This entails three phases of discovery, namely observation, generalisation and renewed observation. In the second phase, new data and above all, new conditions unthought-of before are recognised, leading to the third phase where the scheme is applied to items that were not taken into account in the construction of the scheme itself. Hence speculative reason does not conform to conditions set by antecedent circumstances and offers a state of being not determined by linear chain of cause and effect. It is an 'adventure of ideas', open for novelty and experimentation. Luciana Parisi extrapolates this into computation world, and highlights the proliferation of what cannot be calculated in the face of the infinite amount of data introduced into computation. For her, the incomputable conditions computation today. It means that 'a notion of speculative reason is not concerned with the prediction of the future through the data of the past, but with incomputable quantities of data that rather transform initial conditions' (Parisi 2013, 9).

In contrast, the Confucianism framed quest for knowledge is always at the level of communicating the cosmic mind to achieve a man-heaven alignment in the world of immanence. To be sure, Confucianism does affirm the creation of something new, something that has never existed in the same way before. For example, Confucian philosopher Zhang Zai (1020-1077) speaks of this as the wondrous making of change: ' (《易》) 語其推行故曰'道', 語其不測故曰'神', 語其生生故曰'易', 其實一物。 Yijing/ I Ching/ Book of Changes] speaks of its moving along and proceeding, and therefore it says "the Way;" it speaks of its unfathomableness, and therefore it says "the marvelous;" it speaks of its continuously producing [things], and therefore it says "Change." In reality, these are all one thing.' (Zhang)

But does it qualify as speculative reason? While it allows for novelty, the idea and action of *shen*, 'the marvelous' pertains to the creative cosmic consciousness, to which the human aligns himself. Even though this cosmic feeling may not be immediately manifested to humans, it is there and can be approached by practice, which is the view held by Mou Zongsan, who

extrapolates it to the Kantian ‘intellectual intuition’. In this sense, after taking the flight and coming back to ground, despite the new data and new conditions gained to rectify the scheme, the conclusion would pertain to a meta-condition that is always stable. This can be seen in *tiangong kaiwu*, a 17th century Chinese encyclopedia of technology, where confirms the human effort of transforming things, yet attributes the making of machines to a resonance in the human that emanates from the heaven, and that ultimately it is heaven that lies behind everything.

The crucial point then becomes, how much dynamism is allowed in this heaven. For Alfred North Whitehead, the world of God offers the conceptual experience where the physical, temporal world is initially derived and motivated from. But the world of God is neither permanent nor perfectly determined. Instead, it also evolves with the world of physical, consequent experiences, which feed back into the conceptual realm to its process of completion. Normally religions assume a realm of static God, separate from the flux and impermanence, which doesn’t explain the interplay between the thing which is static and the things which are fluent. Hence such philosophies must include the notion of ‘illusion’ as a fundamental principle—the notion of ‘*mere* appearance.’ This is, for Whitehead, the final Platonic problem. (Whitehead 1929, 345-347)

In essence, the Whiteheadian God factors in the changing world as if in a feedback loop. Different from the Chinese system in which everything is under the sway of the creative cosmic consciousness, Whitehead is able to work out an image of the world with continual creative advance and speculative reason, while the traditional Chinese system, while internally dynamic, can be understood as an ‘absolutisation of immanence,’ or in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, the figures of Chinese thinking tend infinitely close to concepts of Western philosophy.

To go back to the model of Qi and Dao, for me, the insufficiency of this model lies not only in Qi as a mere possibility of Dao, but also – if one follows the materialist history through the lens of desire, that the exercise of the negation of *liangzhi* remains caught in and insofar affirmed as it has to direct back at the core of the moral cosmos, resembling a set of concentric circles with the perfect alignment of things, humans and the universe. Yet the modernisation of China starting in late 19th century marks the transition from precapitalist despotic machine to the capitalistic machine, the latter cannot be surmounted by returning to a previous world order.

In this sense, Kyoto School’s Keiji Nishitani’s theoreisation of a different world history and his emphasis on the emptiness may enter into dialogue with Mou Zongsan, roughly contemporary to him. Though both attempts are debatable for reasons we will see before. Still, for Hui, it is necessary to ‘go back to the question of time and to open up a pluralism which

allows a new world history to emerge, but one which is subordinated neither to global capitalism and nationalism, nor to an absolute metaphysical ground' (Hui 2016, 261)

While Hui is aware that cosmotechnics is not just a return to a cosmology (53), in affirming that technics bifurcate from cosmology (as technics from science in Simondon), the argument leads to technics needing the same element to which it is born and from which, in some cultures, it has not been separated – that is, cosmology. Doubtlessly there are conceptual and social-political merits in re-affirming the cosmological dimension in the belief and practice of the contemporary man. I do not wish to deny the existence of variegated cosmologies in our contemporary society. On the contrary, I acknowledge them all the more precisely because there is a reason for their increasing visibility, that is late capitalism (see section on animism and Chibber in introduction chapter).

In modern China, the traditional Confucian alignment was disrupted and in its place, the most efficient state-guided capitalism has been installed, which follows the conjunctive capitalistic logic and decodes every social strata and entity to turn decoded real or virtual bodies and capital for production. Hui's own understanding of capitalism implicates the mutation of capitalism. He writes, 'capitalism is the contemporary cosmotechnics that dominates the planet', and as a 'mode of power', it takes on cosmic dynamics. (Hui 2016, 299) Ultimately it leads him to propose the reappropriation of modern technologies and technological consciousness as a way to overcome modernity through modernity itself. This variety of cosmotechnics should 'resist the global time-axis that has been constructed by modernity' (Hui 2016, 306). The conjunctive mode of capitalism in its ever-intensive decoding and expanding capacity, double-folding the multi-connective desire from primary societies may indeed be said to liken cosmic dynamics. Yet to unveil the cosmic dynamics, a closer investigation firmly situated both in historical materialism and new materialism(s) is in order. As expounded on above, Chinese capitalism, at a national and global scale, has the characteristics of both fully-fledged market economy and strong state intervention with state-owned enterprises and public-private investments in strategic sectors. It bends but does not break.

This is the ultimate strength of capitalism. Capitalism enlists the movement of desire from the primitive society, and in contemporary China it conflates capitalism with the despotic state. To draw a diagram congenial to this and previous chapters, the despotic state can be likened to a set of concentric circles with a defined centre where the power emanates from, be it the religious leader or king, or a combined figure. The centrifugal momentum of capitalism dislodges bodies, entities, relations from their once set places in the system so to expand into new markets, labour and new debt relations. China ticks with both and centrifugal motions of

capital and centripetal motions of totalisation. At each location, be it individual persons or communities, there are various forces at play. The crucial question here is whether the pure experience in Nishitani and the proposal of Mou pertain rather to an order of the man-heaven alignment in the despotic regime than is able to effectuate any change in conjunctive capitalism, where ‘capital (or the liberation of matters from formed bodies) is the tendency of matter itself’ (Colebrook 2009, 8).

And to go back to the question of cosmotechnics, or the attempt to reinsert technics into a ground beyond the dualistic divide, one has to realise the differential scales between the sway of capitalism and the scale on which such regrounding can happen, and should not to conflate the cosmic dimension as the moral axiological axis, which capitalism incessantly dislodges. Hui is aware of the importance of locality, and emphasises how interconnected it is in the global capitalism network (Hui 2016, 307). The local should be taken not just in terms of location but also in terms of potential, seen in the creative advance of matter against stratifications, and to overspill the capture of capitalism and politics.

This is where the chapters in the dissertation may demonstrate their respective answers to the ‘cosmotechnics’ through their local engagements with technologies, for the technologies involved are never taken as a given but layered with cultural meanings and governing structures. At the same time, the men-machines assemblage is one embedded in a larger relational network beyond the individuals and the machines, and the assemblage, by its immanent configurations, allow a kind of agency/desire to emerge. It then invites the question, is the desire desirable (as in late capitalism)? Where are its immanent cracks? To unpack these questions, art offers a place where we could reground ourselves. Through the enaction of desire and history in Royce Ng’s work, we have gained an affective sense of the magnitude and force implicated in the question of capitalism and necropolitics.

6.6. Opium Dream and Butterfly Dream

In this spirit, this chapter, instead of providing answers, ends with two fables on dreams. As weight and terror in the history of political-economy in East Asia and the world bear down on us, dreams may appear unapologetically airy. Yet indeed, *Kishi the Vampire* is teemed with hallucinatory sceneries: over-dimensional skeleton hovering over industrial sites, brothels with organismic backdrops, all rendered in screaming colours. The artist intended the atmosphere to be dream-like, despite or precisely because of the concrete violence unfolding in it. This lends the scenes to a rather counter-intuitive reading: the scenes as opium-induced dreams. At the end, we will see how this dream that Royce Ng paints for us not just a nightmare to be buried,

nor an alibi for self-numbing passivity, but rather points to the possible critical engagement of disidentification.

The hallucinatory effect of opium lends it to a strange relation to dream. Koester comments, ‘Opium is the quintessential capitalist raw material - the purchase and sale of dreams – and as a commodity it is surrounded by a hallucinatory mysteriousness as if its “real” components cannot quite be separated from its effect’ (Koester 2008, 141).

Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* is one of the earliest and the best known first-person account on the effect of opium: his descriptions of his opiate ramblings through the streets of London become the inspiration for later psychogeographical experiments; a new gateway to the modern city through chemical reveries, the conscious derangement of the senses. De Quincey transforms opium from being an anaesthetising medicine to a portal on to what he calls ‘the secret inscriptions of the mind’, journeys in time to forgotten memories, which seem to be carved from the very darkness of sleep – an often dangerous and frightening enterprise. (Koester 2008, 141)

In *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, there is a curious scene where a ‘Malay’ sailor shows up at De Quincey’s cottage in the Lakes District of Northern England. Without linguistic means to communicate, De Quincey presents him a piece of opium, which he consumes before pursuing his onward journey. What seems to be a brief encounter between the East and West, without the overlaid colonial power relations being explicit, turns out to be a transcultural delirium later. De Quincey writes,

The Malay has been a fearful enemy for months. Every night through his means, I have been transported into Asiatic scenery...in China or Hindustan...I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms, I was the idol; I was the priest, I was worshipped, I was sacrificed... Thousands of years I lived and was buried in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and I was laid, confounded with unutterable abortions, among reeds and Nilotic mud... Over every form, and threat and punishment, and dim sightless incarceration, brooded a killing sense of eternity and infinity... The cursed crocodile became for me the object of more horror than all the rest... I was compelled to live with him and as was always the case in my dreams for centuries. Sometimes I escaped and found myself in Chinese houses. All the feet of the

tables and sofas soon because instinct with life. (De Quincey 2003)

If the earlier encounter depicts a scene between East and West featuring the primary commodities of exchange between the two civilisations, opium and tea, then the traces of the labour embedded in the production of the opium De Quincey smoked exacts revenge through opium nightmares which haunt him. This leads Royce Ng to ask how opium and its effects become a kind of middle term, much like the butterfly dream in Zhuangzi's parable that breaks down the binaries between reality and dreaming, being and nothingness, East and West, consumer and producer relation. He asks potently, did the Malay actually dream of De Quincey? (Ng 2017)

Now, it's interesting to note how this dream enacts a kind of vengeance by reverting the power relation implicated in the opium, that is, the political condition of colonialism and labour condition of (semi-)slavery. In the dream, the colonial gaze is cast back at the coloniser, coinciding perhaps the worst nightmare of the 'enlightened' man – that of the irrational, messy other. This is, to be sure, not a real revenge on the part of the Malay, indeed he may be only a hallucinatory dream of De Quincey. Note, at the same time, how this monologue reveals the multiple states of the writer, not unlike the Nietzsche account analysed in the last chapter, where he passes different intensities and assumes different roles and identities. In this sense, De Quincey's account can be said to be an effect of the ever-expansive force of colonial subjugation acting on the intimate level of bodies capitulated under its necropolitics.

Insofar as the dream exists, the affective efficacy of the dream can be affirmed. This is where it demands a careful reading of Zhuangzi's butterfly dream. Full of baffling allegories and metaphors, the text of Zhuangzi (369-298 BCE) lays the foundation for Daoist philosophy. One of Zhuangzi's philosophical convictions is 齐物论 *qiwulun*, which can be rendered verbatim as 'equalisation or levelling of things,' or interpreted as 'equality of things,' 'smoothing things out,' and 'Gleichstellung der Dinge' in German. The story of the butterfly dream is rendered as follows in the English translation:

Once Zhuangzi dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuangzi. But he didn't know if he was Zhuangzi who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuangzi. Between Zhuangzi and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things. (Watson 1968, 49)

Here I primarily draw on sinologist and philosopher Fabian Heubel's comparative study on the subject matter for the questions he raises regarding transcultural translation has most informed my reading on Zhuangzi. I reproduce two translations in Heubel's study as they exemplify different approaches to the original text in classical Chinese (with my own translation from German to English), for there is a spectrum of interpretational possibilities when it comes to classical Chinese.

I have engaged with the structure of paradox in the second chapter on language, here the challenge is more complex for it involves two seemingly different subjects and perspectives. The key, for Heubel, to understand the philosophical challenge of paradox in Zhuangzi, is a de-subjective understanding of 'equality,' or a paradoxical 'non-identity of the subject with itself' (Heubel 2016, 151).

Here is Martin Buber's translation:

Ich, Tschuang-Tse träumte einst, ich sei ein Schmetterling, ein hin und her flatternder, in allen Zwecken und Zielen ein Schmetterling. Ich wußte nur, daß ich meinen Launen wie ein Schmetterling folgte, und war meines Menschenwesens unbewußt. Plötzlich erwachte ich; und da lag ich: wieder 'ich selbst'. Nun weiß ich nicht: war ich da ein Mensch, der träumt, er sei ein Schmetterling, oder bin ich jetzt ein Schmetterling, der träumt, er sei ein Mensch? Zwischen Mensch und Schmetterling ist eine Schranke. Sie überschreiten ist Wandlung genannt.

(My translation) I, Zhuangzi (in keeping with the *pinyin* romanisation system, I use Zhuangzi instead of Tschuang-Tse), first dreamt that I was a butterfly, fluttering around, a butterfly in all its purposes and goals. I knew only that I followed my temper like a butterfly and was not aware of my humanness. Suddenly I woke up, and there I lay: again 'myself'. Now I don't know: there, was I a man who dreams he is a butterfly, or a butterfly who dreams that he is a man? Between man and butterfly is a barrier, to overcome it is called transformation.

Hans-Georg Möller criticised this translation and offered his own desubjectivised, deconstructivist version (Zhuang Zhou is the name of Zhuangzi):

Einst träumte Zhuang Zhou – und wurde ein Schmetterling, ein flatternder

Schmetterling, heiter daselbst und seinem Ansinnen eingepasst! Er wusste nichts von einem Zhou. Mit einem plötzlichen Erwachen war ein Zhou voll und ganz da. Man weiß nicht, ob ein Zhou im Traum zu einem Schmetterling wird oder ein Schmetterling im Traum zu einem Zhou. Wo es einen Zhou gibt und einen Schmetterling, da muss es eine Unterscheidung dazwischen geben. Diesbezüglich spricht man von der Wandlung der Dinge.

(My translation) First Zhuang Zhou dreamt – and became a butterfly, a fluttering butterfly, happy and fitting its own requests! It knew nothing of a Zhou. With a sudden awaking, a Zhou was fully there. One doesn't know if a Zhou becomes a butterfly in the dream or a butterfly becomes a Zhou in the dream. Where there is a Zhou and a butterfly, there must be a difference in between. Regarding this, one speaks of the transformation of things.

Heubel analyses the various translations. The commentary from Guo Xiang (?-312) on Zhuangzi shows there is no conscious subject that endures, as seen in Buber's translation. Rather, it is about an abrupt break between Zhuangzi and the butterfly, while neither party bears semblance to the other. Both states are equally authentic and real. The spontaneous and natural transformation of things are only possible because the difference between things are affirmed and not transcended as in Buber's translation (Heubel 2016, 153). In this sense, paradoxical and transpositional communication means that a subject neither discards or dissolves the identity of his position, nor does he regard the shifting between different positions as a mere imagined play where there is an enduring consciousness that never gets jeopardised. The non-identity with the self demands that the subject temporarily negates the self-conscious identity in order to pass over to a different position. The great challenge is to equalise or level (*gleichzustellen*) the different positions with regards to the grade of their realities - and this is the provocative side of Möller's reading. (Heubel 2016, 154)

Zhuangzi's non-identity with the self resonates with the notion of multiperspectivism analysed in the chapter on Spiess/Strecker's transgenetic chimera ritual. To reiterate Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's idea, non-human agents and humans both perceive the world in the same way; what varies is rather the world which they see, effectively redeeming relationality rather than substantiality as the primary way of relating to the world (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 471-472).

The butterfly dream can be recast this way: both Zhuangzi and the butterfly perceive and their ‘perspectives’ are equally valid. Regarding this comparison, Lind points out, ‘what is missing here is the perspective of the other, which is, according to Viveiros de Castro, important for the transformation (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 483). Only two ‘I’-perspectives are being compared in this tale, but the other, for whom Zhuangzi would be either himself or the butterfly, is absent. This could mean that Zhuangzi himself was also the other perspective. This would correspond to the role of the shaman in the Amazonian region, for a shaman is able to transform and thereby preserve his own perspective’ (Lind 2014, 151)

Can this be a theoretical lens through which the opium dream of De Quincey can be remediated? Without toning down the implication of colonialism, at least from the microscopic personal account of the coloniser, we can see that because of the logic of conjunctive capitalist desire, his body is the planes on which the desire works its way through by dislodging once firm structures of biopolitical control, giving rise to the opium addiction and deranged hallucinatory behaviours. Not unlike Kishi, who in the artistic rendering of Ng, passes through the states of intensities and ‘identifies’ with the flow of conjunctive capitalism in its most perverted forms, the opium eater too enters into a state of non-identity with himself and thereby sees the world through the eyes of the Malay. He does not become the Malay who dreams that he is De Quincey, but this does not discredit the authenticity of the Malay’s world now registered by the opium eater.

By dint of this passage into the Malay’s world, a process of reflecting on and deconstructing colonisation can be initiated, and the writing it becomes a potent critique of the colonial economic enterprise.

To project this into a larger background of decolonisation of the mind (being aware of the culturalist pitfalls), Heubel asks if Zhuangzi’s *qiwulun* fundamentally undermines the episteme of the Western culture, as Foucault does when he references the Chinese encyclopaedia invented by Jorge Luis Borges. Moreover, he asks if Europe has to realise that it is dreaming a dream that it doesn’t know is a dream, in order to come to its own self-contemplation (*Selbstbesinnung*). (Heubel 2016, 149-150) In this sense, to effectuate a disruption in the global discursive hegemony along with the hegemony on military and economic fronts, it might take a schizophrenic non-identification with the self to enter the passages of a ‘dream,’ so to come up with different subject positionings and ways of relating to the rest of the world. This method, however tentative, echoes the proposition put forward by Paul Gladston in the introduction. For Gladston, perspectivism issues from seemingly irreconcilable positions, which demand an injection of dynamism in the interpretation of them.

In other words, a deconstructive witnessing of deconstruction itself is in good order, to map the terrains of non-binary subjectivities and to situate local efficacies where alternative positionings break free from dialectical stand-offs. (Gladston 2019)

This is also the method of speculation put forward by Marina Vishmidt, which poses a resistance to these closures of identity by means of speculative thought that always returns to the experience of non-identity and thus to the alterity and futurity motivating every practice of critique (Vishmidt 2018b). This powerfully undoes abstract identities based on nationality, race, sex, age or any other category, as the previous chapters have variably touched on, and instigates nomadic or speculative identities. As Simon Jarvis writes, ‘Whereas abstract identity tries to get rid of difference and contradiction as mere error, speculative identity is to contain the experience of difference and contradiction within itself’ (Jarvis 1998, 169).

From the disidentification of the opium eater to the disidentification of the West, we shall now return to Kishi. The speculative identity here may appear at first sight to be a strange call, for it demands, in the case of *Kishi the Vampire*, that we – temporarily – ‘identify’ with Kish, the schizo, or *hentai*. In other words, it urges us to engage seriously with them to understand how incessant self-perpetuating capitalism works on the affective, embodied level. *Kishi the Vampire*, in this sense, is not merely a narration of historical and transhistorical events, but more crucially the enactment of this very affectivity, and through which the opening of a process of identification-disidentification-non-identification. Herein lies the power of arts, however much its ground has been structurally appropriated by capitalism (more on this in the concluding chapter). All this leads us to a subject position irreducible to the one-dimensionality that capitalism flattens us into, sometimes co-opting forces that once resist it (such as race and gender). Now, more than ever, there is an urge to exercise non-identification as a method to move forward.

6.7. Conclusion

Thinking along with Royce Ng’s *Kishi the Vampire*, the chapter has interwoven a history of Manchukuo with key agents in its politics and economy, as well as a conceptual history surrounding Manchukuo and East Asia. The figuration of Kishi and/as vampire in the performance marks a departure of the piece from merely a historical/documentarian account. Rather, the performance grounds the history in the body by shedding light on bodies under necropolitical capture and enacting the erotic-grotesque. Manchukuo provides a case in point reflecting the operation of desiring machine from the desire kept at bay in a Confucian order to

the desire of self-perpetuating capitalism: on the cultural-discursive level, its making of nationalism and multi-ethnic alliance services the semi-colonial rule; on the economic level, it heralds the advanced capitalistic stage where production is for the sake of production and war serves as the expanded means of production, and where the 'nomadic' opium trade is absorbed to reinforce the State; and on the necropolitical level of the body, desire embodied by the schizo manifests itself as perversion, resulting in the erotic-grotesque visual and material culture. While not exonerating economic and military horror, locating desire in war, violence and crime is admittedly against the grains of moralist historiography. Yet as the intellectual history co-extensive to Manchukuo evinces, there are philosophical discussions on being and negation, desire and the individual, governance and coexistence that are worthy of revisiting, not least because some of the topics are regaining traction in the long aftermath of 20th century history.

7. Chapter Seven

Conclusion: for a materialist and speculative process

The dissertation traverses milieus and space-times. It thinks with performances and tries to express how the performances ‘think’, that is, how they reflect the social and historical through the lens of expanded of bodies. The expression is not exclusive in language, but pertains to the kind, as Artaud sees, which ‘says too much to be born, and says too much in being born’ (Massumi 2002a, xxxii). Expression pertaining to the pre-personal immanent world too great to be said is exactly what compels me, and many other scholars and practitioners, to turn to performances. For in performance, expression takes a body, ‘so as to continue, generating a more to reality to absorb the excess’. And when expression is being born, it says too much in the moments of carrying over these forces of excess into tangible and intangible relations in the world. What it says too much is essentially forces of existence: ‘It disseminates life. It comes to be determined, and exceeds its determinations to become’ (Massumi 2002a, xxxii). It is this intensity of expression that are enacted in the works, and it is with this intensity of expression that the composition of this dissertation gets its initial impetus. Even though a dissertation may not convey this force adequately as it works more to illustrate it and thereby stagnating the movements, I still hope that this dissertation – at various places – could ride on the flow and pass through bodies, societies and histories.

My dissertation has come to fruition, and the questions I set out with have been thoroughly explored in the previous chapters. They point me to temporary answers, and motivate my future research. What I’d like to conclude the project with is a reflection on the recursive critical thinking pattern together with a cartography of the interconnections – a tool that may prove useful beyond this dissertation project.

Throughout the dissertation, there emerges this correlation between performances and the expression or force of life. From the outset, I have embarked on a materialism-informed inquiry to explore performances as a form of thinking in itself. This implies locating the material

processes embedded or depicted in performances, such as language and biological materials to understand the underlying flow of this force of life. At the same time, these material processes are implicated in complicated social processes, therefore merging into the world of politics, such as identity as belonging to a particular Muslim persuasion, as an East Asian woman, or identification between DNA and inheritance. The sense of magic as an alternate attitude to history or technology, cast under a new light of multiperspectivism and equally embedded in materialist studies, effectuates a kind of dis-identification, which conditions the last two chapters in the dissertation to take a more socio-political and historical outlook, and where the convergence of new materialism and historical materialism bear fruitful results. The works, in their very diverse forms, thematise the processes from codification to decodification, by creating an immanent world in the artistic works that both demonstrate in a condensed way such contradicting movements, and at the same time, by enacting the consequences of the movements, be it the phonetic materiality of language/expression, the bio-engineered chimera or the lingering of the tiger/vampire. By so doing, they point both to the positive challenge posted by the desire to overcome codifying, signifying and totalising structures, and to the potential disruptive force from decodification and destratification.

Closely examining the diverse artistic practices through the lens of materialism, this dissertation has journeyed through a wide time span and over diverse geographical locations. Though the trajectories may seem to take plural directions, each question examined transpires through different temporal/historical contexts creating a multitude of interconnections or parallel readings, and yet stays focused on its own line of argument. In my engagement with agency, different scales of critique and action become more and more entangled as the dissertation progresses. It becomes more evident that they should be accounted for on multiple levels and in negotiation with themselves as much as with the changing context.

The thinking process, therefore, has followed the method of speculation and immanent critique that takes both the motion of deconstruction (in a negative-productive way) and dynamic transformation, which entails a recursive process of regress and as such, is open for reconsideration revisions. On the conceptual and critical level, it follows a to-and-fro movement, though less like a pendulum but rather in an evolving fashion, which means the dissertation contradicts in order to affirm on a different level. This is all because there is not such a detached position from where to issue the absolute critique. What there is, rather, is a constant negotiation and the witnessing of such negotiations. For example, when it comes to the East Asian understanding of language, time or social dynamics, it may seem that the dissertation moves

between confirming and contradicting differences, for simply affirming ‘indigenous’ thinking as postcolonial critique may veil other forms of self-orientalisation and cultural elitism.

Another set of questions concern agency and/in the arts in the context of new and old materialism. What is to be done, as the complexities and opaqueness of our societies grow ever larger and as (in)dividuals we feel more disempowered and hopeless? Where can and should agency be located and exercised? These are general discussions that artists and social practitioners are questing themselves with these days, and they concern the artists I examine in the dissertation as well. However, my analysis of the works does not amount to any direct answer to these questions. Instead, it hints at critical tools with which we could approach the questions locally.

On the pertinent question of agency: given all the micro and minoritarian practices, it is possible, if not fashionable, to resolve to a posthuman world where agency is redistributed to things or to networks. While some aspects of this strand of materialist thinking, typified by ‘thing-agency,’ is not erroneous, I have pointed out especially in the chapter on Geumhyung Jeong that it risks exoneration of responsibilities and agency. Just who or what should be held accountable in a relational field for certain events? Here, we could zoom out to the level of global networks where the focus is placed on relationalities rather than objects, and we could easily end up at a place where political power, such as seen in surveillance, is increasingly distributed and decentralised. If the anti-establishment politics in the 1960s and 70s, whether in student movements or in the militant guerrilla warfare, was a kind of decentralised and nomadic counter-power strategy, then since the recent three decades, this decentralised and swarming structure has been incorporated by the state to implement what Deleuze has since long anticipated as ‘society of control’. No longer based on intuitional discipline, the society of control exercises control through continuous modulations from within. (Deleuze 1992)

Importantly, this decentralisation should not be taken as a new kind of flatness, and it especially should not foreclose the possibility of actions. Action is wedded to thinking – this is true both in the sense of ‘worlding’ in the artistic works, and in the larger social context. In the performance works, we have seen the bringing forth of a world through the bodies of the agents – biological bodies, animal and machinic bodies, dividualised human bodies, and how these bodies are entangled in social and historical processes with all their complexities and contradictions. This is not immediately in the realm of social actions, however, the way they enact ‘worlding’ gives creative insights into social processes, even though they do not provide one-to-one utilisation or application. The artistic processes and productions act on and influence the society through their affective capacities, reclaiming the affective space now occupied by

personalised advertising and the culture of influencers. This is coupled with renewed rigour of critique, one that does not stop at deconstruction but is open toward dynamic transformations.

When it comes to actions in the social context, we must recognise that there are organised and coordinated actions. Just as important, there are non-intended ones that may or may not emerge to challenge a system. One of the critiques of the flat ontology in new materialism – taken bluntly – is that there cannot be any ‘point,’ ‘whole,’ or ‘centre’ that one could scale, and therefore does not account for the ideology of capitalism’s global hegemony or of political economy in general. This leads some scholars to refocus on the human agency given the fact of its concrete effects on questions like the climate change. (Leskanich 2018)

In the face of the impending climate catastrophe, there are certain stances and propagations that pertain loosely to new materialism. The fact that it seems easier to perform geoengineering rather than to fix the problems of capitalism, as we have observed in many of the world’s leaders, private and public alike, should ring alarm bells. Capitalism is anthropomorphised, if not sacralised, as a ‘subject’, with its seeming self-perpetuation and self-realisation suggesting a will often associated with personhood. The Deep Ecology strand of thinking, on the other hand, proposes that the ecological catastrophe is rooted in overpopulation of the humanity itself, and hence argues for the striking back of nature, or rather nature taking its due course, the consequence of which being that humans are limited or eliminated. Both of the positions share an underlying belief in the animality or desire of a non-human outside, either of capital or of nature, that will exert its power on the world. However, both capitalism and nature are fully human, as the previous chapters have argued. The social context for capitalism reveals how capital is not as a thing or subject, but a process that exists only in motion. Hence it calls for coordinated social interventions to curtail capitalism’s current expansionist motions. Similarly, the deep entanglement between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ beyond simple delineations presents us with both threats and opportunities that need to be mitigated. For example, in the question of genetics expounded in Chapter Three, the ‘nature’ can be intervened on through gene-editing technology, but certain interventions, especially at multiple locations on the genome, may cause nature to ‘strike back’ with unforeseeable consequences. If we follow the view of Dark Ecology, we should perhaps stop all scientific interventions altogether. However, with ethical use of the gene-editing technology, it will present the human kind with possibilities of curing certain diseases. Once again, the deconstruction and transformation thinking process is at play.

To bring this argument in line with the stratification and destratification processes, the destratification of the anthropocentric positions, even in the more nuanced versions, creates a

loose network of distributed agencies that may or may not couple with new entities to give rise to stratifications. Therefore, it is important to reinsert the self-consciousness understanding for the reality (in good old historical materialist tradition) and a demand for responsible actions. In this way, it instigates an immanent deconstruction of the readings of new materialism. Such is the to and fro motion of thinking – and so is my reading of the artistic projects and the social imaginaries they induce and enact.

This recursive movement equally applies to the question of the creativity or desire of matter and capitalism. As we have seen in almost all the chapters, the ‘creativity’ of matter works both ways. It can point to the materiality beyond cultural construction and reductionism, for example, it helps to criticise the reductionism in the instance of language as detached from the world and DNA as the code of life, and later it appears to cast the relation between man and machine, and man and tiger in a new light. Creativity of matter recasts language in materialist and social frames and proposes intensive relationalities.

At the same time, ‘creativity’ has a flip side. Even though the immanent understanding of materials is pitted against reductionism, getting beyond reductionism is not without pitfalls. The call for deterritorialisation and destratification, while important for overspilling certain set structures, must be handled with caution. There is an acute reminder from Deleuze and Guattari regarding this movement in thinking:

You don’t reach the BwO [body without organs], and its plane of consistency, by wildly destratifying. ... If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane [of consistency] you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged towards catastrophe. Staying stratified – organised, signified, subjected – is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them down on us heavier than ever. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 160-161)

This dislodging tendency leading to the co-option of itself in capitalism has been addressed in the chapter on DNA, which shows how the multi-connective desire seen in biological materials is once again structurally appropriated (through the reduction to bio-information) by capitalism. Most significantly, this analysis of capitalism underlies the chapters on Ho Tzu Nyen and Royce Ng, where the processes of economical expansionism and colonisation are examined. The chapter on Royce Ng ends with the Asian financial crisis along

other crises, painting a rather dire picture of incessant perpetuation of capital. However, it is important to reiterate that – as the financial crisis in 2008 rightly evinces – financial speculation cannot be infinitely open-ended, which would always lead to stabilisation on other levels – ten years of stagnation in most of the world’s developed economies.

On a meta-level, the deterritorialised capital self-production leads to view of capitalism as a creative force, extending the notion of capital as a subject that Marx already anticipated. On this point, Vishmidt insightfully points out there is a shared speculative identity, or a structural analogy between art and finance, where the speculative practices of art, premised on its creativeness and open-endedness, and financial speculation as an intensification of capital’s self-perpetuation of future-oriented growth conjoin and reflect each other structurally. This can be seen not just in the replication of the capitalist market logic in the art market but also the rising demand for ‘creativity’ in the neoliberal labour market regardless of the nature of the work, and in social reproduction – coming up with ‘creative’ means of subsistence – at a time when social infrastructure becomes increasingly inadequate. (2018b)

But this infrastructural critique should not be a pessimistic call to stop engaging with the arts. On the contrary, it demands all the more rigour and attention when we conceive, make, participate in, experience and reflect on art. In this way, we may enter into new worldings in the society through art. The procedural qualities of the artistic works can tap into the ‘unknown unknowns’ in the society – instigating unforeseeable relational, social, economic and political processes, which technocracy and solutionism may fail to address. As such, it will provide invaluable insights toward what I call ‘actionable speculations’. The speculation is made productive, and can guide us in navigating complexities.

To start such a process, a firm understanding of art as both a block of affects and percepts intermediating theories and processes of the society and history, such that this dissertation tried to argue for, is in good order to kick start the deconstructive and transformative critique. Importantly for the deconstruction, art has ‘the power to create new functional assemblages that are not predicated on a concept of identity’ (Stephan Zagala 2002, 32). And equally importantly for the transformation, art is a ‘speculative cartography’ which ‘constructs coordinates of existence at the same time as those coordinates are lived (Guattari, 1993, 240-241). Both processes go hand-in-hand.

In order to go beyond identity, Vishmidt emphasises the labour of speculation, which ‘poses a resistance to these closures of identity by means of speculative thought which always returns to the experience of non-identity and thus to the alterity and futurity motivating every practice of critique’ (2018b). Here the identity can be taken as identity of a subject, an

issue, or a context. The speculation-labour process can help broaden recent debates around identity politics (both the left-wing and the right-wing pushbacks in recent times could be attributed to it), which grow from once-emancipatory projects that now favour fragmentations where everybody can only speak from and for one's own subject position. The apt call for and engagement with dissimulation and multiplicity of identities in the works of Lawrence Abu Hamdan is especially pertinent as a critique to the flattening identity politics. The figures of the schizo and vampire in Ho Tzu Nyen's and Royce Ng's works point to the serial movements of dis-identification of a fixed subject, acting as potent allegory to the elusive and expansive motion of capitalism, which in turn produce subjectivities. The dis-identification with the self is further manifested in multiperspectivism and Zhuang Zi's butterfly dream, as a practical example of living the speculative cartography of existence.

Furthermore, just as we dis-identify with the self, the identification of the overall context in which the dynamic subjects are situated can also be transformed into an alterity, thereby provoking a general motivation for finding momentarily meta-stable states among a force field where things are in flux. All these attempts to dis-identify amount to a deconstruction that at the same time opens for transformation. This resonates with what Guattari sees as the ethico-political extensions of the fractalisation of the psyche, which disrupts 'the destiny of the one-dimensionality of the capitalistic subjectivation,' and can 'cause its own eviction by heterogeneous, multicentered, polyphonic, polyvocal approaches, installing itself outside pre-coded equilibriums' (Guattari 1987, 85).

Art provides a place where we can practice in partaking in the force field and assemblage of multiple perspectives, to draw our own speculative cartography as we reflect on the cartography of the transhistorical movements of society.

Taking art both as inscribed in art history of representation and meaning and also as the dynamism of materialities, my research connecting new materialism and historical materialism gives indications of how the immanent mode of organisation of matters in new materialism can also be implicated in complex political economical processes pertaining to the analysis of historical materialism. Hence the relation of production is not just focused on labour in the Marxian sense but expanded to how matters are produced and captured, how subjectivities and (in)dividuation are produced and desire is managed and modulated, as well as under which conditions prefigurative and transfigurative agency can be articulated.

At the end of the journey, it becomes increasingly clear for me that the changing socio-political and economic context demands that we constantly re-examine the place and function

of art. For the becoming 'creative' of everything under neoliberalism should not efface art but all the more demand sharpened positioning of the arts. In the dissertation, the question of political economy arises not just a subject of study but also assumes or becomes, to some extent, a structural element that the works enact.

Given the changing political economy in general and hence also the changing condition of the arts, we need to find renewed practices to reaffirm the power of the arts. Part of the dissertation and my undertaking in general is dedicated to the sheer potentiality of the arts in enacting an expression in excess of the spoken word. And at the same time, by critically engaging with socio-political structures on the level of the affects and then enacting them in the performance, it initiates crucial reflections on the social and political processes at large. Following the recursive critical analysis, we depart from these works that affect us through their critical and affective capacities, and look for a next step, which may be to think how the institutional structure of art can reflect the changing conditions in reforming the infrastructure of the arts, though I'll leave it for now as my future task. Art at the interface of the society and history can capture the dynamic materialist tendencies and the paradoxical-transformative motions of things, and can make a difference. And, I hope, a sustainable one.

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9. Figures

All photos courtesy of the artists.

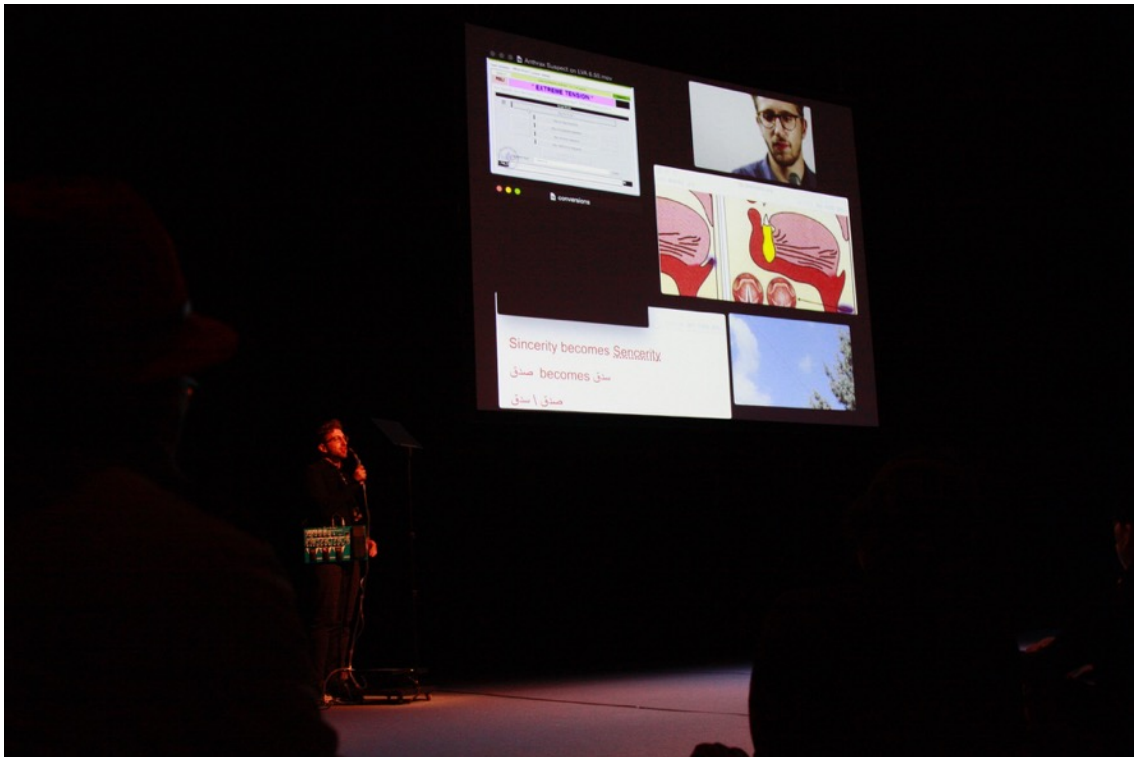


Fig. 2.1 Lawrence Abu Hamdan performing *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*, March, 2016, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea. Photo: Siwei Sun.



Fig. 2.2 Lawrence Abu Hamdan performing *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*, March, 2016, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea. Photo: Siwei Sun.

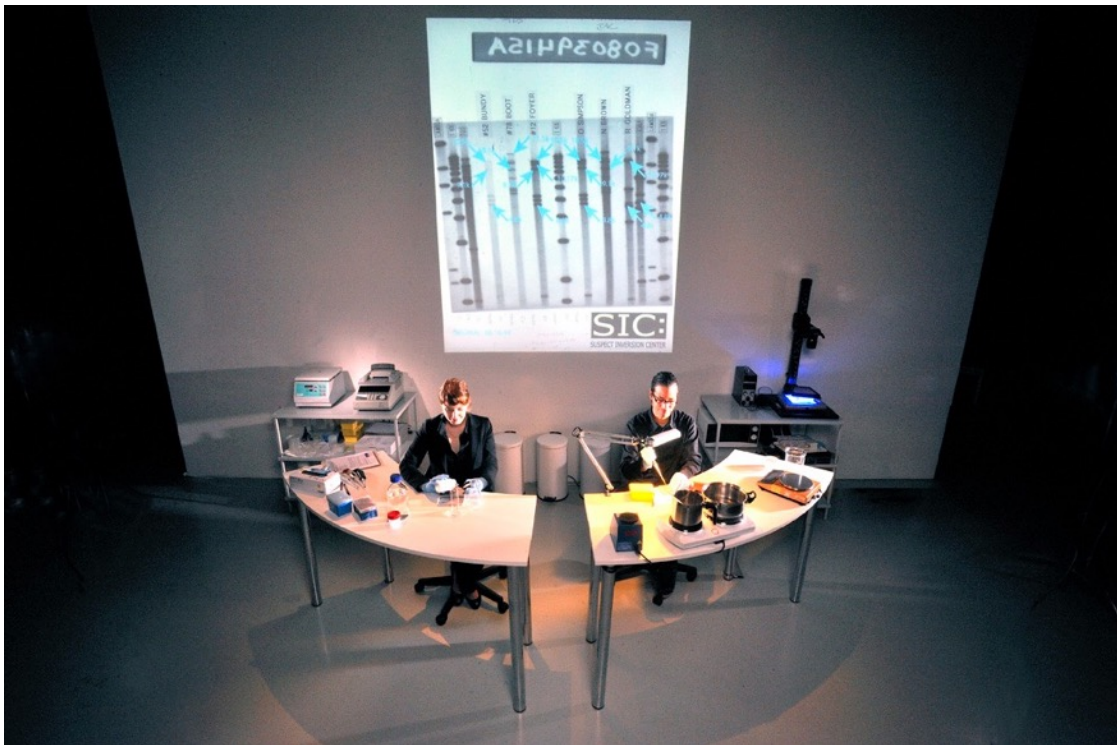


Fig. 3.1 Paul Vanouse and Kerry Sheehan performing in *Suspect Inversion Center*, January, 2011, Ernst Schering Foundation, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Axel Heise.



Fig. 3.2 Spiess/Strecker, *Hare's Blood +*, Biofiction Festival, Museum of Natural History, Vienna, Austria, 2014. Photo Camillo Meinhart.



Fig. 3.3 Spiess/Strecker, *Hare's Blood +*, Biofiction Festival, Museum of Natural History, Vienna, Austria, 2014. Photo Camillo Meinhart.



Fig. 4.1 Geumhyung Jeong performing CPR Practice. Photo: Jeewoong Nam.



Fig. 4.2 Geumhyung Jeong performing Oil Pressure Vibrator. Photo: Gajin Kim.



Fig. 4.3 Geumhyung Jeong performing Fitness Guide, 2011. Photo: Youngkyo Choi.



Fig. 5.1 Ho Tzu Nyen, *Ten Thousand Tigers*, 2014, The Esplanade Theatre Studio. Photo: Ken Cheong.



Fig. 5.2 Ho Tzu Nyen, *Ten Thousand Tigers*, 2014, The Esplanade Theatre Studio. Photo: Ken Cheong.



Fig. 5.3 Ho Tzu Nyen, *Ten Thousand Tigers*, 2014, The Esplanade Theatre Studio. Photo: Ken Cheong.



Fig. 5.4 Ho Tzu Nyen, *Ten Thousand Tigers*, 2014, The Esplanade Theatre Studio. Photo: Ken Cheong.



Fig. 6.1 Royce Ng, Kishi the Vampire, 2016, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea. Photo: Sun Siwei.



Fig. 6.2 Royce Ng, Kishi the Vampire, 2016, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea. Photo: Sun Siwei.



Fig. 6.3 Royce Ng, Kishi the Vampire, 2016, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea. Photo: Sun Siwei.



Fig. 6.4 Royce Ng, Kishi the Vampire, 2016, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea. Photo: Sun Siwei.

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