

Breathing Art into life

The political role of artistic networks in Intermedial times

KUNST IN HET LEVEN BLAZEN

De politieke rol van artistieke netwerken in intermediale tijden

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by

Daniel Hernando Vargas Gómez

born in Bogotá – Colombia

Doctoral Committee:

Promotor: Prof. dr. J. de Mul

Other members: Prof. dr. R. ten Bos

Prof.dr. J.J. Vromen

Dr. S. Zepke

Copromotor: Dr. H.A.F Oosterling

Preface

The Becoming of philosophy: envisioning a Deleuzian century

Foucault's alleged statement about the dawn of a Deleuzian century has without a doubt inspired many to wonder about the future of philosophy. Some have called this post-postmodernism. This statement may appear bewildering at a time in which every discipline defines its purpose in isolation, and scientific discourse seems ever more confined to a monologue of sorts. Deleuzian thought, in turn, prompts us to think beyond the closed boundaries of academic or scholarly life and to think of human life as a continuous experience with a vitalist spirit so akin to Bergson and Nietzsche.

I believe, in the same spirit, that philosophy's task begins anew when we rediscover it under Deleuzian light as the art of human becomings. By this I mean that philosophy is fundamentally an opening of discourse towards life, while at the same time reminding us that discourse can never define itself as something other than life. If there is a distinct aspect to philosophical practice it would be its ability to intrude, to disrupt. What is so particular to philosophy is that, unlike other forms of intrusion, the former applies the gentlest of pressure to disclose life as, in the final instances, a non-identifiable field of forces. However, Heidegger's *What is called thinking?*—while sharing in that purpose of intrusion—follows a different route, which I believe fails. It is simply still too full of itself, too grandiose to be a sincere attempt to think the other as (an)other. A first glance at *What is Philosophy?* by Deleuze and Guattari appears, on the contrary, as an invitation to create concepts, step-by-step, to understand philosophy's strengths, but mainly to transform its destiny into not so much a universe as a multiverse. If one had to strip its message to its bare bones, it would read: human life is primarily a collective effort to compose heterogeneous forces.

Similarly, this research is interested in thinking philosophy as much more than just another discipline confined within the classroom walls and the limits of academic journals. What I hope for is to continue in the efforts of those such as Slavoj Žižek, Bruno Latour, Jos de Mul and Henk Oosterling, who have shown that philosophy is not only relevant, but fundamental to an accurate understanding of our subjective possibilities, and for plausible solutions to the issues we face in our (post) modern way of life to be envisioned; a 'multiversal' way of life that, sooner rather than later, will become the rule rather than the exception in our globalized world.

The Great Recession

The year 2007 will be remembered as the year in which the western 'bubble' burst and I mean this in the broadest of terms. In Keynesian vein, economists such as Paul Krugman marked this event as the beginning of the 'Great Recession', due to its profound yet non-catastrophic effects on socio-economic life in the West and throughout much of the world, with very few exceptions. Beyond economic debates, this event would also see fuelled mass protests throughout the western world, characterized by the surprisingly short-lived 'Occupy Wall street' movement, but most markedly, it served to mobilize massive discontent in a much more convoluted part of the world, in what would be called the 'Arab spring', due to its development throughout the spring of 2011.

Next to these forms of discontent, which attracted global attention through mass and social media as well as through internet video channels and social networks, a much quieter and less noticeable, yet equally alarming event has been unfolding at the heart of the western world. Europe's social democracies have begun the final and decisive push to dismantle the remains of the social welfare system and a slow, but equally certain, journey towards the federalization of Europe has begun, with Germany at its centre. Across the ocean the US has become a divided country with Silicon Valley as its beacon and as a symbol of economic leadership. During the 'Great Recession' globalization has not stopped; in fact, it has increased with a multi-polar global world emerging, in which the Middle East, Russia, China and India play an increasingly important role in the world's affairs, mainly due to their economic and military strength. Yet for most people worldwide, who never shared in the welfare state, things such as art literature, and culture broadly defined, were never more than hobby-like activities, in the best of cases, or foreign and strange luxuries, in the worst, pursued by those lucky enough to belong to the leisure class. Understanding the role that art and culture play in explaining the events of the 'Great Recession' is to a great extent still pending. This research is motivated too by the need to voice this concern and to affirm that we need art today. Of course, this bird's-eye view is surely not intended to synthesize what would be the whole story. This depiction, however succinct, has an important role, for it remains true that these aforementioned events set the stage, where the play of our human life must unfold.

Mediatization and experience

It has been 25 years since the Internet came to light. This time has seen tremendous development in communication and data-sharing technologies, as well as in telecommunications infrastructure. Traditional mass media (TV, radio, and print) has seen sharp declines in their ratings whereas digital advertising has seen steady growth. Video, music and now interactive programs populate the Internet and have become a daily experience for most people. By the same token, social media networks have seen an explosion of growth, which is by no means concentrated on a single platform or firm; despite Facebook's continued popularity, it is by no means unique nor universal, as dozens of other social media networks are gathering millions of users as well, from LinkedIn and Google + in the west to Sina Weibo and Renren in China, which today, harbours the largest internet savvy population despite the well-known censorship efforts on behalf of the Chinese government.

Marshall McLuhan's interest in understanding the active role of media is perhaps today a more urgent endeavour than ever before. Programmers and ICT experts are now building complex virtual worlds and experiences, which require a scholarly effort to explain the myriad of phenomena that spring from their use and intention. Being savvy is not enough; what is at stake is media literacy.¹ Understanding the omnipresent role of media in enabling and informing human and non-human relations today and in the future is what has motivated the writing of this text. The main contention can be summarized by saying that mediatized relationships will soon become the most common form of relationship and part of that

¹ I will return to this issue at the end of my research. See note 215.

² The term is widely used today; Arnold Toynbee had already coined it in 1939 (Docherty, 2006, p 474).

³ Authors who may be loosely called 'postmodern' will not be referred to as such in this thesis in order to avoid adding unnecessary weight to the term.

⁴ Thomas Reid says in this respect: 'To perceive the beauty therefore, we must perceive the nature or structure from which it

commonality springs from the fact that ever smarter technologies will allow for those mediatized relationships to carry, not only more information, but more trust than any other form of human relationship. Mediatized relationships, therefore, open a series of crucial topics that will require a deep and systematic understanding of their implications and construction of ever more complex forms of human experience.

With the aim of proposing an understanding of experience that is relevant to the phenomenon of mediatization, this text undertakes an exploration of the most experimental human practices, which entail the experimentation of experiences supported and, in many cases enabled, by digital technologies. It will be argued that these experiences belong to the realm of aesthetic experience, and in particular, to the sphere of Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics. Several strands of theoretical work are deemed crucial to this approach. Deleuze and more generally, Deleuzian inspired thought, will provide a rich source of critical and original insights that dwell on the issue of aesthetic experience. Relational aesthetics make the reading of Nicholas Bourriaud mandatory. The role of a fuzzy concept such as communications, which seems so pervasive in popular, as well as in high culture, will be, in consequence, treated with caution and instead, explored as supported by the role of media and through the constitution of relations.

Creativity and innovation

The term ‘innovation’ has become commonplace in literature related to management, business and organisational studies; both inside and outside strictly academic circles. The rise of highly successful technological companies particularly those geographically close to Silicon Valley, has made the latter a symbol of what innovation means for many today—Google has become the face of innovation in the collective mind of the twenty-first century.

Along similar lines, business scholars such as Harvard’s Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore, as well as sociologist, Richard Florida have extensively researched the role that creativity plays in many of today’s more ambitious business initiatives. The word creativity is no doubt contentious, for it is used equivocally across many disciplines and contexts. Its use here will remain coherent with aesthetic experience and will presume a relational approach that is consistent with the Deleuzian perspective proposed. In my analysis of experiential consumption I will explore the implications and the role of creativity in order to open a lengthy, and at times complex, discussion where the economics of creativity will be studied as well as the relation between creativity and terms such as autonomy, authenticity, and cooperation or collaboration. Interesting insights from Richard Sennett will bring to light the elements that creative work shares across production spheres: the way in which collective or cooperative work becomes crucial in pushing established boundaries, and unleashing creative dynamics that not only accompany fulfilment and satisfaction at an individual level, but also innovation and economic breakthrough at an organizational level.

My approach to consumption is to a large extent, a pragmatic one. Although, with this, I don’t pretend to wash my hands, willy-nilly, avoiding the muddle of politics and of political thought. The goal of such a

pragmatic standpoint is to present my analysis, not as a new version of utopia, but rather, as a realizable program, which is confirmed by the fact that it has already begun—I am in fact, not so much summoning the people to come as actually building the plug-ins that are needed by the people who have already arrived.

Despite how fashionable they may sound, creativity and innovation are terms that have, no doubt, escaped the boundaries of denotative language, and their role in the construction of knowledge and power deserves serious attention from philosophers and social scientists. This research is an attempt to intrude on this world of technologies and popular science with the aim of offering a different perspective on the phenomena they entail, on the impact they have in the construction of the real, and on the way contemporary humans find meaning in their daily life.

Networks, ecologies and relations

Theorizing on the way technologies, individuals, and organizations create relations and how these are mobilized presents a serious methodological challenge, because of the interrelation between distinct phenomena and the need to appeal to several disciplines, in order to explore and present them in a clear, rigorous and coherent fashion. Understanding, for instance, how artistic motivation leads to actions and how those actions become productive, both in economic terms as well as in sociological or political terms, requires the researcher to put forward a methodology that can identify and articulate differences without increasing complexity and without recurring to reductionism.

Philosophy of difference can rightly be placed at the centre of this research due to its methodological advantage. The reason behind this comes in part as a result of the Deleuzian ideas that inform the philosophical underpinning of aesthetic experience as proposed in this text. Additionally, Deleuzian or rhizomatic structures are not stringent methodologies as positivist methodologies, such as statistical operations, can be. This means that reliance on a consensus of methodological rules is not an option, and that the deployment of an interdisciplinary approach asks for assumptions to be explicitly stated and for any possible prejudice to be critically assessed.

This text will also rely on Actor Network Theory (ANT) as the method of choice and this for several reasons. The first relates to the ontological commitment that a relational approach entails. Relationalism, on the one hand, remains consistent with the Deleuzian perspective proposed. Relations, on the other hand, are the basic units of analysis in ANT, which is the right match for the exploration of aesthetics, creativity, and attempted politics. Following these lines, I will show that ANT provides a rich toolbox that allows the researcher to make a very detailed and clear analysis of the phenomena at hand and without recourse to arbitrary simplification.

In addition, networks are similar to ecologies in their attempt to gather distinct entities and to define them as dependent on their roles, functions, and their constitutive relations. The preference to opt for the term network allows for consistency with the Network Theory perspective to be ensured, but it is also a choice made on the basis of clarity and strategy overall. The concept of network allows for the type of relations that are of interest to this research to be presented in a much more consistent manner, because

unlike ecologies, networks emphasise several important implications of the relationalism proposed. Networks allow the researcher to deal with micro-political as well as macro-political or institutional phenomena, without recurring to unjustified ontological separations or to relay on the presumption of epistemological discontinuity. Networks, moreover, are fundamentally dynamic, and highlight the changes, as much as the continuities, behind the relationships analyzed. Networks remain consistent too with the ontological levelling implied by Relationalism, where entities are levelled as a matter of principle and hierarchies appear as the by-product of specific relationships, and are never taken as the cause of a political structure. Networks will thus allow for an agency to be decoupled from the modern subject and will, in turn, allow for relationships between humans to be treated with as much or as little concern as relationships between humans and non-humans. In that sense this research aims at taking a transhuman approach in redefining the relations between men, media and machines as psycho-technological assemblages.

Final Remarks

I am aware, moreover, that, from the start, prejudices regarding the moral value of consumption might render a pragmatic approach suspect of complicity—and this, no doubt, would be especially true for those who are to the far left politically. Yet, would such accusation make sense were one not presuming that behind all economic investment there is something macabre lurking; something that exceeds an individual's action or the ability to resist? The question I would raise, somewhat rhetorically, is whether capitalism is actually something that I can be an accomplice of. Is buying a car, or a computer, or a song on iTunes, for instance, really an act of betrayal against the workers who made them? Should we believe that the more consumption there is (the more the GDP grows), then the more we are shackled? Can we affirm that our ability to act, to be creative and to help others becomes constrained the more 'commodities' we possess – or must we confess shamefacedly, that they possess us? Can anyone still answer these questions, while keeping a straight face?

This research intends to introduce the philosopher to the complexities and the possibilities that the world of virtual realities, social networks, smart objects, and the like, present for us today. It is also meant to introduce non-philosophers to the world of Deleuzian and Latourian thought, where they can discover an entirely new way of understanding practical life and an equally original way of projecting their own subjectivity onto the world. For anyone who comes across it, this text is, after all, one that wants to explore the potential of communication technologies that generate new ways of life. Given its creative underpinning, this research is about the role that art is playing in our globalized world today. The question that drives my research is not one that can receive a 'yes' or 'no' answer. It is not whether political art is dead, but rather an interested questioning on what the conditions are or can be for the possibility of art to be political today.

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Terminology

The entirety of this text will move across a variety of authors and a number of philosophical ideas. The use of a particular terminology within the ideas explored is essential to the analytical transparency that should characterize a philosophical text. In order to avoid the presentation of terms that may seem ambiguous or even strange, a particular list of concepts will be highlighted before going deep into the analysis in question. The text below is not intended as a glossary of terms, but rather as an introduction to terms, which throughout this research will retain a particular meaning, in accordance to one or several authors. Additional terminology, as well as further discussion about the concepts detailed below, may be presented as this text unravels; however, the core of the conceptual framework deployed may be limited to the terms discussed in this section.

The Postmodern

As part of philosophical teaching the term postmodern (postmodernism) is now commonly associated with a current of thought that challenges and is counterposed to foundational thinking (Docherty, 2006, p 474)². This kind of foundational rejection commonly includes that of metaphysical thought and epistemological transcendence (Docherty, 2006, pp 475, 476). Lyotard has used the term to refer to ‘the condition of knowledge in developed societies’ (Lyotard, 1984, xxiii). Next to the epistemological concerns behind terms like ‘truth’ or ‘certainty’, the Postmodern refers to the collapse of the narrative, and from an epistemic point of view, of the meta-narrative in scientific discourse (Lyotard, 1984, pp xxiv, xxv).

The Postmodern also relates to the accelerated technological advances in the fields of informatics and IT at large, where the role of communications is equally fundamental. An acceleration of communications next to the collapse of the Grand Narratives—Kant, Hegel, and Marx—frames the field where new problems in the creation of knowledge emerge (Lyotard, 1984, p 3). The term Postmodern will be used

² The term is widely used today; Arnold Toynbee had already coined it in 1939 (Docherty, 2006, p 474).

to refer to a particular historical condition shared by social groups in different geographies throughout the globe, rather than an exclusive consideration of developed economies. The postmodern in this sense will not be used independently, but will be often applied as an adjective (postmodern capitalism or postmodern economy). Used in this way, it relates to other similarly used concepts such as post-historic capitalism. Its purpose will be to denote a historical moment, which encompasses the generalized acceptance of western forms of democracy, and which can be understood as effectively understanding democracy as a global rather than a western phenomenon. It will also relate to the socio-political effects of a globalized economy constituted by unrestricted circulation of money and goods, atomistic consumerism, and tangible inequality along lines that differ from national boundaries (e.g. slums next to suburbia). Given its broader meaning, I have avoided using postmodern when referring to a philosophical set of principles³. Finally, the term will also be mentioned explicitly by some of the authors explored (Rancière in particular). In these cases, adherence to their intended use of the concept will be kept.

Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience is a relatively recent neologism that incorporates both the terms ‘aesthetics’ and ‘experiential’. The philosophical origins of the word aesthetics can be traced back to the seventeenth century and the British moral philosophers whose main concern at the time was the development of a theory of taste, from which the concept of ‘the aesthetic’ later became problematized. Hume, along with Hutcheson before him and Reid after him (Hutcheson, 1725; Reid, 1785), conceptualized the presumed faculty of taste in a way that displaced it from a realist or objectivist perspective and towards a kind of

³ Authors who may be loosely called ‘postmodern’ will not be referred to as such in this thesis in order to avoid adding unnecessary weight to the term.

‘internal sense’ (Shelley, 2013)⁴. Concepts are already at stake when Hume argues, for instance, that ‘in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the fine arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment’ (Hume, 1986, Section I). Concepts are also a crucial aspect of aesthetic experience in the texts of Deleuze and Guattari.

Issues of morality and taste appear as irremediably intertwined. It is not until Kant's (1790) *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that the term aesthetic appears as a practical notion, where it is counterposed to understanding (Shelley, 2013). Aesthetic judgement thus becomes a modern notion, whose role is to translate aesthetic events into a discursive practice. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's words are illustrative of the reasons behind the adoption of the term:

As our language [...] contains no other useable adjective, to express coincidence of form, feeling, and intellect, that something, which, confirming the inner and the outward senses, becomes a new sense in itself [...] there is reason to hope, that the term aesthetic, will be brought into common use. (Coleridge, 1821, p 254).

The term experience as it is used here is much more recent and requires the much later developments that begin with Henri Bergson's philosophy and, in particular, those related to his ideas on time; time as duration. The new factor Bergson introduces is that of time as the necessary element for the new to emerge; artistic work appears as exemplary of the change brought on by Bergson. In artistic work one cannot foresee what is to become of the canvas, while the process of creation is taking place; one can only judge after the fact; for the work needs to be executed, to happen, and this means understanding the role of time as duration (Marrati, 2003).

⁴ Thomas Reid says in this respect: ‘To perceive the beauty therefore, we must perceive the nature or structure from which it results. In this the internal sense differs from the external. Our external senses may discover qualities, which do not depend upon any antecedent perception. [...] But it is impossible to perceive the beauty of an object, without perceiving the object, or at least conceiving it’ (Reid, 1785, pp 760, 761).

The innovation introduced by Bergson can be contrasted to what he refers to as the modern (and ancient for Bergson) conception of time that ‘produces nothing; it is merely the abstract and ultimately inessential frame in which one event succeeds another without this succession affecting the nature of events in any way’ (Marrati, 2003, p 15). Time, therefore, becomes productive rather than inert or innocuous. Time, within the dimension of production, frames the notion of experience as one that is productive and which has an irreducible duration to it.

Furthermore, Bergson will prove to be of particular importance, given his influence on the thought of Deleuze and Guattari. For the latter philosophers, art as a creative process maintains this productive dimension, although without presupposing a functional end; art is a process without a goal, but in being so it attains its own completion (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008). Aesthetic experience will then be used as a term that incorporates ‘aesthetics’ into the Deleuzian (and Guattarian) conceptual framework, where the procedural aspect—its becoming—is fundamental to its understanding. The unique character that such procedural perspective introduces to the aesthetic dimension affects the way in which art is conceptualized. Art will be taken as a process that fulfils itself, that is, while maintaining its duration and, as such, the aesthetic dimension becomes one of ‘experimentation’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 371).

Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

The term network has, in our common language, undoubtedly become a synonym of social network. In a way, a network does not entirely depart from the connotations of connection, linkage or web-like structures that the social network brings to mind. A network, however, cannot be reduced to a connection between humans (between conscious users). When used as part of the analytical tools of ANT, the network becomes an expression of ‘how much energy, movement, and specificity our own

reports are able to capture. Network is a concept, not a thing out there' (Latour, 2005, p 130). This last sentence is an especially important caveat to keep in mind. The usage of a network as an explanatory tool is, in fact, purely heuristic: it is not meant to represent a structure or entity that would be 'out there'.

Latour argues that ANT is more like the name of a pencil or a brush than the name of a specific shape to be drawn or painted' (Latour, 2005, p 143). The *how* of a network comes down to the specificity of the relations of elements that it intends to identify and elucidate. This text, therefore, will not simply use the concept as a way to capture complex situations, which for the most part would remain unexplained, but will follow the relations and articulations between humans and nonhumans, in order to construct the greater networks – in a way the figure of the network is not intended to provide a bird's eye view, but is better seen as a series of passageways, which would come closer to Alice's journey in Wonderland than to Mark Zuckerberg's design for Facebook.

Actor networks, despite the vivid imagery they convey, do not straightforwardly resemble technical networks, such as computers, telephones or subway networks, where strategically positioned nodes are fundamental to their proper functioning (Latour, 1996, p 2). The figure of the network must then be understood in much broader terms as illustrative of a net-like structure, albeit one without the common limitations found in concrete networks, such as the ones mentioned.

Actor-Network Theory is also not limited to describing the relationships of human actors, where issues such as frequency, distribution, homogeneity and proximity are the main analytical concerns (Latour, 1996, p 2). Therefore, the term here must also be taken with caution, as it will be used to refer to objects of patently different qualities, whether it is a child, a microbe, or an iPod. Hence, the term actor will not be used as a parallel to any biological substrate. Latour coins these assemblages as actants.

For Latour, the importance of ANT's approach derives from its radical aspect: it is used as 'a change of metaphors to describe essences', similar, for example, to rhizomes in Deleuze (Latour, 1996, p 3). Actor-

networks affect the analysis by introducing a new and multi-dimensional topology; beyond the two-dimensional or even three-dimensional surfaces, networks offer the researcher ‘as many dimensions as there are connections’ (Latour, 1996, p 3). This is the reason why imagery of networks must be used with caution, for any such representation may bias the conclusions of the analysis. The radical aspect of Actor-networks is also related to their ontological qualities. Researchers like Latour use Actor-networks, because they enable the deployment of a form of analysis that achieves a reinjection of the things we know (objects, theories, and humans) into our understanding of the social fabric (Latour, 1996).

ANT will also introduce a foreground/background reversal, which means that rather than beginning from a top down approach—from the universal to the particular—ANT will begin with the irreducible, with the localities, from which relations and posterior Actor-networks emerge. In this way ANT comes close to ‘the order out of disorder or chaos philosophy (Serres, Prigogine and Stengers)’ (Latour, 1996, pp 3, 4). However, the figure of the woven, of the threadlike structure makes ANT’s form of analysis akin to the analysis of power found in Foucault (Latour, 1996). This kinship makes ANT a heuristics that enables the researcher to put forward different explanatory levels that will function in synchrony or rhythmic-like fashion as they contemplate issues of interaction between human actors or power struggles between micropolitical forces.

Furthermore, Actor-networks also have an important effect on scale. It cannot be strictly said that a network is ‘bigger’ or ‘smaller’ than another. Comparison does occur, but it does so in the order of complexity alone, where one would say that one network is more intensely connected than another, while understanding that scale metrics are in themselves networks of scale (Latour, 1996, p 5).

Not unlike the way in which semiotics was used during the second half of the twentieth century to understand the opacity, richness and layered character of any narration or image, ANT is used as an approach or method aimed at understanding the deployment of associations (Latour, 1996, p 9). The

underlying relational character of the analysis, next to the horizontality of all actors affects, in turn, the character of circulation that the network structure entails. Thus, circulation will not follow the categories of Society, Nature, or Texts, for in ANT there is a presupposition of continuity, which the foundational character of relations demands (Latour, 1996, p 15).

Quasi objects, Factishes and Artefacts

It is a common gesture of postmodern philosophies to take a step away from modern thought by denouncing and giving up on the analytical use of the famous subject-object divide. The issues that such a gesture puts forward certainly go beyond mere semantics. It can be said that it is the validity and coherence of the (social) scientific discourse that is at stake, when one chooses to fiddle with the apparent stability that the divide allows for. It is almost a matter of course the way in which the name ‘object’ brings to mind physical properties and the idea of absolute exteriority. An ‘object’ is spoken of as an entity that must pre-exist our ability to think about it as well as limit our ability to master it. Curiously enough, a similarly quick reflection on the word ‘subject’ would highlight the fact that everything that is thought of, apprehended and discussed, must inevitably undergo the filter of the human mind. It is also commonly accepted that the mind has been moulded, for it has gone through a process of socialization: a process in which it has learned what the meaning and role of every object is, what can be said about it, and how to relate to it etc. An evident contradiction between these simple reflections comes forward. The paradoxical nature behind the use of the subject-object divide comes precisely as a result of this contradiction. The purpose of this research is to develop in a way that follows a trail of thought, which will not be based on the above-mentioned divide. To do so, three useful notions must be kept in mind: quasi-objects, factishes, and artefacts⁵.

⁵ A more detailed philosophical discussion develops in Parts 1 and 2 of this research.

These three Latourian concepts are not synonyms, nor will they be used as such. All three, however, do share a twofold analytical purpose: a) to be explanatory and rigorous about the way in which humans and nonhumans relate to constitute a common world, and b) to be so in a way that is accountable, that is, in a way that neither begins nor ends in universal affirmations that would define relationships by predetermination, or by identifying underlying forces that would necessarily lead to a singular outcome.

Latour uses the term quasi-object in parallel with the term quasi-subject. Their role is not to denote object-like or subject-like entities, which would still presuppose the contested divide, but to undo the subject-object separation entirely, by rejecting the notion that objects are shapeless receptacles of social categories (Latour, 1993, p 55)⁶. Simply put, the lesson is that there is no need to uphold or confirm the divide. So-called subjects and objects have contaminated each other; they have created a knot that cannot be analytically untied and, therefore, all claims to objectivity or subjectivity would only make sense if phrased from the perspective of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. It is argued that, challenging the absolute sense intended by the subject-object divide, brings with it, by implication, issues about claims that the mind itself would somehow be allowed to make. How can scientific statements be made without falling back on the divide; that is, while still stating that subject and object are rigorous analytical claims?

Giving a positive answer to this question brings us to the second term, the factish. Latour uses this term as a portmanteau word that combines the word fact and the word fetish. By combining two, in principle, opposite terms, Latour asks us to take distance from the unbridgeable divide between subject and object, transcendence and immanence, or reality and construction.

⁶ In symmetrical fashion it implies a departure from 'subjects' which would be characterized by the absolute freedom of an all-powerful will.

We shall use the label "factish" for the robust certainty that allows practice to pass into action without the practitioner ever believing in the difference between construction and reality, immanence and transcendence. (Latour, 2010, p 22)

This dichotomous separation(s) has no longer any analytical value in Latour's thought—a thought this text adheres to in its use of the discussed terms. The functional and pragmatic nature of this word is perhaps its biggest strength. The factish will be used mainly to denote those non-humans, which have a constitutive role in articulating human practices: the religious image, the totem, the masterpiece, the role-model, icons in general, as well as, for instance, abstract principles such as space or time, which often appear as 'radical realities' that serve as a basis for minor claims. There is also another reason to put forward the word factish. The neologism is not primarily intended as a rejection of either fetish or fact. It is better seen as an attempt to capture the analytical transparency that both terms presuppose, without falling into the absolute demands that the construction-reality divide would impose.

There is no more reason for giving up the word "fetish" than for giving up the word "fact", on the pretext that the Moderns believed in belief and wanted to disqualify the former term while retaining the latter. In practice, no one has ever believed in fetishes, and everyone has always paid astute attention to facts. (Latour, 2010, p 130)

As it turns out, a principle of Latour's thought is that there were no absolute claims in the first place, which means that it is the presupposed divide that the term factish mainly challenges and avoids falling prey to. Along these lines, enters the third term: artefact. In a relatively straightforward way, this emphasizes the idea of human involvement, which makes it particularly relevant for this research, where artworks and art will be discussed in detail. Artefacts are not mere human constructs, but have an interesting quality to them, which makes them unique: 'Unlike facts, artefacts are surprising, because human actions can be discovered where they have not been expected' (Latour, 2010, p 130). The term

artefact will thus, allow for the role of human involvement to be qualified, to be understood, and to be accounted for, without recourse to any notion that denotes human action as the expression of some mysterious interiority.

In short, what these Latourian concepts demand from us is to rethink the role of objects in the construction of collectives. It is this demand to critically reassess ‘political spaces’ that informs their use throughout this text.

Becoming

The term ‘becoming’ is iconic of Deleuzian philosophy, and will often appear in this text. Marrati defines it in a rather simple, yet richly descriptive manner:

Becoming [...] expresses a purely immanent dimension of time, without determinable beginning or end and one that cannot be judged—or even experienced—according to any result attained.

The ontological and ethical consistency of becoming is due to its own operation, and although it does not take place “elsewhere” than in history, although it is born in history and always falls back onto it, it nonetheless does not belong to history. (Marrati, 2003, pp 84, 85)

As this text develops greater detail of its use will be provided to the reader. It suffices to say for now that it will function as a basic and powerful underlying principle. Its use will allow the propositions developed here to be always framed outside modern interpretations of space and time: as pre-existent and predefined categories. The term becoming relates undoubtedly to change, to the constant reconstruction and redefinition of reality that allows for human life to exist as it does today, with its evident irrationalities, with its perhaps vulgar pragmatism, and with its constant efforts to make the new and the old coexist under a logic that wishes to preserve, to reduce and to normalize.

The word is further explained by Deleuze and Guattari in terms of their ‘molar’ versus ‘molecular’ aspects:

On the one hand, multiplicities that are extensive, divisible, and molar; unifiable, totalizable, organizable; conscious or preconscious – and on the other hand, libidinal, unconscious, molecular, intensive multiplicities composed of particles that do not divide without changing nature, and distances that do not vary without entering another multiplicity and that constantly construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communications, as they cross over into each other at, beyond, or before a certain threshold. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p 33)⁷

Gesamtkunstwerk

The originally Wagnerian term is emblematic of modern philosophy of art. The notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or ‘total work of art’ has been an ideal that portrays art as a manifestly unique force, whose main role is to give univocity to the variety of human desires and its cultural expressions. Rather than adhering to the specific use it has in Wagner’s writing, where it is linked most directly with theatre and opera, the notion is used here in a looser sense:

The total artwork is seen as an internally dynamic and self-proliferating set of aesthetic possibilities, rather than as a strict program confined to Wagner’s own intentions and cultural context. (Goebel, 2012, p 413)

The term, therefore, is not intended to stay close to Wagnerian theatre, but to portray this ideal of unity, of fulfilment in a sense that inevitably brings modern romanticism to mind. This sense of unity, which would give art a single voice, and which would make an artist the tool of a greater cause has important

⁷ The use of the molar/molecular separation will be seldom used here, yet it will follow Deleuzio/Guattarian lines when doing so.

political connotations, which will be, in turn, discussed. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be thought of, along these lines, as ‘the Hang zum *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the urge to a total work of art) – Harald Szeemann’s term for the irresistible need to give everything consistent politico-aesthetic meaning from a single perspective. (Oosterling, 2009, p 8)

The Sublime

The concept of the sublime will be mainly used when discussing the arguments put forward by Lyotard with regard to aesthetic experience. The concept finds its origins in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, where the sublime is presented as a judgement that presents itself as a sort of overpowering of nature by reason (Kant, 1987, §28, p 261). Furthermore, the sublime experience triggers a judgement that regards an object as counter-purposive, rather than purposive, for the faculties of imagination and judgement (Kant, 1987, §23, p 245), yet it still retains a sense of purpose for reason, while not for the imagination (Kant, 1987, §27, p 260). Kant argues that judgements of the sublime involve a sense of purpose that differs from the one involved in a judgement of beauty, and this in two ways: 1) it is not the object, but the aesthetic judgement per se, which is represented as having a purpose, as purposive, and 2) aesthetic judgment keeps a sense of purpose not for imagination or judgement, but for reason alone (Kant, 1987, §27, p 260).

In Lyotard the notion remains close to the Kantian idea of an object that surpasses our mind’s ability to understand and represent it, to make it part of a structure of signification (Lyotard, 1984, p 78). Lyotard, however, takes it a step further than Kant:

We find sublime those spectacles which exceed any real presentation of a form, in other words where what is signified is the superiority of our power of freedom vis-à-vis the one manifested in

the spectacle itself. In singling out the sublime, Kant places the accent on something directly related to the problem of the failing of space and time. (Lyotard, 1991, p 113)

The sublime is not so much our mind's ability to present the unrepresentable to itself, but it is a challenge to the mind's ability to rationally comprehend what stands in front of it. As a failure of the basic categories of understanding, the sublime would, thus, be presented to our mind as lacking communicability, because it cannot be properly grasped by logic, or by scientific language. Going even further, by posing an insurmountable challenge to rational discourse and, hence, to rational discursive practices at large, the sublime would be best taken, primarily as the deconstruction of such discourse, of those practices, and as such it would become symbolic of our ability to precisely free ourselves from them. There is, in consequence, a feeling of inadequacy or impropriety that comes with the sublime: there is tension; there is anxiety, but still there is more than pure negativity:

The sublime has this as specific: it imposes on us a theoretical experience of the absolutely negative, by making us open to the practical experience of overcoming in the imagination. [...]
The experience of the sublime is the path that crosses from the theoretical to the practical, is the truth of negativity. (Negri; 2000; 35)

The Intermedial

The terms 'Intermedial' and 'Intermediality' will be used extensively in this text. The reason behind their use is motivated by one of the main philosophical efforts intended: to develop an argument that avoids oppositional thought as well as the need for underlying metaphysical principles. Given the scope of this research, the notion of the Intermedial will be used to inform events related to aesthetics, politics, and economics. In short the Intermedial can be thought of as the intersection of media, materiality, and art (Oosterling & Plonowska, 2011, p 1). The notion of the Intermedial can be understood as developing

along two axes or as proposing two dimensions to philosophical thought. There is an axis of complexity that is extensive and an axis of depth that is intensive and proposes new entities, new modes of thought. The axis of complexity has to do with the demands that the notion makes on analytical thought, the latter understood as an effort towards achieving simplification through abstraction and systematization, as well as, through reduction and synthesis. The Intermedial, in turn, demands of thought to grasp the efficacy of multiplicity, which means that common philosophical notions such as essence or entity must be rekindled or avoided entirely—the second route is taken here.

The Intermedial then is a notion that invites thought to gather, to collect, but to do so in a way that is not reductive, but which is still much more than an accounting exercise. This means that the physical space that common sense ascribes to objects must be also challenged, and by doing so one of the facets of Intermediality is that it is a political analysis of new modes of being in common. Understanding the Intermedial can, for instance, begin with the commonsensical understanding—the obvious even—space of in-between or ‘inter’: in between bodies, in between topographies, in between economical prosperity and latent poverty, in between political authority and freedom, in between persistent abuses by democratic institutions, and in between national and supranational authorities. These in-between spaces break with a Cartesian and Kantian notion of space, not simply by being metaphorical, but because they are not spaces which pre-exist and define objects, but appear as spaces, which are constantly being produced; constantly being constructed, re-constructed, and deconstructed; hence, making of our attempts to rationally understand them, instances that always come too late and always after the event. I refer to these spaces as ‘spaces’ and not moments, because of the negotiations that they must constantly host: negotiations between humans and non-humans who claim a right to existence within them, as part of them.

Nancy refers to this dynamic of production as a socio-political paradox that characterizes the intersection between Politics and the Intermedial:

The result is a sociopolitical paradox: while becoming members of expanded virtual communities [...] real communities are actually dismembered. Phrased less metaphorically: individuals no longer belong to one community, but to many. (Nancy, 2005, p 97)

It is within this paradoxical political context that the intensive axis shines through. The political spaces that are produced cannot be understood as external to humans and non-humans who would come to populate them. Negotiation is here not a matter of distribution, but of intensities, of modes or ways of being. Humans and non-humans produce ways of being that are neither internal to their physical or physiological boundaries, nor absolutely external to them; they are precisely in-between. They are principally relational. I refer, therefore, to this axis as being intensive, because of the way it challenges thought to understand the gathering of multiplicity as more than a distribution of space or as a collection of items; it demands from thought to grasp what is being produced as new modes of being, as claims to existence made by humans and non-humans who are in constant becoming.

The notion of Intermedial carries too, another important functional connotation. Its focus on the production of being, of agencies, suggests the idea that, within a world of contradictions, identities alone stand for nothing, but come into being as they become productive, and as they produce accountable effects. To some extent, Intermediality implies that identity as a concept can no longer denote more than fleeting contingent states.

Finally, this research has an important stake in the role and understanding that we have of art today, i.e. in a digitalized world. In particular, its focus is set on what will be referred to as Intermedial Art, which is a mode of artistic production that attempts to gather multiplicities as well as to put forward a mediated aesthetic experience. Briefly, the term Intermedial Art relates to art that:

[e]mphasizes the trope of the incorporation of the mediatic frame into the artistic message [...]

Interaction and participation in the creation of meaning is one of the dominating ‘mottos’ in

digital art [although it is not exclusive to digital art]. [...] They [Intermedial artists,] call for interaction, inviting the viewers to become artists/producers/creators themselves. (Wegenstein, 2010, p 94)

The concept of Intermediality has a broad field of application, varying from the conventional visual and performing art practises via architecture and design to multimedia and digital art practices. It will allow for a more rigorous understanding of artistic proposals within the present digitality (interactions, avatars, virtual profiles, real time input, etc.) to be developed.

Relationalism

The term relational is both relevant from an ontological point of view as well as from the perspective of Art Theory. The term is used consistently across these viewpoints, but naturally raises particular questions and problems according to its usage and context. From a philosophical standpoint, Relational Theory (or Relationalism) refers to the presumption about the constitution of the world that can be labelled as holistic. Instead of an ontology based on individual bodies or entities, Relational Theory would measure the reality of actants (in a sense that will include humans and nonhumans) by their relationships and not by their ability to project individual attributes. The weight of Relationalism in ANT is relevant and must be kept in mind. Harman, for instance, argues that relationalism in Latour refers to 'the view that a thing is defined solely by its effects and alliances rather than by a lonely inner kernel of essence' (Harman, 2009, p 75).

The importance of Relationalism in this text is mainly driven by two factors: its pragmatic vein and accountability, on the one hand, and its philosophical departure from dichotomic thought, on the other. By putting a focus on relations, rather than on individual attributes and essences, explanations will thus develop as verifications of sorts. These will not only highlight the importance of practical, accountable

effects, but also do away with the problem of seeing potential action as an equally relevant ontological moment. Relational theory, therefore, refers to agencies (or actants) and not to entities, because discussing the production of ‘the real’ is done by locating its effects, and by understanding connections, articulations, productions, and consequences. Furthermore, the focus on effects makes sense only in a world where all actants have an equal footing; where activity and passivity are no longer ontological attributes or where ‘real’ action would be caused by will. In other words, Relational Theory will no longer work along the lines of the subject-object divide, or of any set of presuppositions that would make of relations the by-product of specific types of entities; a by-product that neither adds nor explains what an entity’s footing on reality is or can be. It is this equal footing that can only occur within a plane of immanence, where a certain horizontality between actors remain, where relational theory finds its place and where our human understanding will profit the most.

Relational theory will also have here a political scope. Relations between actors are not presupposed, nor characterized by their stability—quite the contrary. This means that relations are always the product of negotiations between actants who have equal footing; mastery over objects or other humans would be no more than wishful thinking in the best case, or would come close to megalomania in the worst. However, a reality constituted by relations is also not naively presupposed. It is not simply a matter of affirming that humans and non-humans are related through and through without the need for deeper analysis. On the contrary, by remaining pragmatic, Relational Theory pays attention to the dynamics of a changing world, to the contingencies that characterize the rise and fall of particular relations, as well as to the way in which new relations are put forward by propositions. From a political standpoint, relational bodies ‘are ambiguous sites of both sedimented, technologized power relations as well as new productive modes of existence’ (Oosterling & Plonowska, 2011, p 3).

It is as part of this philosophical deployment that the term Relational Art appears on stage. Relational Art too is a concept that remains pragmatic and faithful in keeping the focus on the success and failure of relations, between humans and nonhumans. Bourriaud defines it as:

[a] set of practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space. [...] aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt. (Bourriaud, 2002, p 113)

This slight hint of ‘inter-human relations’ might remain too humanistic a point of view, which is in need of enhancement by Latour’s notion of actants.

Experience, Event, and Experiment

Experience, event, and experiment are notions that come close to each other once relations, propositions, and effects become part of the explanation behind the general becoming of humans and non-humans.

The understanding of aesthetic experience proposed will make pivotal use of both these concepts.

Experience will be used to denote a moment between perception and reflection: affects and percepts, i.e. sensations (present in the artwork) are all experienced and, as such, claim to subsist on their own, without man (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 164). Experience as the moment between perception and reflection, presents itself in the form of an event; a fleeting moment where sensations become a stable structure, and where they become part of a web of associations that is not yet reflected upon, but merely are intuited or felt. Lyotard argues for a similar understanding of the event: artworks present themselves as combinations that allow an event to occur (Lyotard, 1991, p 101). The effects of this aesthetic event on a spectator go beyond a reduction of experience to identifiable sensation:

The art-lover does not experience a simple pleasure, or derive some ethical benefit from his contact with art, but expects an intensification of his conceptual and emotional capacity, an ambivalent enjoyment. Intensity is associated with an ontological dislocation. (Lyotard, 1991, p 101)

Therefore, the closeness of experience and experiment comes by means of the event. An experiment is an event, because an experiment is not a set-up, but a story, not a structure, but a process. For instance, when referring to the scientific experiment, Latour says that it is a story “‘tied” to a situation in which new actants undergo terrible trials plotted by an ingenious stage manager; and then the stage manager undergoes terrible trials at the hands of his colleagues, who test what sort of “ties” there are.’ (Latour, 1999, p 124). Latour’s usage of the term again points to the way in which an experiment is propositional of new relations—is a set of propositions—and does so in a way not dissimilar to a trial and error approach. For humans and non-humans are challenged to coexist in a particular yet attainable way; ‘[a]fter the event all elements have been, at least, partially transformed’ (Latour, 1999, p 126). The main lesson behind the idea of experimenting and behind the event is precisely this: actants gain after the event and must gain after a successful experiment—a statement—which gains its true meaning only when held up against a background of relationships.

Political (art), politics and the Political

Virtually any process of negotiation can be termed political. When dealing with a theory that argues that humans and nonhumans incur in negotiations at every moment and in every place, politics seems to become over encompassing. This text, in consequence, will depart from an understanding that reduces the political to a practice that concerns only human groups or individuals acting in the form of representatives. The scope of ‘the political’ will, in turn, be used in broader fashion, in order to make

space for both humans and nonhumans, without this meaning that the role that humans or institutions have will be passed over, or that political practises will be neglected. Nonetheless, relational theory does demand a level of abstraction that allows for the negotiations mentioned to be properly analyzed as being political in essence.

The political, briefly, gathers in this text three main elements: negotiation, ‘the common’, and mediation or mediality. Agamben is clear in this respect, for he argues that politics is the exhibition of mediality, which would, in turn, make it the act ‘of making a means visible as such’ (Agamben, 2000, p 116). Negotiations are in essence political, precisely because there is ‘a common’ at stake or, in other words, there is an element of recognition and claims, which different parties make upon each other. ‘The common’ has here a twofold reference to notice. On the one hand, there may be a common content at stake, for instance, a space, which has been recognized as valuable and attainable for parties with different interests. On the other hand, the common is also the existence itself of a mode of negotiation, that is, a way through which parties approach each other to make their claims; this way presents itself as mediation or mediality. Agamben refers to this mediation of the common as a practice of pure means:

‘Politics is the sphere neither of an end in itself nor of means subordinated to an end; rather, it is the sphere of a pure mediality without an end intended, as the field of human action and of human thought’ (Agamben, 2000, pp 116, 117).

From this perspective of mediality, the common then gains a new quality, for it is no longer or primarily an object, a particularized value at stake, but is better seen as a practice that is persistent, yet entirely dynamic in its inner works:

If instead we define the common (or, as others suggest, the same) as a point of indifference between the proper and the improper—that is, as something that can never be grasped in terms of

either expropriation or appropriation but that can be grasped, rather, only as use—the essential political problem then becomes: “How does one use the common?” (Agamben, 2000, p 117)

To conclude, how we use the common is then an essential problem that will be discussed in this text, with (Intermedial) Art being its particularized value at stake. At the same time—and because of its propositional nature—art intrudes politics as a moment that redefines the common, when it appears as presenting a challenge to the inner dynamic of negotiations, to the ever-present mediations. As such, Intermedial Aesthetics deals with the proposition of new forms of mediation, of new medialities, or in short, of new spaces where ‘the political’ unfolds itself.

PART 1

Communication in a world of the in-between

Aesthetic Experience in Deleuze, Lyotard, Bourriaud, Morton, and Rancière

Introduction: Aesthetic experience, hermeneutics and interpretation

When we are exposed to a work of art, materials and composition seem to converge, to collide, and to mix in a way that makes both equally relevant for our enjoyment of the work. The materials, whether paint, plaster, metal, photographs, film or the like, do not stand on their own; when we are confronted with a work of art in which all we can see is the material (*subjectile*⁸), we are irremediably lost. There is no meaning to attain, no signification whatsoever. Yet, these specific material conditions, still, constitute the artist's work in its entirety. Whatever meaningfulness the work is said to convey must be derived from these same material conditions. It would seem that meaning appears as a requirement, and implies in turn, that the artwork's political bearings, taken simply as its ability to affect other social practices in particular, as much as societal life in general, necessarily depend on the ability of the spectator to transform materials in an intelligible way, i.e. to see materials as a composition.

Meaningfulness, as the property of a structure of signification, is only comprehended by the spectator as long as matter, content and form, are expressed in a coherent intelligible and sensible manner. More than a seemingly reasonable recipe, this means that a specific discursive regime must appear as underpinning the 'veiled' truth that is aesthetically represented. Thus, the universal validity of such discourse would be what the artwork reaffirms, albeit aesthetically, and what the spectator must be able to conclude, discursively, through a process of interpretation that can have forceful effects on her practical life. I tend to agree here with Morton, when he asserts about political art that, 'Whatever form it takes, art since Romanticism comes with an explicit or implicit manifesto attached to it' (Morton 2007, p 92). It is either subversive and critical, or emancipational and escapist (Morton, 2007, p 92).

As interpretations become essential aspects of aesthetic experience, both, the material conditions and the composition involved, become significant and coherent conceptual wholes—for as long as the process of

⁸ The French term *subjectile* refers to the surface on which the painting, drawing or mural is supported.

interpretation is successful. This can be easily seen, for example, if we think for a moment of the mural paintings of an artist such as Diego Rivera.



Illustration 1: Diego Rivera. *The Uprising*. 1931.

In his paintings, a political discourse (Marxism, i.e. Trotskyism) seems to overflow and suggest itself as the conceptual framework from which a proper interpretation, focusing on a materially expressed truth, should successfully follow—the painter himself would probably have agreed, at least in general terms, with this interpretative framework. However, disagreement with the maxim of interpretation does not affect the latter’s ability to translate aesthetics into a political program, for the task can and has been done⁹.

Moreover, having interpretation as the maxim of successful aesthetic experience would agree with Goodman’s *Languages of Art*, as it argues that: ‘The aesthetic significance of material attributes of autographic artworks can only be decided upon retrospectively, from the perspective of a successful interpretation. In “[merely] looking at them”, we find all their material attributes to be of equal aesthetic significance or insignificance’ (Menke, 1999, p 41). This stresses the importance of the reception-

⁹ Think of Futurism’s *Manifesto of Futurist Painting*, to name a case in point.

aesthetics that became relevant, from the 1970's onward, and has become part of intermedial and relational aesthetics today.

Hermeneutics, as one of the arts of interpretation, deserves a few words, for it is a crucial theoretical backbone for any interpretative perspective on aesthetic experience. In Heidegger, 'interpretation is the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding' (Heidegger, 2007, p. 189). 'In interpretation understanding doesn't become something different. It becomes itself' (2007, p 188). This is true of Gadamer as well, where foreprojections are fundamental to any interpretation that can be given to a text¹⁰.

Hermeneutics (in Gadamer and Heidegger) calls for the interpreter to make sure that her interpretation is successful, meaning that interpreting a work of art is to project over, under or above it—the metaphorical topology already contains metaphysical implications—a particular meaning that expresses our specific knowledge and orientation. These potential projections are neither infinite, nor indeterminate; yet can never be aware of them all. As possibilities, whatever the case may be, these are determined by the conditions of our life, of our way of living. Our ability to configure those possibilities into something intelligible relies on our ability to fully comprehend the conditions of our way of life in the first place. Understanding then, is an interpretation of our projected possibilities based on our (current) life conditions; in other words, it is an existential aspect of human beings (an 'existenzial' or 'existential' in Heidegger's terminology).

[E]very revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of

¹⁰ 'A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into meaning, is understanding what is there' (Gadamer, 2004, p 269).

meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-projections that are replaced by more suitable ones.

(Gadamer, 2004, p 296)

Unity of meaning is one of the criteria hermeneutics proposes as a way to avoid complete dissemination of meaning or *interpretosis*. The other criterion is intelligibility or coherence of the text:

[F]ore-conception of completeness [...] states that only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible. So when we read a text we assume its completeness, and only when this assumption proves mistaken i.e., the text is not intelligible—do we begin to suspect the text and try to discover how it can be remedied. (Gadamer, 2004, p 294)

Read carefully, read it as a whole in order to render the work of art intelligible. If you fail start over, but don't stop until an interpretation is chosen. This is the mantra of intelligibility and unity of meaning put forward by Gadamer, in order to deal with aesthetic experience. However, it is true that the interpretation chosen may not be final¹¹ and that one needs a certain good faith—*docta ignorantia*—for the (temporarily final) interpretation to be a successful one¹². This fact, however, neither implies that interpretations are straightforwardly critical, nor that they subvert our non-aesthetic practices. If so, what is subverted will be the reader's prejudices, which, with additional dialectal manoeuvring, may be argued are the result of imposing social conditions. Still, shared meanings and some good faith on behalf of the viewer, do not immediately qualify the success or failure of aesthetic experience, in terms of its political effects. In other words, the fact that the reader's own prejudices are the ones that must be shattered means that the door is opened for an entirely *subjective* understanding of aesthetic experience to become established. Aside from this possibility, there also remains the possibility of an aesthetic understanding that is not productive (of new meanings or identities), but rather reproductive (of the already established meanings). The viewer, in this case, could have a relation with the artwork that is

¹¹ 'Gadamer agrees understanding can never be final' (Apel, 1980, p 34).

¹² Gadamer has recourse to the Socratic *docta ignorantia* as the 'engine' of the interpretative process (Gadamer, 2004, p 356).

similar to the relation that she has with a TV commercial, a sit-com, or a reality TV show, that is, a relation not only compliant (or indifferent) regarding her form of life, but one which bluntly reaffirms existing prejudices. An aesthetic relation perhaps, but one better adjusted to a hamster spinning the wheel of its cage—without this denying, at all, the entertainment value that such activity can have (in both hamster and human).

However, keeping faith, one may arguably say that, strictly speaking, subjective interpretations—in a solipsistic sense—and social reproduction—unreflective social practices—are neither the most salient, nor the most interesting of approaches to hermeneutics. ‘Fair enough’, one may say, and focus instead on the collective or social nature of unity of meaning and intelligibility. At this point, the interpretative process raises a considerable obstacle: the conditions of our life, which Wittgenstein – and after him, Foucault and Agamben – calls ‘way of life’ or ‘form of life’. The hermeneutical process demands a clear understanding of our ‘form of life’, of our ability to communicate with other forms of living, or of the potential to have a universally shared way of life. Communication, participation, and identification are constitutive aspects of this process. The political implications are evident and unfold in the modern project of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, for instance, but not only there. The issue that must be kept in mind is the presumption of communication between work and viewer, between viewers and between ways of life: communication that is based on shared meanings and a sense of community must involve artists, viewers and critics alike if it is to be successful. This presumption effectively turns a work of art into a functional social activity and into a discursive practice.

One must keep in mind that Gadamer’s hermeneutic reading wants to avoid the objectification of social realities – departing from the empirical propositions found in the natural sciences – and argues in favour of coming to an understanding about the meanings that determine different perspectives on that same social reality; an interest that he shares with Habermas (Harrington, 2000). Suspension of judgement is precisely what Gadamer wants to avoid as a methodological presupposition—in fact a metaphysical

proposition regarding the nature of knowledge as such—and which can be arguably said to be a likewise departure from Husserl's phenomenological parenthesizing. Presuming that suspension of judgement (from historical circumstance in the first place) entails an understanding of knowledge as absolute is what worries Gadamer (Gadamer, 2004; Harrington, 2000). The hermeneutic process in Gadamer therefore becomes a sort of never-ending dynamic of interpretations—it is speculative to say that an interpretation is finished, although this does not imply that a general consensus cannot be reached, bringing us perhaps closer to Habermas than to Dilthey.

The figure of Dilthey is important to bring to mind, because in his hermeneutic reading the role of foreprojections (of value orientations) is analyzed as a contentious aspect: value orientations or foreprojections determine the possibilities of interpretation, and also the ability of a hermeneutic reading to gain authority, from an epistemological point of view. These value orientations are explicitly differentiated in Dilthey from particularistic material interests; the latter referring to purely individual (political) interests, something not dissimilar from what we see in the news today such as a politician's relationships with corporations, interest groups, etc., which is perhaps what characterizes the way politics is understood and spoken of in daily language. The value orientations in Dilthey—the foreconceptions in Gadamer—refer, in turn, to the process of socialization of humans in modern society. In short, modern life means that an individual acquires a worldview, a framework of prejudices, to fall back on Gadamer's term, from which reality at large becomes structured. Structured in the sense in which we say that scientific problems are always and from the start presented in a particular manner, that is, based on a theoretical perspective that grants any answer its meaning and its place as an answer to a specified problem. Any such structures should, however, not be taken as subconscious or unknown, even if they cannot be reflected upon in their entirety. Such structures can always be reflected upon and must be always presumed to be primordial to the construction of knowledge, as ontological perspectives¹³ or as

¹³ For Habermas, there is a Kantian transcendentalist sense invoked behind these valuations (Weber 1949, 76).

metaphysics – as first philosophy in the Aristotelian sense. For Dilthey it is to this process of socialization that we owe our ability to decode or decipher social life (Dilthey, 1989). This process is naturally what makes reflection and critique on modern social life possible¹⁴.

Furthermore, Dilthey emphasizes—against Neo-Kantians—that it is not the transcendental, transhistorical self that experiences historical life (human life), but rather the historical, socially embedded self. More than an implicit recognition of historicity as an underpinning for knowledge, it is interesting to note here that Dilthey grants life, experience, *Erlebnis*, a quality that is determinant of our own ability to reflect and rationalize that same experience (Bambach, 1995). At this point Dilthey's approach presents an important difference from Gadamer's. Gadamer's interpretations do not carry the absolute character that is granted to objective knowledge; hermeneutic knowledge for Gadamer is neither universal nor absolute. Even if this is the case, Gadamer abstains from seeing in human life aspects that fundamentally surpass our ability for interpretation, which makes of *Erlebnis* a concept that has no place in his brew of hermeneutics. The hermeneutic approach envisioned by Dilthey entails instead, a historical process where time is recognized as a dimension of historical life that cannot be disregarded or reduced to our value orientations, product of a form of life (Bambach, 1995). In this sense, such recognition of time as a fundamental dimension of our historical life brings Dilthey closer to Bergson than to Gadamer. The importance of life is such, that one can, in fact, argue that Dilthey's understanding of historical knowledge is not rooted in the scientific method—or a replica of it for the human sciences—but in lived experience (Bambach, 1995). Yet for Dilthey, 'Life expresses itself to us within a context of meaning whose unity is based on this part-to-whole relationship, following a hermeneutical structure' (Bambach, 1995, p. 164). In other words, one sees in Dilthey the constant shadow of objectivism looming behind them; objectivism as the dominant character of the modern

¹⁴ 'Out of this world of objective spirit, the self receives its nourishment from earliest childhood. It is the medium in which our understanding of other persons and their life-expressions is accomplished. For everything in which the spirit has objectified itself contains something communal for the I and the You' (Dilthey, W. 1989, pp. 256, 229).

scientific method. In this sense, Dilthey's interest is to give the human sciences (the human and social sciences of today) an objectivist character of their own that, due to their historical nature, must be different from the one endorsed by the natural sciences—or at least, by the philosophers of science that stand guard on the absolute character of objective claims. Objectivism is a constant shadow on Dilthey's analysis and one that some of his readers would say he simply cannot escape from (Harrington, 2000). The value orientations, which inevitably bring politics within the epistemological conversation, are highly subversive in doing so; yet it is unlikely that Dilthey would see this gesture of bringing politics and science together as necessary or desirable. I say Dilthey remains ambivalent with respect to the separation of politics and science, because for him science and life are essentially one, as science has its roots in life, and his main contention is with the scientific method, which demands too much from life in terms of objectivity (Dilthey, 1989)¹⁵.

The *prima facie* difference between evaluative and descriptive statements makes Dilthey's hermeneutic reading an interpretative scheme that is inevitably tied up within the objective/subjective divide¹⁶. Harrington (2000) illustrates the weight of the divide on Dilthey's thought by pointing towards the Habermasian critique that maintains that 'Dilthey increasingly neglected the sense in which our hermeneutic "fore-conceptions" and "practical cognitive interests" first enable understanding by allowing us to form reflexively meaningful relationships to others in communication' (Harrington, 2000, p 498). From such a perspective, abandoning the pathway towards objectivity can only appear as endorsing the most vulgar relativism with respect to the human sciences. Therefore, with respect to the role of interpretations as a method from which to approach aesthetic experience, the point is not that

¹⁵ 'Because historians, political economists, jurists and religious scholars stand in life, they want to influence it. They submit historical personalities, mass movements and developments to their judgement, and this is conditioned by their individuality, by the nation to which they belong, and by the time in which they live. Even where they believe themselves to be proceeding presuppositionlessly, they are determined by their ambit of view [. . .] At the same time, however, every science worthy of its name contains the demand of universal validity. If there are to be human sciences in the strict sense of science, they must set themselves this goal ever more consciously and critically' (Dilthey, 1989, pp. 166, 183).

¹⁶ Harrington notes that, in Dilthey, there is a *prima facie* difference between descriptive and evaluative statements (cf. Dilthey 1989, p78; in Harrington, 2000, p. 500).

hermeneutics is unable to derive highly convincing interpretations, but that the role of experience (aesthetic experience) remains an inferior one; even in Dilthey's view and even within a method that does its best not to reduce knowledge to the mantra of scientific objectivism.

Keep in mind that I introduced interpretation using a work of Diego Rivera as a prime example of the way in which interpretation becomes part of a clear political programme, not of practical political interests, but of a general programme, which derives its authority from *sensus communis*; broadly defined as a recourse to some form of general knowledge regarding universal principles and an essential part of the 'total work of art'¹⁷. From this perspective, interpretation finds political relevance in artworks by politicizing them and by placing them within the 'whole' of the political discourse bearing in mind the part-and-whole relationship that is fundamental to interpretation. This also implies that for hermeneutics any form of art must present itself as a composite whole; this with the purpose of facilitating the convergence between the visual and the enunciative, between the 'visible' and the 'lisible', the articulable¹⁸.

In order to explore the political relevance of contemporary art, one cannot rely on interpretation as the method of choice, because this would entail insisting on a separation between science and politics, where experience (*becoming*) is taken as secondary, and where a philosophical argument runs the risk of being captured by a political discourse whose underpinning lies, perforce, outside artistic practices, and artistic production as an autonomous sphere. Political art cannot begin by owing anything to political or epistemological absolutes. Instead, the starting point in this investigation follows Latour (2013), who says that the question of scientific knowledge is not mainly a question of either debunking objectivity as

¹⁷ This view is held, among others, by Oosterling (1999b, 'Sens(a)ble Intermediality and Inter-esse: Towards an Ontology of the In-Between').

¹⁸ This quickly relates to the power-knowledge implications of modernity as one follows Foucault. In his book *Foucault*, Deleuze states that the archive, 'audiovisual is disjunctive [...]'. As long as we stick to things and words we can believe that we are speaking of what we see, that we see what we are speaking of, and that the two are linked: in this way we remain on the level of an empirical exercise' (2009, p 64 & p 65). This would allow one to view the hermeneutical project as interpretative scheme in accordance, or in compliance, with modern mechanisms of social reproduction.

an idealization product of a metaphysics of enlightenment, or rediscovering it as a possibility that is the result of a proper hermeneutic process – one in which fore-conceptions are exhaustively identified. The first pathway leads towards relativism and nihilism, by means of a critique whose strength consists in stating the obvious, albeit as a catastrophe of sorts: Science unlike science cannot and will not exist, reducing the worth of scientific discovery and scientific knowledge to pragmatic considerations. The second route makes scientific objectivity conditional on hermeneutics as first philosophy and implicitly assumes that the philosopher of science must be a hermeneutist, a normative claim that is not far from the standpoint of analytical philosophy, where science can only become Science under certain methodological conditions – conditions that most scientists entirely ignore (Latour, 1999).

Inasmuch as interpretation is required for the work to have universal relevance within any, or all, aspects of social life then one can risk saying that, under an interpretative scheme, the work is most likely to end up appealing to one form of another of *sensus communis*. It is perhaps by following interpretation too closely that shared meanings make way to the ‘total work of art’ or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The main contention at this point becomes a practical one: such gestures of universality relate little to contemporary art practices, which by no means give an overall orientation toward morality, politics, or culture. Artists such as Warhol in painting, John Cage in music, or Charles Bukowski in literature, just to name some relevant exponents of avant-garde art, have not attempted anything of the sort: they neither disqualify other artworks based on their political affiliation, nor show contempt towards more recent uses of modern media by artists.

Moreover, interpretation can be co-opted by a pro-capitalist discourse that highlights the role of the individual spectator as interpreter – of aesthetic judgment as individual taste – leading towards a compartmentalized view of art as an economic practice (a production process), where each compartment relates to a particular niche in the market and to an arbitrary number of consumers. In this case, interpretative schemes that have no claim to universality can be used to explain away taste, presuming it

is the result of personal narratives—fore-projections quickly become consumer preferences. This would entail a relativism of sorts, but a consensuated form of relativism, where differences are seen as positive inasmuch as they allow the art market to grow in many directions.

Such interpretative approach can also take a different direction, which I refer to as contextualization. Contextualization also functions as an effective frame. It keeps the interpretative process alive, while giving up the universalizing aspects of a political discourse, based on *sensus communis*. What I regard as contextualization has to do with the attempt to maintain aesthetics' heteronomy by means of maintaining a historicity of sorts. In other words, it is possible to adduce the work's relevance within a particular context, but in so doing and by the same gesture, deny it with respect to any other. By presupposing the work's relevance within a particular context—topologically and chronologically—the former would quickly lack effective productive power outside its original historical circumstance, making aesthetics entirely relative. Given that no two historical contexts will be strictly identical, it will be true that contextualization will not function as a comparative scientific process, but rather as a loosely framed conversation that helps to normalize aesthetic experience. The normalization of aesthetic experience does not bluntly erase any subversive elements that a work may have, but rather enables specific channels of diffusion and communication to be set in place¹⁹.

This contextualization is similarly noted by Rancière, who sees it as a romantic gesture, where objects of past time are reappraised in the present and even made into a fetish (Rancière, 2010, p 125). For Rancière this reappraisal makes of a museum of art a museum of ethnography: the aesthetic experience is discovered in everyday objects (everyday life), through this 'fetishization' of old art, that is, new art

¹⁹ This argument stands in line with Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Artlike sex does not simply vanish—product of repression—rather, a multifarious arrangement for the controlled diffusion of sex and art is set in place: 'There is no single, all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society and uniformly bearing on all the manifestations of sex' (Foucault, 1990, p 103). Similarly, there is no single way in which art is placed under control, but a series of superimposing mechanisms serve to neutralize distinctive artistic manifestations: power-knowledge, anatomo-politics, and biopolitics (Foucault, 1990, p 139).

made out of old forms and objects. Rancière relates this view among others to Warhol and current exhibitions of recycled commodities (Rancière, 2010, p 126).

To sum up, interpretation, as a scheme for producing aesthetic understanding, neglects the particular tension behind aesthetic experience, by claiming the success of a single interpretation – tension that can only be recognized when the aesthetic experience is not subjected to the signifier, i.e. to a universalizing discourse²⁰. Christoph Menke hints towards this tension, when arguing ‘It is precisely in the attempt at signifier formation that the aesthetic object produces itself as material and achieves its superabundant quality vis-à-vis each and every signifying relation’ (Menke, 1999, p 61).

A successful interpretation cannot help but to impose a particular orientation upon the work of art. This orientation has to do with the conditions regarding unity and intelligibility, whose main goal is to deliver a cohesive and coherent interpretation²¹. Those conditions serve to establish coherent signifying relationships between internal elements, but do so at the cost of reducing the work of art to those particular relations. The possibility of having two or more interpretations will always be seen by an interpretative approach as negative or lacking, as an incomplete process. This means that, instead of viewing multiple interpretations as an expression of the work’s richness, or autonomy, they will be perceived as a flaw on behalf of the observer and interpreter.

Briefly, a quick diagram of the hermeneutic process reveals two major issues at stake. Firstly, the presumed existence of a programme behind all works of art that would be based on the presumption of a self-evident common sense. I have highlighted the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its desired effects of conscious cultural awakening, as well as its less politically charged appropriations, which deliver a solipsistic

²⁰ ‘[t]he total reduction to either side [art to politics or vice versa] destroys precisely the tension that both artists and spectators need in order to reflect and project what they experience in self-reflective art practices’ (Oosterling, 2007, p 227).

²¹ This was already seen by Adorno when he said: ‘The manifold may seek its own synthesis in the aesthetic continuum, but it also balks at being synthesized, for it is in part determined by forces outside of art. The synthesis, which is extrapolated from the many that contains it as a potential, is also, unavoidably, its negation’ (Adorno, 1970, as cited in Menke, p 77).

appropriation of art via interpretation in a way of life, that can also imply a normalization of art by their circulation as commodities in the market. Secondly, there is an issue regarding the limits of all interpretations when attempting to deliver a proper understanding of aesthetic experience. The difficulties that surround the possible translation between one language and another—between artwork and viewer or between the visual and the enunciable—must be carefully explored. The underlying problem has to do with the role that communication—better seen as a spectrum between transparency and transformation rather than as a clear goal—plays when confronting a work of art. The functional role of communication will set the effective limits of whatever political project one may choose to ascribe to contemporary art. Lastly, both these issues will be elliptically explored in order to properly study the various layers that can be said to surround the question of art's political relevance. I begin first with a philosophical exploration of aesthetic experience, aesthetic understanding, and innovation as experimentation, as framed by a Deleuzian approach, which I propose will adequately explain today's artistic practices. After a theoretical qualification of contemporary aesthetic experience, I will turn full force to the question of political art as a practice of socio-political and economic relevance.

Deleuze and Aesthetic Experience of contemporary art

My general aim in this section is to explore, in depth, the aesthetic experience in contemporary thought. This effort is not exhausted by the idea of putting forward a better-informed theory of contemporary aesthetic 'gaze'. My research instead unfolds as an exploration of the way in which aesthetic experience can remain a powerful form of social criticism, that can in general subvert society's institutions, but does so in a way that is neither openly subversive nor self marginalized. This means that the modern political issues at stake —resisting normalization, and maintaining some form of (aesthetic) autonomy—will be rekindled here, in order to understand them in terms that will no longer be informed by the whole/part

divide; by the sort of oppositional thought explored and criticized above. In other words, my intention is not to attempt to demonstrate the autonomy of the artistic or aesthetic sphere by means of a critically superior form of dialectic. This would be a self-debilitating endeavour in itself. My interest is not either to reclaim the autonomy of art as an independent or emancipated ‘creative’ sphere; as a set of practices through which social grasp would be finally overcome. My analysis can be regarded, in consequence, as ‘immanent’²² and, as such, as staying close to a Deleuzian usage of the term.

The Remainder and deterritorialization

I open the issue by going into what I argued above: the tension raised by aesthetic experience as it challenges its reduction to language. This tension can be straightforwardly related to Derrida’s distinction of a *remainder* as that which characterizes the indeterminateness that accompanies aesthetic experience as a signifying structure.

What is beautiful is dissemination, the pure cut without negativity, a sans without negativity and without signification. Negativity is significant, working in the service of sense. The negativity of the gadget with the hole in it is significant. It is a signifier. The without-goal, the without-why of the tulip is not significant, is not a signifier, not even a signifier of lack. At least insofar as the tulip is beautiful, this tulip. As such, even a signifier without signified, can do anything but be beautiful. Starting from a signifier, one can account for everything except beauty, that is at least what seems to envelop the Kantian or Saussurean tulip. (Derrida, 1987, p 95)

²²My analysis would thus aim at (re)affirming these tenets: ‘if the forces within man compose a form only by entering into a relation with forms from the outside, with what new forms do they now risk entering into a relation, and what new form will emerge that is neither God nor Man? This is the correct place for the problem which Nietzsche called “the superman”. [...]What is the superman? It is the formal compound of the forces within man and these new forces. Man tends to free life, labour and language *within himself*’ (Deleuze, 2009, p 130& p132).

Aside from the Kantian comprehension of the beautiful²³, what is highlighted by Derrida's interpretation of Kant is the fact that meaning does not work alone but must rely, for its success, on its coexistence with non-meaning. There is always a supplementary *restance* that resists complete understanding. The uniqueness of the tulip, for instance, is both what makes it beautiful, but also what makes this same beauty indefinable—impossible to subsume and understand under a signifier of 'the beautiful'. However, in disagreement with Adorno, this non-meaning cannot be understood as pure negativity, but rather as a surplus, a supplement or, again, as a *remainder*. This positive, or productive aspect of the remainder is better grasped through a clear understanding of its operational character, which I will now bring forward.

If one takes, for example, the world proposed by Bukowski's *Pulp* little profit is made from reflecting on the meaning that such a world carries, or from comparing our world with that of the main character, Nick Belane. To begin with, in a way, the world proposed, differs little, if at all, from ours—which implies that identification will be successful to some extent, or to a certain degree—although one must keep in mind that interpretive schemes are disjunctive. The success of any particular interpretation would then begin to blur as Bukowski's novel introduces a series of lines of flight. These lines of flight come from the 'gaps' of non-meaning that the reader must constantly hurdle throughout the novel: the uneasy detective that hates the senselessness of his life, and yet indulges in felicitous drinking and sexual fantasy without making sense of them either, the disparate characters of death and the alien sit down for a drink with Belane, while the latter is driven mainly by the visual pleasure of such encounter, and the list could go on. When reading the novel one quickly realizes that no hero, no climax, no happy ending, no love story, nothing of the sort is needed for the construction of a great story. *Pulp's* reading will at least result in the subversion of all the transcendent aspects of storytelling that are said to instil value²⁴.

²³ With Kant an understanding that would take us into the propriety of the natural, and to the distinction between this one and the sublime, that lacks understanding, is avoided in order to narrow down the argument so as to keep in line with postmodern understandings of aesthetics.

²⁴ A quote from Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* serves to confirm the point: 'any story will be unintelligible unless it introduces, however subtly, the amount of telling necessary not only to make us aware of the value system which gives its

Furthermore, one soon realizes that what the novel first offers is another way of dealing with our human affairs; that Belane's life is another's life. Nevertheless, the way in which this conclusion is reached will depend, not on the existence of a discourse that discloses or unveils the hidden truth that lies within the novel, but on something similar to the delight of dealing with our human affairs in a valueless manner. It is, therefore, not a matter of partial identification with one or several characters, but rather the identification with all of them to a certain degree, and at a certain point. The reading unravels more as a sort of experience of various degrees of intensity, and as a matter of becoming; becoming Belane, becoming Death, becoming Celine, as much as becoming the spectator of a bizarre state of affairs. The experience of discontinuity, while reading, allows for an aesthetic experience to be fulfilling without it being meaningful.

The discontinuous reading filled with gaps and constant questioning, offers itself as a possible and fully practicable reading, but does so without attempting to deliver a moral underpinning, or a political teleology of any kind. One could even argue that, morality itself is contested as a suitable standard for judging human life as long as it fails to comprehend this other way of understanding subjectivities that the novel proposes. So, it is safe to say that by subverting the expectations that the reader carries, with respect to the story (as narrative) and the characters (as identities), Bukowski effectively creates a world where enjoyment, purposeless work, and fantasy not only cease to be destructive (pure negativities), but also become valid channels for the creation and affirmation of subjectivities.

The aesthetic experience that Bukowski's *Pulp* proposes is, in short, a means for deterritorialization via a discontinuous reading that subverts the idea of an all encompassing meaning or interpretation, while, in

meaning but, more important, to make us willing to accept that value system, at least temporarily' (Booth, 1983, p 112). For Booth the communication of certain meaning(s) is a fundamental aspect of a good story, and a certain amount of persuasion would be needed for them to be effectively transmitted.

turn, suggesting reterritorialization²⁵ due to the affirmative process of subjectification that it advances.

Menke phrases a similar idea, when he says:

Thus the claim to discontinuity involves not so much a conclusion as instructions for understanding: we are to understand interpretative speech in such a way that it is undecidable or discontinuous, that is, we are to have an experience of the aesthetic object that can only be expressed in undecidable interpretations or in a discontinuous interpretative speech—for this is the only way that we can perceive the object aesthetically. (Menke, 1999, p 121)

The appearance of ‘gaps’, or discontinuities serves, primarily, to challenge any understanding of aesthetic experience that may still be based on representation. If *Pulp* makes the meaning within our reading tremble it does so as long as one insists on seeing the work as being representational of reality: where this can mean either the mimicry of a ‘radical’ reality, or the unveiling of a true, but hidden reality²⁶. Aesthetic experience is thus, one of ‘gaps’ or discontinuities that will not give us any true or original presentation of reality; a gesture that, by the same token, creates a distance from modern and pre-modern theories on aesthetic experience. What it does instead is to challenge the perspective by which we understand the medium, as a reflection of reality, in the first place. Marrati also notes this challenge as she discusses Deleuze’s ideas on cinema. She argues that cinema creates a change of perspective that can be seen as an invitation for the spectator to become aware of the particularities that cinema possesses as a medium of expression. These particularities are deployed through concrete forms

²⁵ The conceptual definition of and relation between deterritorialization and reterritorialization can be better understood in Deleuze/Guattarian words: ‘The movement of deterritorialization can never be grasped in itself, one can only grasp its indices in relation to the territorial representations [...] In short, there is no deterritorialization of the flows of schizophrenic desire that is not accompanied by global or local reterritorializations, reterritorializations that always reconstitute shores of representations. What is more, the force and the obstinacy of a deterritorialization can only be evaluated through the types of reterritorialization that represent it; the one is the reverse side of the other’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 316).

²⁶ Following the Platonic inspired theories, art would mimic reality, which would result in an illusion of an illusion – the ontological distinction between representation and reality would thus make art undesirable to reveal the truth. Under Marxian inspiration, the artwork is seen as an object that can confront us with the true reality, the one that lies hidden behind the apparent. This unveiling would be achieved by a critical reflective process, which leads to overcoming alienation, and allowing, for emancipatory self-consciousness (as an instance of collective consciousness) to emerge.

that present social life in ways that are creative and fulfilling, because of what they propose through and for the medium, and not merely because of their critical force. In her words:

Cinema, for Deleuze [...] can undo the sensorimotor link of human perception both in order to go back toward the acentered universe of movement-images—toward matter not yet curved by the human gaze—and to go beyond it toward dimensions of time, spirit, or thought freed from the demands of action and pragmatic perception, just as it can settle into the world of human actions and affects, though always with a little disruption. (Marrati, 2003, p 40)

She goes on to say:

The “turn of experience” of which cinema, in its greatest moments, is capable consists, of course, in the fact of undoing that which our habits, needs and laziness have done, in order to make visible what the human eye is not made to see. But what cinema gives us to see are the perceptions, affects, and relations of thought that cinema itself was able to create. (Marrati, 2003, p 41)

Marrati’s words, in line with the outlined aesthetic experience in *Pulp*, bring the argument within the Deleuze/Guattarian perspective where ‘The work of art is a compound of percepts and affects. [...] Affects are precisely this nonhuman becomings of man, just as percepts—including the town—are nonhuman landscapes of nature. [...] [Through art] We become universes’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp 164, 169).

The Deleuze/Guattarian perspective is straightforward in its recognition of the key role that ‘the new’, whether in terms of innovation and creativity, or whether in terms of sensation, plays in contemporary art. It allows as well for the Derridean *remainder* to become productive, in terms of becomings and of the deterritorialization-reterritorialization continuum. Nevertheless, the sensations (as percepts and affects), which were previously neglected by the interpretative approach, become determinant of

aesthetic experience, and it is necessary to further qualify their role. Along these lines, questions regarding the possible effects of deterritorialization and subversion must be taken explicitly beyond the realm of language so as to configure their impact on forms of subjectivity, communications, networks, and communicability, as well as the place and potential for dissemination that art can have in today's globalized capitalism, which could also be labelled post-historic capitalism —as Slavoj Žižek does —or simply, postmodernism.

Creative Subjectivities: awareness and sensation in the production of 'the new'

Simon O'Sullivan relates current aesthetic practices to the reappraisal of art as something more than an object to be read, because there is something in excess, but less than a sort of transcendental space called 'aesthetics' (O'Sullivan, 2010, pp 189, 190). Along with Derrida he sees contemporary art as a process that involves multiple regimes of signs, and, in this sense, as both signifying and asignifying (O'Sullivan, 2010, p 193).

Taking artist Cathy Wilkes (1999, 2004) as his main reference he argues that the patent surplus of meaning and non-meaning that is present in contemporary art is a gesture that, rather than being merely the continuation of a postmodern critique of representation and modernity, celebrates instead, a modern inclination, which can be characterized as the desire for the production of the new, and for having something different from what is already there (O'Sullivan, 2010, p 193). Nevertheless, the production of the new is not contrary, although not necessarily, a postmodern endeavour, which can still be critical, yet does not intend to make of artistic labour an independent sphere of production; both aspects do establish a safe distance from modern understandings of aesthetics. In other words, contemporary art can indeed be critical 'but it can also plug into the creativity and fundamental productivity in and of the world that is ontologically prior to this capture' (O'Sullivan, 2010, p 194).



Illustration 2: Cathy Wilkes. *Untitled* (detail mixed media). 2011

Therefore, there is more than sheer deconstructive semiotics. There is a remainder and a critical resistance. O'Sullivan's take on the Deleuzian perspective wishes to highlight the calls for experimentation and creativity, and also wishes to underpin the fact that contemporary artists are completely submerged, as we all are, in the spheres of production and exchange that characterize our postmodern reality. Theorizing on contemporary aesthetics means exploring the possibilities that art proposes in order to deterritorialize, not only our structures of meaning and our discourses, but also our all-too-human social practices (technical machines and technical processes pervading throughout the capitalist regime production), which are presented to the public in ways that would be in fact innovative and creative.

Consequently, a frequent ingredient of contemporary art is the 'shock' as a psychological residue of the experience of the sublime, whose purpose is to produce effective deterritorialization. Shock is important, it is argued, inasmuch as it shakes the viewer's current state of mind, hence constituting a distance and rupture that mobilizes heterogeneous forces. Producing shock aims at producing new percepts and affects, new sensations as possibilities for becomings, and by implication in the affirmation of these becomings also new forms of subjectivity. This begs the question of what would be the concrete effect of

the shock? What can the shock produce in terms of new affects? And, what are the supposed social consequences of having shocked viewers?

A first answer can be found in Lazzarato, who sees in ‘the shock’ an effective force that moves the viewer towards the transformation of his or her own subjectivity, and possibly towards the creation of a new ethos. For Lazzarato, once the shock is produced, forces of emotion or affects (in the Deleuzian sense) ensue and move the individual on the basis of belief:

These forces make us both “humble”, because belief surpasses knowledge, and “perceptive”, because the contours of the ego and its modalities of perception limited by imperatives and routines are burst apart. [...] Belief is a power and ethical force that moves the subject into action when success is not assured, and is thus the condition for every transformation and every creation. (Lazzarato, 2010, p 107)

Following Lazzarato, shock literally shakes the viewers’ set of beliefs and challenges them to rekindle their values and moral authority. Belief is so necessary for Lazzarato, because neither knowledge nor meaning provides us with an existential link to the world and to other people (Lazzarato, 2010, p 110). Lazzarato refers to Duchamp to argue in favour of the importance of the shock as an effective mechanism of deterritorialization, which would allow not only for a critical consciousness to emerge, but also for equally new affects to be produced (Lazzarato, 2010, pp 104, 105). The shock moves the spectator’s state of mind towards a state of awareness (regarding her current beliefs) and towards the transformation or reconversion of her own subjectivity (Lazzarato, 2010, p 105). What Duchamp puts forward are a series of techniques which are meant to produce shock, and which, in turn, allow one to:

[i]nvent a method for disentangling oneself from established values, including aesthetic values. [...] These undecidable propositions [which are put forward by Duchamp through the ready-made], these techniques and practices, which only with great difficulty could we define as

exclusively aesthetic, have the production of subjectivity at their aim, the production of an ethos and a *modus vivendi*. (Lazzarato, 2010, p 105)

The viewer, I would say as I understand Lazzarato, is a subject of beliefs that conducts herself in accordance to a set of rules and ethical standards. These ones serve as a moral guidance, not only as a beacon, but also as a coherent structure, which connects the viewer to the social institutions that surround him by means of the recognition of shared or divergent beliefs. Lazzarato's viewer would in fact hold beliefs not only about morality, but also about art, science, the economy, and social institutions at large. The place of the new affects is not entirely clear, but one could speculate that through the shock and the new forms of sensation, the belief-driven spectator would be able to deterritorialize from her usual state of mind; a state of mind which would involve not only a firm set of beliefs, as an eidetic structure, but as a controlled set of sensations, and, thus, an existential whole that allows her to have a constant sense of security with respect to the world.

Now, the fact that the beliefs alone would refer us, almost unavoidably, to a signifying structure, to a discourse on morality or meta-ethics, would provide enough critical ammunition against Lazzarato's view. Moreover, the mention of the existential link, which I see as the means to keep the relevance of the new sensations alive, makes the whole experience rather complex, and hints at an ontology of aesthetics, and perhaps even at a transcendent understanding of the shock. Nonetheless, Lazzarato's story delineates a path that originates in the artist and ends in the creation of a new viewer—a vision, which is surely not exclusive to him. Shock and awareness seem to be the crucial ingredients —the necessary ingredients— if art is to have any impact on the social field. Would there be a set of material conditions that assure the shock, and thus a material ontology? Would awareness be a necessary correlate or consequence of shock? And, does the spectator become aware of the impropriety or partiality of her beliefs, of what she lacks as a subject of belief?

Answering these questions may not be an entirely fruitful enterprise here, as I am not attempting to sustain or reinforce Lazzarato's view. Yet, Lazzarato undoubtedly proposes an understanding of aesthetic experience that wants to be Deleuzian (and Guattarian) at its core. Concretely, the connection between the production of the new (percepts and affects, although awareness would suggest the inclusion of eidetic content) and the transformation of subjectivity through an aesthetic experience would be the key aspects he wants to argue in favour of. The production of the new, however, creates a first bump on the road. To reiterate, much artistic work today, is filled with common objects, common appearances and delivered through the use of screens, computer software and hardware, which are all but exclusive to artists, and which unavoidably lead to the question of whether it is still relevant to talk about the production of the new at all—where the new would clearly point to an outside. To be more precise, the new is a modern category par excellence. In postmodern times the new is deconstructed as an assemblage that configures elements that are already known. Moreover, if we still want to maintain the category of the new, the latter primarily results from the crossover and interbreeding of different materials, different media, and different disciplines. In short, the new is an aspect of intermediality.

This precise question is raised by Stephen Zepke, who sees a problem emerging within the Deleuzian perspective, which as the latter is said to call for a new way of life, while contemporary art seems to reappraise the existing life: 'In Deleuze then, "contemporary" art produces a new sensation as the becoming of life, while much "Contemporary art" is concerned with defining itself against an existing "art", so as to better embrace and utilize the "life" of "non-art" (Zepke, 2010, p 64). Zepke attempts to rekindle Deleuze, in order to allow a non-dialectical understanding to emerge, one that escapes the apparent contradiction of the new life against the existing life (new/old). To do this he uses Anita Fricek's paintings.

Fricke's work portrays²⁷ or, better, uses institutional images, or icons that would represent institutional forms (for instance the nun and teacher in *Butterfly Girl*). These institutional images, however, are portrayed metaphorically as forces, and as forces that meet a certain resistance:

Fricke's work renders these forces in the children's home, the orphanage, or at school, but always places them in relation to another force that resists [...] [How?] in the manner of Contemporary art, through a critical intervention in the social realm that transforms the oppressive forces of the institution into liberatory potentials. (Zepke, 2010, p 68)

More than having a focus on the critique and its call for resistance, Zepke moves in the direction of a contemporary art that works as a powerful inspiration that launches the viewer into an affirmative re-appropriation rather than a critical resistance against the social institutions:

Fricke is not interested in simply opposing these forces, good against bad, child against institution, etc., but creates a diagram that revalues the institutional forces so they are able to become-active, are able to overcome their confinement, transform servility into freedom, and finally through the painting give these active forces to us as sensation. (Zepke, 2010, p 72)

²⁷ An image of the painting is printed in Zepke & O'Sullivan, 2010; *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*.



Illustration 3: Anita Fricke. *Butterfly Girl* (Oil On Canvas). 2002.

The term ‘becoming’ is decidedly a departure from any calls towards appropriation, in Marxist terms, and what signals the undeniably Deleuzian character of Zepke’s ideas²⁸. What the artist’s work proposes, as I follow Zepke, is a new ‘sensation’ that activates a movement of appropriation on behalf of the institutionalized body. This movement would be in fact a form of critique that leads into a particular form of resistance and liberation, but whose attempt is not to destroy or capture those institutions as such: ‘This is finally the active-force of a sensation, it is what turns consciousness to the body, and allows the body to escape its institutionalization’ (Zepke, 2010, p 74). Here the body as a material field

²⁸ In *What is Philosophy?* one reads the immediate relation with Zepke’s thought: ‘It should be said of all art that, in relation to the percepts or visions they give us, artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects. They not only create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 175).

of forces, and by implication, a specific affective sensitivity, enters the stage. The importance of becoming rather than plain resisting lies in the fact that becoming is an impulse towards a joyful appropriation of the body, towards a joyful experience of life, which even includes the rejection of point blank resistance.

Hence, with Zepke the importance of the new percepts and affects is rescued, and the portrayal of the institutionalized reality has an explicit critical effect. Yet, it is a new sensation and not a new ‘consciousness’ that matters the most here. What the viewer reaches through the aesthetic experience is not the creation of a new form of subjectivity that would counterpose the old self and the established beliefs, but a new form of life where the institutionalized body is liberated from the grasp of the repressive institutions. Zepke’s view, in line with Foucault’s understanding of the disciplined and normalized body, sees in contemporary art a vehicle for the liberation of the body towards a joyous life, towards a life of experimentation and self-creation, a life of becoming in stylizing the supplementary tension of what Derrida has coined as remainder. Not in order to totalize this within a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but to compose the in-betweens of all included forces.

Zepke’s goal, however, goes further; for, through his study of Fricke and aesthetic experience, he also wants to re-establish art’s autonomy. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Zepke argues that,

The autonomy of art, at least when it is realized, is not a bourgeois institutionalisation that must be rejected, but a radical alterity introduced into the social body as sensation. This sensation affirms a body uncontained by its institutions, a body that evades its negation in the critical “consciousness” of the avant-garde and institutional critique. (Zepke, 2010, p 64)

Zepke’s proposal, in short, reorients the subject of the production of the new, returns art to a state of autonomy via the exclusivity of the new sensations it produces (and a critical reappraisal of the ‘old’, of

the institutions), and directs the bearings of contemporary art towards the (modern) objective of emancipation, although with a caveat: not as a totalizing project, but as a creative lifestyle.

Zepke's emphasis on sensation, on the 'active-force of sensation', and on 'institutional escape', leaving all talk regarding alienated consciousness aside, allows a Deleuzian perspective to come close to contemporary ideas regarding the role of the sublime²⁹, because rather than a return to the theme of emancipation through transcendence, Zepke seems to open a space of autonomy and liberation in aesthetic experience that could also be seen as the space for rendering the 'unrepresentable'—the radical 'alterity' of art—as a social practice, and would rely on its ability to connect spectators with the sublime that is lacking in their bourgeois life.

The Return of the Sublime

Zepke's ideas come close to the sublime when one notices that communication is a negligible aspect in his aesthetic experience. The latter is no longer a means of conveying this or that political program, nor of denouncing or unveiling the excesses of current political reality. Nevertheless, one cannot immediately identify the 'active-force of sensation' with the sublime simply because both cease to be driven by any logic of representation or interpretation. The impossibility of having a straightforward identification opens the door for a distinction between art that aims at presenting the unrepresentable (art dealing with the sublime), and art that would have no particular objective besides deterritorialization. This distinction is described by Lyotard when he argues that art after the sublime is an art where communication ceases to exist; it is an art that has no addressee, no message, and no destiny.

²⁹ A similar gesture can be seen in Oosterling as he talks about the relation between aesthetic feeling and *sensus communis*. Here one can see Deleuzian *affects* next to Lyotard's *sublime*: 'The productive aporetic tension that forms the outer limit of this sensitive and sensible art of thinking lies in the fact that it 'knows' that the knowledge of general principles is principally impossible; they are at most shared in a sensible way: *sensus communis*. But once made discursive they are phrased in dissensus. [...] Sublimity is a reception-aesthetic category. It can also manifest itself as a collective experience: enthusiasm as an affect, "even as dementia"' (Oosterling, 1999, p 89).

The paradox of art 'after the sublime' is that it turns towards a thing which does not turn towards the mind, that it wants a thing, or has it in for a thing which wants nothing of it. After the sublime, we find ourselves after the will. By matter, I mean the Thing. The Thing is not waiting to be destined, it is not waiting for anything, it does not call on the mind. How can the mind situate itself, get in touch with something that withdraws from every relationship? (Lyotard, 1991, p 142)

For Lyotard, contemporary art may be said to depart from any form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, inasmuch as there is no political emancipation promised, and no universal sense of community involved. This same art, furthermore, rejects representation and any clear verbalization of a shared sense of reality, which contributes too, to the lack of a communicative purpose. Without the need for a clear understanding, aesthetic experience inevitably loses all links with forms of *sensus communis*. Autonomy is reached, but Lyotard reminds us that isolation and irrelevance may also be the case.

In parallel manner, Lyotard makes us realize that deterritorialization doesn't assure by itself that it can actually trigger in the viewer anything else than the desire of the new for the sake of the new, which for him is nothing but the general movement of our age – without this necessarily carrying a negative connotation. This means, on the one hand, that deterritorializing sensations are not the exclusive domain of aesthetic experience (as Zepke would want it) and, on the other hand, the production of the new sensations may be a necessary condition for deterritorialization to take place, but deterritorialization by itself cannot promise any particular effects on the social field, and in the worst case may be completely innocuous.

Despite deterritorialization's inability to ensure what the newly conquered territory will look like, the latter still entails a change of viewpoint on the spectator's perspective. This effect distances contemporary art from modern emancipating gestures, because aesthetic experience presumes the

existence of spectators who lead a fully mediated social life—a life where the media ‘rule’ (Greek: *kratein* – crity or literally, ‘mediocrity’)—but avoids proposing a necessarily critical attitude towards such mediatization. This mediated social life is thus reflects on works of art that make use of everyday objects, every day machines, and technical procedures and formats. In Lyotard’s words:

Through contemporary techno-science, s/he learns that s/he does not have the monopoly of mind, that is of complexification, but that complexification is not inscribed as a destiny in matter, but as possible, and that it takes place, at random, but intelligibly, well before him/herself. S/he learns in particular that his/her own science is in its turn a complexification of matter, in which, so to speak, energy itself comes to be reflected, without humans necessarily getting any benefit from this. And that thus s/he must not consider him/herself as an origin or as a result, but as a transformer ensuring, through techno-science, arts, economic development, cultures and the new memorization they involve, a supplement of complexity in the universe. (Lyotard, 1991, p 45)

By recognizing the production of the new as a movement proper to recent postmodern times, Lyotard also makes clear that the form of subjectivity that is deployed through social life is also in constant movement as it is continually mediatized; living its social relationships through ever-growing mediums and, thus, for Lyotard, in a continuous effort to control time. This state of ‘mind’, itself the effect of a state of mediatized being, is labelled in Oosterling —connecting Foucault with Lyotard and Deleuze — as ‘radical mediocrity’³⁰. Radical, because media would function as the roots (*radices*) anchoring us in reality. Both the constant movement through a medium, and the experience of the medium itself, make patent that the subjectivity involved is not the cohesive (and independent) modern subject, and that, henceforth, talk about emancipation or liberation no longer presupposes the possibility of an outside but of an in-between, i.e. media. So all meta-narratives come to an end, but also all appeals to re-establish art

³⁰ I return explicitly to Oosterling’s concept of ‘Radical Mediocrity’ in *Situating the Intermedial: a relational reflection on community*, but will insert aspects of this concept in my arguments.

as autonomous, as if the artworld were independent from all spheres of capitalist production and mediatized life.

The question then, regarding aesthetic experience in art today is, while following Lyotard: ‘What happens to aesthetic feeling when calculated situations are put forward as aesthetic?’ (Lyotard, 1991, p 110), when an already conceptualized situation (the ready-made, the all too familiar objects, and occurrences) is put forward? Zepke’s answer to this question can be put into perspective, as Lyotard argues that creating new sensations through all too familiar situations is anything but a transparent task, and those new sensations, by being effective and incommunicable, will not assure the straightforward critique that he (Zepke) sees in Fricke’s art.

An additional remark made by Rancière, is instructive. He states that everyday objects and commodities, become fetishized, by contemporary artists with the aim of turning ‘Life into Art’ – a notion inspired by romanticism (Rancière, 2010, p 125). In his view, ordinary objects become art by a reappraisal of their historicity and of the values they incarnate or express. A museum of art would thus be seen as a museum of ethnography, where the aesthetic experience is discovered in objects produced with an intended functional value but made a fetish of; much as the statue of the Juno Ludovisi became a poetic object in the ‘showrooms of Romanticism’ (2010, p 126).

Rancière relates this view to artists like Warhol as well as current exhibitions of recycled commodities (2010, p 126). My main contention with Rancière’s response is that, were this ‘fetishization’ true, then this would mean that people could certainly enjoy Warhol today, but not at the time when he actually presented his work, for the objects he used were fully functional and commonplace in his time—without the symbolic weight of the abovementioned Juno. It seems to me then, that Warhol’s Brillo Boxes or Campbell Soups would be a different proposition from the romantic or poetic reappraisal of the ‘old’ that Rancière put forward. Yes, one may insist that there is in Warhol a fetishism of commodities in some

sense, and even that his work exemplifies the invasion of everyday life into art ('Life becoming Art'). Yet such invasion does not necessarily lead one towards fetishism—for the image in Warhol does not praise the values and historicity of its object; again, as with the Juno³¹. Warhol, I believe, manages to remain ambivalent, between being critical and being an accomplice. Going even further, I would add that the visual per se plays a role in Pop Art that would relate it much more to the unrepresentable sublime (because it can't be verbalized) than to a fetish—one must let go of the prejudice that capitalism cannot produce anything but 'commodities', or anything but garbage.

In retrospect, I depart from Rancière's view entirely, for I think that neither a romanticism of sorts is in play in works of art today, nor that the intention of making life into art is the main driver behind works that make use of familiar objects, or those that portray familiar situations, and so forth. Moreover, I believe that an answer like Rancière's says nothing about art that makes use, not of objects of consumption, in the sense of commodities, but of means or mediums of production like the internet and computer software in general, as well as theatrical audio-visual ensembles; as is the case of Hollandia's *Dirty Thief* (2000) with its simultaneous use of screens and performance. All these technological gadgets and multimedia combinations, which were once an exclusive quality of performance art but are today used profusely in all art practices, are evidence that the understanding of our objects of consumption as commodities (as objects that we buy because they serve a particular function) is not present in contemporary art, and certainly not as fetish. I don't believe it was present already in Warhol, and would even debate its relevance when trying to understand a ready-made.

The question raised by Lyotard is, therefore, not easily answered. The role of the new sensation, if we return to Deleuze and Guattari is rather determinant of the contemporary work of art. For them, 'The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 164).

³¹ If the Juno was said to represent the 'life' of a historically determined form of society, this must imply to some extent the exaltation of whatever political community was said to exist then. Historicity functions too, as a way to confirm that what is being felt is, in fact, sublime, which is not the same as a fetish. The inability to duplicate a historically extinct political is at least part of what makes the aesthetic experience 'unrepresentable'.

What complicates the matter is the effect of a new sensation; which was what led Zepke to focus on the body (as institutionalized body). I say it complicates the issue at hand, because for them the new sensation implies more than sensible data perceived by the physical body:

And yet, in principle at least, sensation is not the same thing as the material, which constitutes only the facto condition, but, insofar as this condition is satisfied (that is, the canvas, colour, or stone does not crumble into dust), it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, 166)

So, if the percepts and affects are not explained by the ‘now here’ material conditions of the work, and if artists are not working in an independent sphere, but within the life of non-art, then how is it that all too familiar means mediums, objects and situations can propose anything new?

Liotard says that in order to allow some form of free play, to remain distant from the representative dissolution that is given by the objects that make up the work, contemporary art goes as far as to challenge the Kantian transcendentals: the presentation of objects in a given space and time (taking into account too, the social space and time that accompanies the objects at hand) (1991, p 112). This challenge, when assumed, would be that posed by the unrepresentable sublime. So Lyotard addresses the problem of a form of art that is not interested in delivering a sublime feeling, in promising emancipation, or in affirming its distance from all spheres of production. The issue at stake has to do with the communicability of the work: what it can communicate, what it intends to communicate, and the process through which such communication takes place. The Deleuzian perspective, with its emphasis on the new sensations by means of deterritorialization, opens a gateway, but remains vague as to whether the destined territory of such deterritorializations is to find abode within the machines of social reproduction and to a great extent, become normalized, or whether an emancipation of sorts must be the case. In Lyotard’s words:

The secret of an artistic success, like that of a commercial success, resides in the balance between what is surprising and what is 'well-known', between information and code. This is how innovation in art operates: one re-uses formulae confirmed by previous success, one throws them off-balance by combining them with other, in principle incompatible, formulae, by amalgamations, quotations ornamentations, pastiche. One can go as far as kitsch or the grotesque. One flatters the 'taste' of a public that can have no taste, and the eclecticism or a sensibility enfeebled by the multiplication of available forms and objects. In this way one thinks that one is expressing the spirit of the times, whereas one is merely reflecting the spirit of the market. Sublimity is no longer in art, but in speculation on art. (Lyotard, 1991, p 106)

For Lyotard, what is missing is precisely sublimity; that is clear. Now, wondering about how to inject the missing sublime cannot but take us back to the avant-garde. The avant-garde is an artistic and political experiment with its formal and material conditions and as such, always a layered presence that allows for critical reflection on its presuppositions. It questions the technical means of painting; It asks 'what is to paint?' (Lyotard, 1991, p 128), and by the same gesture questions the existence of a generalized taste (of *sensus communis* and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*). The question today, is directed towards what the role of the avant-garde is in a world where no uniform taste exists or is proposed; where what is patent is the movement of the new, the movement of capitalism's expansion (which can be said to confirm, or to assist in procuring, this lack of universal taste). Lyotard answers: 'It is absurd, impracticable and reactionary to turn aside from this principle [from movement and the constant production of the new]. What has to be done is to slip into it the evocation of the absolute' (Lyotard, 1991, p 128). Only this evocation transforms the material conditions of an artwork into a proper aesthetic experience:

The artist attempts combinations allowing the event. The art-lover does not experience a simple pleasure, or derives some ethical benefit from his contact with art, but expects an intensification of his conceptual and emotional capacity, an ambivalent enjoyment. Intensity is associated with

an ontological dislocation. The art-object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unrepresentable; it no longer imitates nature, but is, in Burke, the actualization of a figure potentially there in language. The social community no longer recognizes itself in art-objects, but ignores them, rejects them as incomprehensible, and only later allows the intellectual avant-garde to preserve them in museums as the traces of offensives that bear witness to the power, and the privation, of the spirit. (Lyotard, 1991, p 101)

Contrary to the new sensation (the new percepts and affects), the sublime is not the production of anything, but the productive recognition of a lack. For Lyotard, the sublime is the response of the mind and body to an experience that is seemingly meant to communicate, but which in principle, is lacking that presupposed communicability.

We find sublime those spectacles, which exceed any real presentation of a form, in other words where what is signified is the superiority of our power of freedom vis-à-vis the one manifested in the spectacle itself. In singling out the sublime, Kant places the accent on something directly related to the problem of the failing of space and time. (Lyotard, 1991, p 113)

Only with Lyotard is there a clear distance from the basic premise of aesthetic experience as supplementary surplus, which I proposed earlier following Derrida. For instance, one could venture to say that the issue of the sublime may have relevance when explaining a work such as María Zéndrera's *Hitchhiking*³².

This work consists of a small briefcase with an LCD screen on one side and a wired computer on the inside. The briefcase is left unattended at one of the entrances of Amsterdam Central Station, and the artist, locked in a closed dark room located elsewhere in the city, transmits directions to passers-by who can see her through the screen and hear her through small speakers. The artist, acting as if trapped inside

³²A version of the project was presented in Amsterdam on 12 November 2010, during the transmission of the radio programme *Casual Friday*. Details can be found at <http://www.mariazendre.org/hitchhiking/about/>

the briefcase, tells those who stop that she must travel to another location in the city and asks for help in order to reach that destination. Her intention is not so much to make of the computer a representation or medium through which her ‘real’ self is transmitted, but rather to convey the fantasy that she is the briefcase, or at most, to playfully propose that possibility. Now, I say that the sublime may be useful here for I believe that what one could see in her artistic object/performance is the patent lacks that are exemplified by a computer that talks like a human, but does not possess the autonomy of movement that a human can have. The briefcase discloses what is missing when a social relationship is entirely mediatized, where there is only a voice – the voice commanding, or perhaps begging, to be treated as a human; forcing us, therefore, to question what it is to be human after all? One could even say that *Hitchhiking* is a straightforward critique of social network websites, chat rooms and dating websites which, like the briefcase, are a voice (and an image), but still lack a whole array of elements necessary that make it impossible to replace a ‘real’ human relation.



Illustration 4: María Zendrera. *Hitchhiking* (Interactive Art Project). 2010

However, because any criticism against the social that can be read from this work is possible, and given the fact that so much of everyday life is already involved in it (the computer, the webcam, the voice asking for directions, the internet link that must be kept alive, etc), one could quickly question why such experience of lack would be exclusive to the artwork itself or, to state it differently: what if *Hitchhiking* had been made by an internet company in order to convey how a stable internet connection can allow for, otherwise inexistent, social relationships to exist?

My main contention with the unrepresentable sublime is the way in which it quickly makes of the material conditions, objects, and spaces used in artworks rather irrelevant. Unlike Lyotard, I do not see the challenge product of the unrepresentable sublime, as something that would demand an exclusive mode of production and presentation, or as something that would allow the viewer to unmistakably differentiate art from non-art. For an informed viewer of the early twentieth century who would go to see Malevich's work—to name an artist entirely envisioned with the place of the sublime in his work—there would be little difficulty in contrasting Malevich's work with the expressionist and impressionist proposals of the nineteenth century. More importantly, such a viewer would still share in the opinion that the work of the artist belonged to a sphere of production that remained entirely independent from the heavy factorial air of the time. As I see it, this patent separation played a crucial role in the characterization of these works as sublime, or to state it differently, in the characterization of Malevich as developing proposals that would call upon the viewer's ability to judge the sublime³³.

I see, in addition, Lyotard's intention of injecting the sublime as entirely problematic and not independent from the historical conditions that surrounded the early avant-garde. It is a fruitless task to think about the sublime as a proposal exclusive to artists, when talking about art that makes use of Photoshop and design software in general, to name a case in point. Furthermore, wouldn't this make of

³³ It is too speculative to affirm without hesitation that Malevich's, or Kandinsky's use of geometrical figures would still have conveyed the aura of the absolute, of the sublime, if instead of paintings, the artists had used black and white photographs or recycled sculptures made of scrap metal as material support.

works such as Damien Hirst's *Golden Calf*, with its presentation of death and the dead body, the only clear examples of how the unrepresentable sublime appears in today's art world? And would its auction, and the more than twelve million pounds it raised, also be also part of its sublime purpose, or did Hirst's monetary ambitions de-sublimatize the work?



Illustration 5: Damien Hirst. *The Golden Calf*. 2008

Diverging from Lyotard, I do not see the 'unrepresentable' as an element that would return solemnity or propriety to aesthetic experience. I particularly find it almost impossible to see a return to the sublime via art that is ever more involved in everyday life. Therefore, I find it safe to say that the sublime simply won't do today, when trying to qualify aesthetic experience. Insisting on the sublime also risks having as sole conclusion that there is no Art today, because affirming the contrary would force one to see in the artist's specific use of everyday objects and means of production a particular dignity, an exclusive path leading us towards the unrepresentable sublime, and making the artist an emancipated producer.

There is, additionally, the problem regarding the communicability of the work of art, its ability to convey any sort of message, which must not be immediately thought as being necessarily a return to narration or

a full-fledged teleology. Qualifying communication and the communicability of the work is important when, for instance, reflecting on the assertion of Deleuze and Guattari: ‘There is no other aesthetic problem than that of the insertion of art into everyday life’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 293), but it is also crucial in the conversation with Lyotard, where one reads that, without communication, the destiny of art and the art world at large would be marginalization, irrelevance, and extinction:

‘In so far as they do not allow themselves to be subordinated to ‘tele-graphy’, thought and writing are isolated and placed in the ghetto, in the sense in which the work of Kafka deploys that theme. But this term ‘ghetto’ is not here simply a metaphor. The Jews of Warsaw were not only doomed to death, they also had to pay for the ‘protection measures’ taken against them, starting with the wall that the Nazis decided to erect against the supposed threat of a typhoid epidemic. The same goes for writers and thinkers: if they resist the predominant use of time today, they are not only predestined to disappear, but they must also contribute to the making of a ‘sanitary cordon’ isolating themselves. In the shelter of this cordon, their destruction is supposed to be able to be put off for a while’ (Lyotard, 1991, p 76).

One surely knows that this does not mean that Lyotard wants to be seen as belonging within the ‘monad’ or even apart from the ghetto, for he views such attempts as part of current capitalism’s attempt to gain absolute control over time. Yet, he surely hints that what must be thought differently here is the fatalistic conception of the latter, the uniformity assumed, and the dichotomous language that is said to describe the situation between reflection (the ghetto) and communication (capitalist production); as if they were two poles. If art has something to share, say, or donate to everyday life, then it is clear that this would involve communication. And, if one agrees with Lyotard that, the ‘traditional function of the political institution undergoes a displacement: its purpose is less to embody the Idea of the community, and it is more turned towards the management of infinite research for knowledge, know-how and wealth.’

(Lyotard, 1991, p 124), then the question would have to be something like: if communication today, is

intended neither as a way to achieve proper identifications and meaningfulness (hermeneutics), nor as a new form of *sensus communis*, then how and what can be communicated?

Along these lines, when communication purposes are negligible; when language no longer mediates the spectator's appraisal of artworks, another door is opened: immediacy. Aesthetic experience then becomes a matter of disposition: a natural or technical state of openness through which an immediate world becomes readily available.

In what follows, I will explore both these issues. On the one hand, I will pursue Nicolas Bourriaud's ideas on Relational Aesthetics, in order to explore the communication potential and the possibilities that can be found in artworks that are firmly supported in social life, which come to life through the innovative uses of capitalism's tools of production. In addition, Relational Art will open up the conversation to Intermedial Art, bringing the study close to Oosterling. Both art practices are closely related, yet by introducing the Intermedial proper, a series of issues already highlighted in the Deleuzian approach to aesthetic experience, will be developed further, paying particular attention to the role of relations, not only between humans, but also between humans and non-humans, and the importance of maintaining the in-between perspective developed so far.

On the other hand, I will thereafter, explore the issue of immediacy and the creation of atmosphere in Timothy Morton. By following the critical reading of Morton's ecological thought, the figure of the Intermedial, and the presupposition of an ontology of the in-between³⁴ will be presented as a conceptual proposal that requires for our understanding of relationships of production to be reassessed, in order to properly understand the full effects of aesthetic experience on political life and an ecological definition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Through my analysis of Morton and Oosterling my goal is to both highlight the basic tenets of their critique, as well as to analyze the strength and scope of Morton's appraisal on environmental art.

³⁴ Or 'inter-esse', as Oosterling coins this affirmative ontology of relations (Oosterling, 2005)

Communication and the in-between in Relational Art

Discussing the uses of everyday technologies, of film, photography, and objects of design as well as the Internet and computer hardware technologies in contemporary art needs a more adequate approach than Gadamer's hermeneutics and Lyotard's analytics of the sublime. The embedding of current works of art in digital technology that has become an integral aspect of our daily communication and participation, demands a more serious acknowledgement of our mediality, or more specifically, the mediated ways in which we are connected to others, to the world and to ourselves. That is why an artistic, creative, and experimental effort to critically reflect upon our present human condition cannot be done without attention to Nicholas Bourriaud's ideas on what he labelled as Relational Aesthetics. Relational Aesthetics does not share Lyotard's interest in the sublime. There is no longer an outside. It values an equal footing of all participants in art practices and, given an immediacy in all mediated relations, straightforwardly addresses the issue of communication or communicability within contemporary art, the production and understanding of 'the new', and the effects on subjectivity and social relationships that are part of many of today's artistic practices.

I begin with Bourriaud's words on the horizon of Relational Aesthetics and its ascribed role or intention within social practices:

The role of the artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist. [Relational Aesthetics refers to] an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space. (Bourriaud, 2002, p 13, 14)

Relational Aesthetics, as I follow Bourriaud, sinks right into everyday life, into our day-to-day social practices with the aim of using them as inspiration, and also as a point of return. The relational aspect of

Bourriaud's view on aesthetics is meant to highlight its incursion into social practices, and does not have a specific focus on the relationship between artworks and spectators; 'over and above the relational character intrinsic to the artwork, the figures of reference of the sphere of human relations have now become fully-fledged artistic "forms"' (Bourriaud, 2002, p 28). Artists will not only use everyday life as a point of departure, as a critical reference, but will have social practices as their target, as their formal object. What is proposed, however, will not be necessarily the destruction or direct subversion of those practices, but rather the evocation of micro-utopias and interstices in the social body (Bourriaud, 2002, p 70). Relational Artworks will deal with social practices hence, in a somewhat sociological fashion; yet their aim is never to explain social relations but to experiment with the ways in which social relationships are currently produced.

Along these lines then, and given the miscellaneous aspect of our current social life, Relational Aesthetics will not have a uniform method of intruding or affecting social life, but will make use of several approaches. These modes of action can include parody of every-day life (but without ideological intentions or base), ephemeral or changing artworks (short-lived or changed through public interaction), industrialization of 'craftsmanship' processes, and voyeurism to mention just a few; there is a virtually limitless supply for artists to work upon. Through these multifarious methods of incursion it is easy to see Relational Aesthetics making constant use of shock, while distancing from any attempt to confront the viewer with the sublime. Shock, in any case, does not constitute a singular directing line or a general trend. There is, more often, what can be taken as a constant play on the public's understanding of what the proper channels and the available ways of communication are. One can still argue that for as long as the spectator feels pushed into an unexpected situation, which forces her to open up, and to communicate, such an experience will not be entirely dissimilar to that of being shocked, although seduction can be an aspect as well.

Thus, with Relational Aesthetics' use of technologies, it becomes a common occurrence that such produced artworks will have an effect on social relationships and human interactions with machines, in a way that cannot but risk darkening the transparency of the medium or, better, of the aspect of mediation that is present in any such relationships. Henceforth, the medium, whether a video platform or a social media network, ceases to be seen as something neutral to the subjectivities that it mediates. The medium as indistinct disappears, allowing instead for the mediated subject to be recognized as an assemblage of humans and non-humans. A cyborg in a way, as Donna Haraway conceptualized our present state of being. Making the medium visible in itself will only come as an after effect, as a form of awareness: Relational Aesthetics refers to 'art [that] creates an awareness about production methods and human relationships produced by the technologies of its day, [...] enabling to see them right down to the consequences they have on day-to-day life' (Bourriaud, 2002, p 67).

This physical awareness of being mediatized is micropolitical in the sense that it transforms the obscure and paradoxical relation man has towards his media: thinking he is in charge while at the same time being determined in all his interactions and transactions by the very same media. This aesthetic experience is less conceptual than 'sensational' in the Deleuzo/Guattarian sense. As such it produces new subjectivities. Computer voices, virtual relations, social networks, dating websites, as well as automatic check-ins at airports, TomTom GPS systems on our cars, etc., all become inspiration, ammunition, point of encounter, and theoretical horizon for Bourriaud's relational artists; 'the influence of technology on the art that is its contemporary is wielded within limits circumscribed by this latter between the real and the imaginary' (Bourriaud, 2002, p 71). The use of technology, but, more importantly, the lack of distance between the artwork and established social practices and objects of consumption rescales downward the political goals, deriving from a shared sense of community. Artists, in turn, can be said to abandon all dreams of universality and *sensus communis*, in order to pursue

micropolitical goals that, to some extent, help them, as well, to stay relevant and to avoid the melancholic marginalization prophesied by Lyotard.

Additionally, for Bourriaud, abandoning all ‘manner of communalism’ enables artworks to impact social relationships directly, by proposing reconfigurations that are immanent and thus, in no way, point towards an outside, or call upon a people to come. It is qualified through these micro incursions on the social field that the ‘production of the new’ returns as an aesthetic theme for Relational Aesthetics. In Bourriaud’s words, ‘If we must reject all manner of imposed communalism, it is precisely to replace it by invented relational networks’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p 81). In terms of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* what is important is the failure of this totalization as a result of which, the connections and the in-betweens have become visible; in-betweens that can be called media as well.

What Bourriaud asks us to replace, can be seen in the previously mentioned installation *Hitchhiking*, but also in works that use the medium in a less explicitly functional way. I think here, for example, of an artist such as Frederick Heyman³⁵ who uses several superimposed media: photography, film, and sculpture as well as illustration and graphic design.

His work not only makes the aspect of mediation visible, but it also allows for the spectator to note the various qualities that medial shifts produce in his work. An example of this can be seen in *The Weather Project*³⁶, where Heyman wishes to portray the image of an environment that has suffered the attack of winds, lightening, and water. The final image is an apparently treated photograph, but standing next to it is a film, which the viewer is invited to watch. The film shows the production process developing as a sort of theatrical décor, where sculptural elements become evident, but especially, where measurable time regains an important role so the viewer may see the final work as the direct product of an organized team and a proper direction – closer to the work of a creative department in an advertisement company,

³⁵ Information and samples of the artist’s work can be found in <http://frederikheyman.com/>

³⁶ Shown on 7^t and 8^t November, 2010, in Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Brakke Grond, in Amsterdam.

rather than a theatre company. Seeing the final product, the photograph makes the effect of one medium (the photographic treatment) evident, but it doesn't deconstruct photography, for the experience produced is purely positive and the artist does not intend to be critical of Photography at a conceptual level³⁷.



Illustration 6: Frederik Heyman. *The Weather Project*. 2010

The work, however, produces an entirely different experience of mediation when it shifts into a film, where sculptural elements become, on the one hand, emphasized. On the other, and perhaps more interestingly, the needed organisation, direction, and the efficient use of time that is needed to accomplish the photograph, has a critical and transformative effect on any traditional understanding, and on the artistic team as a form of subjectivity. The various modes of presentation produce an aesthetic experience of multifarious qualities, where the viewer can encounter both a critique on her prejudices, an appealing aesthetic object, and the deployment of a creative enterprise, which highlights, in turn, the

³⁷ An example of this purely productive perspective can be seen more clearly in Oliver Herring's *Gloria* (2004). Here, a sculpture is made out of photo fragments. Herring deconstructs photography without annihilating its use. Photos of body fragments are made into a sculpture, so the photographic image is still essential to the aesthetic look of the sculpture. Thus, know-how of both photography and sculpture are needed to make the artwork happen (Rush, 2005, p 78).

positive role that organized production can have, in order to achieve creative and innovative pieces of art³⁸. The need to embed creativity within social production at large is equally highlighted in Oosterling. He draws the more radical consequence for a topology of creation beyond the modernist perspective:

Against the background of the intended megalopsychia, creativity no longer resides in, but in-between individuals. Creativity is first and foremost relational. Cooperation, participation, and interaction no longer presuppose individuals. These come to the fore in creativity. (Oosterling, 2007, p 376)

The weight that mediation has on our understanding of cooperation, community and environment is seen by Bourriaud as a crucial feature that will be responsible for whatever effect Relational Aesthetics can have on the production of subjectivity. The kind of subjectivity proposed brings him close to Guattari who, argues Bourriaud, provides a paradigm for contemporary art (Bourriaud, 2002, p 91). Bourriaud reminds us that subjectivity for Guattari, is defined ‘as the set of relations that are created between the individual and the vehicles of subjectivity he comes across, be they individual or collective, human or inhuman’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p 91). This idea, simply put, means that Guattari, in line with Deleuze’s notion of immanence, is arguing for an ecological understanding of subjectivity³⁹. One must note that Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic argument in favour of an ecological understanding of subjectivity proposes, by the same token, a new form of *Gesamt*, albeit one where the ‘vehicles’ for subjectivity would not refer to humans alone, but would include non-humans too.

Relational Aesthetics produces new subjectivities as becomings, through an aesthetic experience that works as a vehicle that moves the viewer through a changing set of relationships, through various modes, and various possibilities, in the constitution of subjectivity. The paradigm shift, for Bourriaud, goes from thinking of the work as product of a (collective) subject (Hegel and Romanticism) towards being a

³⁸ The following section will expand on Oosterling’s approach to Intermedial Art.

³⁹ More specifically for a threefold understanding of ecology: Environmental, social and mental (Bourriaud, 2002, p 95), also seen in Oosterling as ECO3 (Oosterling, 2013).

rhizomatic machine that in affirming connectivity and avoiding dichotomies produces subjectivity.

Therefore, 'Art is the thing upon and around which subjectivity can reform itself, the way several light spots are brought together to form a beam, and light up a single point' (Bourriaud, 2002, p 97).

Yet, the issue of subjectivity, thus posed, remains close to a criticism of social institutions and institutionalized identities, in a way not dissimilar to Zepke's position. For the latter, one must bear in mind there is a sense of reappropriation in aesthetic experience, which allows for everyday objects and capitalist means of production to be rendered positive. However, Zepke had no preference or special interest in artworks that required the use of commodities, mass-produced images, technologies, and organizational structures to exist. This allowed him to maintain, even if in a ghostlike fashion, a perspective on Art as an autonomous sphere of production, where the medium would play the role of material support for purely symbolic content⁴⁰. If we want, in any case, to maintain that a critical perspective on social institutions is a necessary ingredient for the production of subjectivity, then a risky aporia looms ahead: institutions, commodities and means of production become necessary for artworks to exist while being, at the same time, central to the criticism being raised on these same institutions⁴¹. This aporia can be understood as the postmodern transposition of the experience of the Sublime that sweeps away the viewers' rock bottom position, leaving her, in turn, to experience the overwhelming magnitude of the sublime. Seen from this late modernist point of view, Relational Art would seem to ask for a commitment on behalf of the artist to a set of principles: either immorality (capitalism) or responsibility (political art).

For Bourriaud, the enemy continues to be capitalism and its imposed egoistic relationships:

⁴⁰ The weight of the symbolic throws aesthetic experience back to the realm of pure reflection, making of the noted reappropriation, a matter of *awareness* that moves the individual into political action; in the end, it remains close to Lazzarato's interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari.

⁴¹ Even Bourriaud seems to notice this when he says that, 'Guattari's brand of ecosophy – physical, social and mental - likewise posits the totality of existence as a precondition for the production of subjectivity' (Bourriaud, 2002, p 103).

‘The enemy we have to fight first and foremost is embodied in a social form: it is the spread of the supplier/buyer relations to every level of human life, from work to dwelling-place by way of all the tacit contracts which define our private life’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p 83).

Art and the artist, he says, following Guattari, deal with:

subjective material, which must be brought forward in order to “heal” the disastrous effects of homogenization, that violence wielded by the capitalist system towards the individual; suppression of forms of dissent and disagreement that can only be found by his subjectivity. (Bourriaud, 2002, p 98)

Bourriaud abstains from defining Relational Aesthetics as being inherently critical or totalizing, yet his insistence that art must at all costs subvert capitalism’s imposed social forms, presupposes that one can take capitalism as a totality. This critical totalization ignores the fragmentation and the rhizomatic connectivity that is inherent to the aesthetic experience that he has claimed for Relational Aesthetics. Bourriaud’s insistence on social critique makes one doubt his commitment to the micropolitical perspective that he began developing in the first place.

Furthermore, this perspective of mental resistance would take us back to an art whose goals are mainly subversive and whose horizon stays outside the current state of social production—outside capitalism. Bourriaud follows Guattari’s militant character, in order to make a point on subjectivity, but ends up inevitably confronting Relational Aesthetics with the elephant in the room: capitalist modes of production and the commodification of artworks. Even if Bourriaud tells us that the issue of sensus communis is finally left behind, it is untenable to say that artists will play with computer technology, mass produced images, the internet, etc., but that they will do so in a way that is critical of

Capitalism—a capitalism which is entirely responsible for those same objects to be available in the first place⁴².

In addition, proposing an ecological understanding of subjectivity in those terms, not only challenges the moral justification of using commodities as artistic objects, but also raises questions regarding our understanding of ecology in the first place. It questions whether or not the notion must remain bounded by the empirical relationships between humans and non-humans or whether, on the contrary, the environment as a whole—which would be bigger than the sum of its parts—must be taken into account, so as to consider the effects it produces on each of the individual parts⁴³.

The issue of communication, which I raised previously as I followed Lyotard, has received but a partial answer so far: communication is not sterile, for it involves the creation of new modes of subjectivity, which will both feed upon and subvert the existing relationships between humans and non-humans. The validity of such a move was initially put into question by Lyotard, who saw with suspicion the twofold gesture of constantly producing new things and of constantly innovating our ways and channels of communication⁴⁴. In other words, the micro-utopias that Bourriaud sees as essential to Relational Aesthetics will not have theoretical traction, while maintaining that they must take place within a totality that imposes relationships and exerts violence—Capitalism. Moreover, the political horizon of such micro-utopias cannot be reduced to being a meagre, but persistent, gesture of affirmation against all imposed forms of *sensus communis*.

⁴² A similar suggestion can be seen in Michael Rush, whose interest in the use of New Media is patent, next to his criticism of modernism. Yet, he still seems set on seeing the commodity as the enemy of the artwork. For Rush the artist's intention is what makes video art—Art. He argues this by using Warhol and Paik as examples. Their intention is exemplary for they are attempting to make something with no other purpose in mind besides expression (Rush, 2005, p 87). This distinction allows him to divide art and art-ful (Rush, 2005, pp 87–88). Such statements cannot but take us back to a modernism that he had decidedly rejected, until he had to deal with the commercial uses of the artist's techniques and know-how.

⁴³ It also raises the question, as Oosterling indicates, on whether ecology is about nature or about technology. As we will see, Morton answers that question in a Zizekian way, proposing an 'ecology without nature' (Morton, 2007).

⁴⁴ Oosterling refers to a continental vein, i.e. German-inspired understanding of intermediality that starts with a hermeneutics of literary texts that is transposed to theatre, film and visual culture, but that mainly focuses on conceptualization, cooperation, and communication as belonging to a Habermasian perspective. Both, Oosterling and I depart from this notion as it leads precisely to that which concerned Lyotard in the first place: neutralization and normalization (Oosterling, 1999, p 36).

The inside/outside perspective that supports a purely destructive criticism on capitalism is also at odds with an ecological understanding of subjectivity. I will come back to the issues of the inside/outside opposition when I analyze Timothy Morton's criticism on ecological thought, and will do so with two aims in mind. Firstly, to avoid falling prey to an understanding of ecology (thus subjectivity) informed by the inside/outside opposition; this will, in turn, allow for Morton's criticism on contemporary (environmental) art to equally impact the understanding of aesthetic experience that has been proposed thus far. Secondly, through an analysis of Morton's ideas on ecology, aesthetic experience, and atmosphere, I will identify the main problems that a still- prevalent understanding of capitalism-as-a-totality poses to the question of art's political relevance. Before moving on to Morton, I will finalize my reading of Bourriaud developing some of the most interesting aspects highlighted in his texts: the need for a non-totalizing notion of *sensus communis*, the role of relations and multiplicities (including communications), and the production of subjectivity along ecological lines. These noted elements will be addressed using Oosterling's ideas on Intermedial Art, which in turn, I will argue shares much with Relational Aesthetics, but puts an ever greater emphasis on the active role of relations and on the Intermedial aspect of aesthetic experience—as a reflective sensibility or a sensible reflectivity.

Sens(a)ble Reflection on Intermedial Aesthetics

The notion of the Intermedial—or as Oosterling prefers to label this: Intermediality—is fundamental to understanding how aesthetic experience operates, and how the spectator is invited not primarily by a concept or an idea, but by experiencing the immanent crossbreeding of different artistic media and disciplines gathered in the artwork. With Relational Art, Bourriaud's ideas direct this text towards highlighting the role that communication plays. The artwork, we learn is in fact, a medium, which to a certain extent establishes a palpable line of communication with its spectators – percepts and affects

(sensations) are contingent, but not completely dependent on the duration of the experience. The sensation that the work triggers lingers on, transforming not only the gaze, but also the attitude of the audience. To reiterate, the artwork is indeed a medium and as such, its function can only be properly grasped as happening in-between: in-between matter and form, in-between content and expression, in-between function and design, activity and passivity, and sensation and reflection.

Deleuzian thought puts an emphasis on the irreducible difference that sensation and reflection entail as they jointly work to make of aesthetic experience a reflective-sensitivity; aesthetic experience is characterized as a configuration of percepts and affects that triggers concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 164). Noticing the rhizomatic form of the artwork is, therefore, one of the most insightful aspects of Deleuze/Guattarian thought. An assemblage triggers desire and directs our actions. It brings together objects in a chaotic, yet distinct manner: crossing scales – planes, according to Deleuze and Guattari – it brings together disparate elements in a way that challenges utilitarian functionalism, yet without making of a critique its ultimate and exclusive destination. Its challenge is one that always introduces a new function or rather a new horizon of functional relationships. This new horizon is exemplary of the deterritorialization-reterritorialization dynamic, remaining open, porous, and susceptible to even more connections. In a Nietzschean sense, the work of art is a field of forces that are inscribed in power relations. The spectator is enveloped in the unfolding that also denotes the procedural aspect of deconstruction and reconstruction. Yet, the artwork is first of all a proposition, which by implication unfolds a sort of criticism. The assemblage is an affirmative artifice, yet I am hesitant to uncritically adhere to this notion as it invites thought to follow a path that leads straight to another modern foundational divide: the artificial/natural opposition. Morton deconstructs this dichotomy in *Ecology without Nature*, while Latour introduces the word factish⁴⁵ to surpass the divide. This term may be more

⁴⁵ I argue that the term is an attempt to capture the analytical transparency that both ‘fetish’ and ‘fact’ presuppose, without falling into the absolute demands, that the construction-reality divide would impose, because ‘no one has ever believed in fetishes, and everyone has always paid astute attention to facts’ (Latour, 2010, p 130). The term appears too in the terminology section at the beginning of this text, where the full explanation of the term and its use can be found.

suitable at this point to understand what the artwork as an assemblage entails. The key behind the term lies in its practical aspect: it allows for the researcher to mobilize the analytical advantages of the word fetish and the word fact, without falling back on its demands towards any universalism of sorts, or on diffuse debates on the relations between ontology and epistemology.

I argue that artwork is a factish because, like a fact, it unveils or presents a vantage point with respect to our common sense, and like a fetish it proposes new and not self-evident ways of relating to materials, which appear to have been incidentally brought together. The factish, therefore, allows practice to pass into action (Latour, 2010, p 22); it allows art practice to pass into conventional life, that is, into a way of life that as a matter of principle thought itself as fundamentally anaesthetic. This prompts the question of: how is Intermedial Art, that is, art focused on producing an experience of the in-between, related or different from Relational Art?

I have insisted, with Bourriaud, in emphasizing the part played by conventional objects, meanings and situations in the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Relational Art technologies, for instance, appear as central to the goals of their aesthetic proposal: they subvert the use and meaning of technology, and propose instead, new forms of engagement and new functional roles etc. Similarly, Intermedial Art is equally open to accentuating the role that technics and technologies —i.e. media in the broadest sense of the concept, proposed already by Marshall McLuhan in his 1964 book *Understanding Media* —have in their artistic practice. However, an equally important aspect that must be considered, and which is not truly accounted for in Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics is interdisciplinarity.

Intermedial Art is, in short, an aesthetic proposal that can be said to operate on two axes, both equally effective in producing an experience of the in-between. The first, I will argue, is an axis of hyperbolic specialization, which refers to the way in which, for instance, an artwork will exaggerate the role of technologies – an overstuffing of machines – in order to intensify the experience and the active nature, i.e. the agency qualities, of technology. Such hyperbolic turn can sway between technology as an

abstract idea and technologies as concrete machinic relations. An example of such use of technologies can be seen in Stelarc's *Third Hand* (1982) and his following projects *Movatar* and *Exoskeleton*⁴⁶. His different performances with technology actually illustrate this process of vacillation between the machines concrete or material possibilities, and the works critical reading of technology's role in constructing human relationships.

The second axis, I will argue, is one of correlation, which I choose to name in this manner, because it functions by highlighting the partial identifications (weak or strong) that gather different perspectives around a same target or area of intensity; this is similar to how sociologists and anthropologists, for instance, attack the same phenomena, albeit with different purposes and different intentions. This second axis is missing in Bourriaud's ideas on Relational Aesthetics and yet it is present in Intermedial Aesthetics; it is here where things such as collaboration and negotiation of individual interest, as well as interdisciplinary approaches, in the scholarly sense of the term, have a place. Such aspects of interdisciplinarity makes of Intermedial Art a form of aesthetics that is not conditioned by the use of technologies, but which uses technologies, primarily, in a strategic fashion. In order to grasp how interdisciplinarity can lead to an Intermedial aesthetic experience, which can be elucidated by a quick look at the methodology of artist, Lawrence Weiner..

Lawrence Weiner works with an array of different materials, yet his work constantly makes use of language as its fundamental artistic element or material, because it allows him to emphasize different aspects related to aesthetics, meaning, agency, and the appropriation of common objects in his work: language gives a narrative form to reflection and, by the same token, it allows for the deconstruction of these narrative properties to be quickly grasped by a spectator, motivating her in consequence, to feel and reflect about the aesthetic qualities of words, letters, and sentences etc. When transformed into a

⁴⁶ In fact a much longer list of projects following this same spirit could be mentioned. Through the in-between experience of application and aesthetic sense, Stelarc pushes the spectator into a tension that challenges old views, but, most importantly, it sparks curiosity and a certain awe in the possibilities of these same technologies outside the typical sphere of engineering schools and robotic labs. The mentioned projects can be found at <http://stelarc.org/?catID=20218>

visual experience words also gain a certain aesthetic quality that forces the spectator into an uneasy state⁴⁷ and a new experience of language as a critical medium, which is resolved or reterritorialized only when the spectator reaches a position of in-between. Weiner does not ask the spectator to choose a specific reading for his work, for his main interest consists of exploring the possibilities behind this Intermedial perspective.

My interest in Weiner is also raised by the way he envisions artistic practice itself. He wrote in 1968 a now famous threefold declaration of intent that defined the artwork thereafter. He declared:

The artist may construct the piece

The piece may be fabricated

The piece need not be built

Keep in mind that this declaration came in a time in which Weiner was not particularly interested in technologies or in using common objects in a pervasive manner—he would use common objects as materials that would quickly lose their functional qualities in the process of aesthetic transformation, that is, in the process of becoming an artwork. This is precisely why I find Weiner's declaration so interesting, because it highlights the factual qualities of the materials—using words such as construction or fabricated—and the way in which they are put into use by the artist; the artist is no longer a genius but merely a fabricator or a craftsman⁴⁸. Given the conceptual character of his work, one is forced again, into a perspective that is neither reduced to an empirical appreciation of the work nor to a purely abstract one. Wiener forces us as spectators to adopt an Intermedial perspective, where readings of his work

⁴⁷ The spectator is forced to bounce between the functionality of the word and its aesthetic place within the work. To a certain extent, it is a different take on the duck-rabbit problematic in Wittgenstein. This issue is addressed in detail when discussing Timothy Morton's ideas (See *The threat in ambience: Morton's ecological critique of the Intermedial*).

⁴⁸ Oosterling introduces the term 'craftsman' (Dutch: vakman) in his 2004 educational school projects in the socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods of Rotterdam, as a key term that indicates the redefining of work in an Arendtian sense. It is the former student of Hannah Arendt, sociologist Richard Sennett, who also reevaluates work in terms of craftsmanship in his (2007) book *The Craftsman*. This term has interesting implications to keep in mind. I will come back to Sennett in Part 4 of this text.

accompany and complement each other, in a way not dissimilar to how interdisciplinary research works. Perspectives are neither reduced to a singularity, nor kept safely apart in order to remain intelligible. No disjunctions, but connections and conjunctions are sought; both debate and comprehensive understanding come about, when different disciplines or field perspectives are used to plan and develop, for example, a public project. It is the tension—forces—in-between the disciplines and in-between the applied artistic media and technological gadgets (*dispositifs*) that needs to be re-inscribed in power relations that do not obscure the formative role of these media and disciplines.

Weiner's contemporary art films (2000–2005)⁴⁹ are perhaps a more patent example of what Intermedial Art is currently about, in the sense that he now uses technology in a direct and purposeful manner, with the aim of emphasising the need to break with the linear perception of language's function and to explore the rhizomatic possibilities that different media—images, sounds, language—allow for in this same type of sensible-reflection.

Oosterling argues that Intermediality is not a recent phenomenon (Oosterling, 1999). The interdisciplinary and multimedia perspective can be traced much further back. I agree with Oosterling, when he argues that the early twentieth-century avant-garde can be analyzed under this light: art forms as assemblages made out of unorthodox combinations of materials, techniques and disciplines that expanded the visual arts, resulting in objects like the Duchampian ready-made, the collage and the mixed use of film and photography. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, we could refer to American artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Jones, who combined the use of everyday objects and imagery from popular culture and media in their work and used effectively both abstraction and figuration techniques that challenged the predominance of abstract expressionism, exemplified by Jackson Pollock, who was perhaps the most renowned American artist at the time.

⁴⁹ The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam comprised an extensive exhibition across 50 years of Weiner's work called *Written in the Wind* (September 2013-January 2014). It is on this collection of drawings, canvases, and films that I based my ideas regarding Weiner's work.

This reading of Intermediality has been developed extensively by Oosterling, who not only highlights the interesting mix that cooperation and interdisciplinarity presuppose, but also the experimental character that is shared with the avant-gardes:

[Bauhaus, Fluxus, The Factory and Origen Mysterien Theater] all these experiments have a common approach: a cooperative ‘enterprise’ between media, disciplines and artists wherein the audience is incorporated as a constitutive part of the work of art and everyday life is taken as the point of departure. As a result the borders between art and life are problematized. (Oosterling, 1999, p 93)

However, the avant-garde has now become a general qualification of all artists who strive to please their audiences in order to take their work seriously. Crossbreeding is no longer an issue, but a basic feature in such works. Transposed to lifestyle and daily experiences the cultivated experimentation of the former avant-garde has even been interiorized by consumers, the taste of which is now ‘formatted’ by an economic system, which ironically presents itself as allowing taste to become as open and flexible as possible.

The term ‘intermedium’, moreover, has an even longer history as it was already being used by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1818, who was the very same Coleridge that proposed the term ‘aesthetic’⁵⁰. Thus, in a sense, the exploration of the medium, as a node in a network of relations, expressing Intermedial qualities, is not exclusive to contemporary artworks alone. It is possible to think of the Intermedial, as well, in terms of convergence and complementarity: a symbiosis of words, images, and sounds (Oosterling, 1999b, p 36). This perspective, however, should not give the impression that the specificity of the medium is undermined by an increasingly abstract notion of aesthetic experience. Totalization into a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* can only come about by reducing the specific tensions that are triggered by these crossovers. My persistent return to Deleuze has precisely the opposite intention: to restate the

⁵⁰ See terminology section

importance of the materials and, in turn, of an experience that lies in-between, for it can only be produced by the crossbreeding of different media, that albeit ‘sensational’, trigger medium-specific experiences. In Peter Greenaway’s films, literature, painting, architecture, cinema, theatre, and dance all play a specific role, but their crossbreeding enables the spectator to experience a remainder that suggests composition and coherence (Oosterling, 1998).

Current technologies provide artists with an array of exceptional media. I would argue technology acts as a catalyst of Intermedial Aesthetic experience; artists can use technologies to precipitate the spectator into a myriad of percepts and affects—sensations—in ways that none of the avant-gardes could. In order to illustrate this I will spend some lines on Oosterling’s own take on Intermedial Aesthetics. The reason for exploring Oosterling’s arguments at this juncture is that, as noted above, he asks us to identify Intermedial artworks as those that problematize the borders between art and life. I believe this remains a valid point, yet my main interest here is to understand how such problematization takes form and becomes politically valid. I argue that such problematization is not independent of its conditions of possibility and therefore, not easily generalizable across artistic practices.

Oosterling proposes an aesthetic reflectivity that is summed up as one that invites us to become ‘an enlightened rhizomatic inter’ (Oosterling, 2007, p 376), i.e. a porous network node that is able to sense and to reflect its connections as a function of its mediatization. The Deleuzian wink, which is exemplified by the word rhizome, is certainly not an incidental matter. An enlightened rhizomatic inter, however, does not come about easily. The ability to problematize the borders between art and life demands that we are able to effectively situate ourselves in-between art and life, thus, not only erasing their presupposed borders, but demarcating new ones in their place, surpassing the dichotomy of the real and artificial. Virtuality is crucial in thinking their supplementary relation. In other words, Intermedial Aesthetics must be able to move spectators, not only towards a reflection of their relative, i.e. related positions (of being in-between), but also towards a sensitivity that is reflected in the handling of their

media. This sens(a)ble reflection is part of the in-between life (a transaesthetic life), where the incursion of art into life would become tangible (Oosterling, 2009b).

The way in which Oosterling envisions this process, however, takes us back again to the idea of surplus—which I have discussed earlier as the remainder in Derrida and as being a purely affirmative notion, in the sense of referring to a surplus that cannot be exhausted by meaning or by any particular discourse. This supplementary meaning, I argued, led me to an understanding of Intermedial Aesthetics along Deleuzian lines, where the surplus comes as the result of the spectators’ failed attempt to distil aesthetic experience along the lines of sensation and reflection; the result of this failed attempt being a remaining uneasiness, which the spectator may be tempted to resolve by reduction of the hermeneutic, the surrender to the Sublime or an empiricist variation. Following Oosterling requires taking this experience of surplus a step further, where this further entails becoming aware of the way in which surplus presents itself as a non-resolvable tension inherent to crossbreeding of the specific media, as an aporia of Intermediality. The term aporia comes as the result of an aesthetic experience that is characterized by uneasiness, where our experience as spectators becomes, in fact, a paralogy (Lyotard). This Lyotardian notion is used by Oosterling to underscore ‘the limit between the tolerable and the intolerable by way of moves lacking any given model’ (Oosterling, 1999, p 89). There is no all-encompassing totality; the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is not a regulative idea. It is, at most, a regulative fiction in a Nietzschean sense.

The re-emergence of Lyotard and of the experience of the sublime in Oosterling’s solution seems almost straightforward. The transformation of percepts and affects into paralogy is, I believe, rather problematic—I am not even convinced that it serves Oosterling’s purpose of clarifying the Intermedial perspective proposed. My concern is motivated by my expressed interest in avoiding a fallback onto the theory of the sublime experience, which I have argued is simply too abstracted for the argument about medium specificity to hold. I also argued that such an approach would almost inevitably lead to a

metaphysical appropriation of the sensational aspects in aesthetic experience. Additionally, I remained unconvinced about the independence of the notion of the sublime from very specific artistic practices, namely, in the paintings of artists such as Malevich or Kandinsky.

For this reason, I will attempt, on the contrary, to present Intermedial reflectivity in a way that unequivocally sustains the importance of the medium and which, by the same token, restates the reasons why Relational and Intermedial Art are of particular importance to understand the political relevance of these current aesthetic practices.

Intermedial sensibility and the Gesamtkunstwerk

Oosterling argues that Peter Greenaway's work is Intermedial *par excellence*, because of the way the latter uses all kinds of artistic media: Layer upon layer from *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *The Belly of an Architect* to his theatre pieces and the digital *Tulse Luper* project. But on a discursive level he also transforms the experience of a crisis (of the Grand Narratives) into aporetic sensibility (Oosterling, 1999b, p 33). The keyword for Oosterling is, no doubt, this: sensibility. Oosterling argues that the aporia of aesthetic experience becomes sensible, meaning that they materialize mediatically (Oosterling, 1999, p 40). In short, the spectator experiences through the crossbreeding of media, a tension that invites her to become sens(a)ble. The pending question being: can we reduce the role of the different media to the production of this tension, to the realization of this aporia?

For Oosterling the issue of the aporia cannot be separated from the Lyotardian topic of the unrepresentable/the infigurable, where the tension that arises is almost transcendental (Oosterling, 1999, pp 40, 41). The purpose of the aporia, to repeat, is to trigger and inspire a particular sensibility, which I would suggest, is almost transcendental in nature. This sensibility enables or allows spectators to come to expect or anticipate the affirmative force of an in-between, when faced with an Intermedial artistic

practice (Oosterling, 1999b, p 41). There is a sensational or haptic logic in the artist⁵¹ when testing or arousing this particular experience in the spectator (Oosterling, 1999b, p 42).

It will remain the case for Oosterling that aesthetic experience does not amount to the arousal of a certain sensibility. To understand this, attention must be paid to the way Oosterling characterises this sensibility, because it is at this point that his motivation to argue in favour of Intermedial Aesthetics unfolds. An Intermedial aesthetic experience, he argues, pushes the spectator to reject the urge for totalization of the work according to political lines: Sensus communis as an absolutist perspective. I have made a similar point too. Not only does Oosterling see in Intermedial artistic practices an abandonment of the modern sensus communis, but also a critical vantage point that allows for the Intermedial quality of the spectator's reflection to become central to the unfolding experience:

‘[O]nce we reject the totalitarian urge to identify and totalize a community politically with artistic means, this Intermediality as a coherent practice of multimedial, interdisciplinary and interactive elements comes to the fore. In Intermedial experiments of avant-garde artists criticism towards society as a given reality becomes explicit as a medium-specific reflectivity’
(Oosterling, 1999a, p 95).

The relation, between an Intermedial sensibility and the rejection of a totalizing perspective, is explained by Oosterling when he argues that sensus communis as a sensibility is transformed, if put into words, into a form of ‘dissensus’ (Oosterling, 1999a, p 89). In other words, it is the aporetic idea of community that he contends should ensue as sensibility: as an experience founded neither in reflection or sensation alone, but one that comes as the resolution of a (sensitized and reflected) tension (aporia). Yet, this tension presents itself in a manner that is almost transcendental.

⁵¹ This sensational logic follows from Deleuze's analysis in *Francis Bacon: Logic of Sensation*.

This is perhaps suggested by his use of the modern notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the urge to envelop art and politics in an all-encompassing collective practice, in which the stylization and designing of our daily life would become part of a higher goal. Fascism and Stalinism are two political total works of art, but on a smaller scale, Foucault's 'aesthetics of existence' can be understood as an articulation of such a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Foucault illustrates this in the second part of his *History of Sexuality* by the dandyism of Baudelaire. Oosterling sees Wagner's ideal of culture as an artistic articulation of such a total work of art (Oosterling, 1999b, p 34). For Oosterling, an Intermedial experience of a work of art moves the spectator to recompose his mediated life.

How the notion of Intermediality fits, depends again, on this sens(a)ble *sensus communis*, where Intermediality, Oosterling asserts, implies the experience of a certain tensed unity that is never definitive (Oosterling, 1999, p 36). This regulative fiction is for him triggered by the failing of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an overall project. Foucault reverses this failure into an affirmative project, characterized by self-creation or (an) aesthetics of existence. As stated above, Oosterling refers to this same aesthetics of existence with the coupling of the terms *Dasein* and design⁵². What is retained then, from the modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is precisely this idea of a necessary coherence, albeit informed by a sensibility similar to the sublime experience, rather than to a totalizing reflection and a political program⁵³.

To sum up, for Oosterling, *sensus communis* is enfolded in a reflective sensibility, articulated as dissensus (Oosterling, 1999a, p 89). The artwork, therefore, acts on the spectator by pushing her into a tense state (an experimental aporia), as a result of which, logic and language games fail to explain what the experience entails. Arguing that the arising tension faced by the spectator produces this specific Intermedial sensibility, I believe, is not without its problems. Oosterling states that the spectator

⁵² I discuss Oosterling's *Dasein as Design* in Part 2 this text, in the section 'Situating the Intermedial'.

⁵³ Oosterling is explicit on this relation between unity and identification, when saying that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Schelling, Hegel & Marx) presupposes the primacy of an identifying power (Oosterling, 1999, p 84).

entertains a fragmented experience of community and unity that triggers an urge to understand the whole as a composition from within. The micropolitical spin off is a sens(a)ble, i.e. techno-psychological awareness of being mediatized and the need to become responsible for one's own aesthetics of existence, focused on an apprehension of self as a 'total work of art' embedded in layers of networks. This scaled and always porous *Gesamtkunstwerk*, if one follows Oosterling, must be one in which this aporetic sensibility somehow underlies the process of self-creation. Yet, as a sensibility it cannot be communicated, although Oosterling would presume it can be shared in action.

At this point, I have two concerns with Oosterling's solution. First, his sensible community is ambiguously close to Lyotard. Arguably, it could even be subsumed under Lyotard's theory of the sublime experience. Second, the idea of a sensibility that cannot be phrased except in a language of dissensus is equally problematic, from a pragmatic perspective, where cooperation comes as the result of shared interests. If dissensus remains, then how can cooperation truly emerge? If all we have is a sens(a)ble understanding of community that should be conducive to an aesthetics of existence, then how can the latter unambiguously avoid being interpreted as a solipsistic aesthetization of life?

It is worth recalling, at this juncture, some of the key points that guided the Deleuzian reflection on aesthetic experience, in order to understand where we currently stand. The danger behind the Deleuzian interpretation of aesthetic experience was to end up with a false choice, with a forced disjunctive: either the sublime experience or pure sensationalism. It is when faced with such disjunction that the Intermedial perspective proposed becomes operational as a heuristics: it functions as a constant reminder about the limitations of oppositional thought and of the explanatory possibilities that a focus on the in-between entails. The role of Intermedial Aesthetics is precisely to keep us (as spectators) in-between, which is also why the active engagement suggested by the Deleuzian conceptual framework is fundamental to remaining in-between: percepts and affects, the deterritorialization-reterritorialization continuum, lines of flights, and becoming are all concepts that require thought to always contemplate the

sensational, and to correlate, as irremediably intertwined, with the thought that comprehends it—this is why Intermedial reflectivity is by necessity, reflection + sensation, i.e. the intertwining of Deleuzian affects and percepts. I have argued that deterritorialization plays a destabilizing role, similar to the role that paralogy played in Oosterling. However, the notion of deterritorialization-reterritorialization accentuates the fact that such destabilizing aspect is but part of a process that ends in the creation of new relations—untested and experimental in nature, yet tangible and accountable. The arrival of a sensibility is, in my view, an aspect akin first and foremost to a technique and not to anything quasi-transcendental. In other words, the spectator by means of repeated exposition to Intermedial Art would eventually come to expect the process of destabilization and experimentation. Therefore, in my view, sensibility acts in the same way as mastery, for example, in the case of a musician, whose ‘feeling’ for an instrument can be understood as a sensibility that the amateur does not possess⁵⁴. Sensible *sensus-communis* would, in turn, become an element that hinders rather than enables the creation of new relationships, because communication is required for humans to come together⁵⁵.

I will, in consequence, abstain from arguing that community can only be phrased in dissensus, for my contention is that even if a clear notion of community can only be phrased according to a discourse that is anchored in oppositional thought, there is still an aspect of cooperation that remains essential. This ‘*sensus communis*’ I believe is neglected by the non-communicable notion of sensibility⁵⁶. The way in which Intermedial experience encourages communitarian bonds must come as the result of the new possible relations that emerge; Intermedial reflection reveals to the spectator that between selfish interests lie mediatized possibilities for cooperation that can eventually be conducive, among other things, to greater personal recognition. Still, the first thing that aesthetic experience destabilizes is the

⁵⁴ I will use the Latourian concept of the Plug-in to refer to this particular sensibility that is required to create alliances with non-humans—and with technologies in particular. (See Part 2, the section: *The issue of power articulation: Transformation and Accounting*).

⁵⁵ It is also required for humans and non-humans to come together.

⁵⁶ I come back to the issue of oppositional thought, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and community when I analyze Rancière’s position in the section entitled: **The artist-spectator paradox: Political art and the role of the Intermedial**.

centrality of the monad subject, of the ego, as a core of attributes and essential demands.

Deterritorialization by means of Intermedial experience always takes a relational form, by which I primarily mean that the spectator comes to realize the central role that relations have and, by implication, the potential that constituting new and experimental relations can have on her own subjective possibilities. This, to repeat, escapes the notion of sensibility, and may be more accurately described as being the result of an Intermedial reflection. Moreover, this reflection is triggered, for instance, in the embedded reception of an Intermedial installation. The deterritorialization-reterritorialization process cannot occur without new percepts and affects.

To put it differently, what was always at stake was cooperation and collaboration. Both are present in the assemblages of Intermedial Art, which are for this same reason factishes: both fact of life and a fetishized gadget. By being transparent about the arbitrariness of the relations proposed, the factish can be safely taken as a concept that is consistent with the Intermedial reflection that is argued for here. The fictional part of the factish unfolds the space for creativity to enter the process. The Intermedial I opt for can be taken as, both, a heuristics and as a denotative notion – the latter, however, requires particular caution, in order to avoid falling back to a metaphysics that grants transcendence to art and artistic practices. Oosterling is right in that phrasing dissensus in terms other than dissensus is a fruitless endeavour – unless a strategic use of oppositions is carefully deployed and assemblages are measured by their effects and not by the intentions that inform them. Proposing an in-between perspective is, by no means, problem free. The following section will explore the kind of theoretical concerns that are on a par with its analytical use. Morton's criticism of *ambiance* will allow for the analytical issues behind theorizing the in-between to be highlighted and discussed accordingly. On top of that, bearing in mind Guattari's project on the three ecologies, my reading of Morton enables me to specify the way a notion as ecology can be useful to revalue current art practices, such as performance, installation, and community art and their political impact.

The threat in ambiance: Morton's ecological critique of the Intermedial

Morton's criticism of contemporary art focuses on ambiance, on the creation of atmosphere as an all-too-common gesture in contemporary art practices. For Morton, the complications of studying ambiance will effectively open two different conversations. On the one hand, ambiance as an attempt to create a medium, an atmosphere, which would somehow envelop the audience, and pose a set of philosophical issues, when informed by the inside/outside opposition and the subject/object divide. On the other hand, identity and the creation of subjectivity become an issue for a spectator who is invited to reflect upon her own sense of place (eco = *oikos* = home) and her self-reflective insights (logy = *logos* = knowledge), by being a part of a whole that determines and surpasses her. Ambiance as a synesthetic experience, in addition, raises questions regarding the propriety of an art that must be deemed improper, in order to be taken seriously—this paradoxical statement becomes clearer in Morton's affirmation that,

Synesthetic works of art try to disrupt our sense of being centered, located in a specific place, inhabiting "the body" from a central point. Our senses are disorientated; we notice that our gaze is "over there", our hearing is "outside" the room we are sitting in. (Morton, 2007, p 44)

Creating atmosphere is not an established technique that would organize a specific set of materials in an equally determined manner. Despite this fact, one can safely say that the creation of an atmosphere, in broad terms, involves the strategic use of space, Intermedial sensorial stimulation, and the manipulation of real time. These elements can only be outlined in a general fashion, but one must keep in mind that they can include a myriad of multimedia combinations (of materials), for atmosphere is not exclusive to a specific type of art or to a specific school. The exhibition of a Mona Lisa in the Louvre uses atmosphere as much as the art performance, *The Artist is Present* by Marina Abramovic in the MOMA.

At this level of abstraction, Morton argues that multimedia, music, and visual art practices play with atmosphere as an ‘instrument and raw material’ (Morton, 2007, p 43). Furthermore, for experimental art, but also for kitsch art, the creation of atmosphere becomes a ‘second naturalism’. Morton’s conclusion is akin to Adorno’s thinking (Morton, 2007, p 153). Experimental art, he concludes, fears the ‘aura’ of high art and wants to escape the canvas and the concert hall, but in doing so it becomes the ‘barbaric literalness of what is aesthetically the case’ (Morton, 2007, p 153). Experimental art to a certain extent—and this is Morton’s point as well as Oosterling’s—has become normalized and thus, has become reduced to a repetitive effect, which may vary in degree and complexity, but not in kind.

Ambiance may itself become the goal of the artwork, to be sure. The method that, nonetheless, is used by artists, in order to create this ambiance – this atmosphere – must be judged from a pragmatic perspective, based on its results, and on its ability to create the right environment (a specific vibration) (Morton, 2007, p 153). It is this territorialization of the experimental as ‘atmospheric’ that becomes a second naturalism, a law, where Nature becomes the object of concern, which would determine the ideological turn that Morton wishes to denounce. This reappraisal of ‘the Natural’, through a fully sensed experience of ambiance, which would seem to guide many of today’s contemporary art practices, is a social phenomenon that creates terror for Morton, although no more than curiosity for me, I must confess, but it does explain the title of his book: *Ecology without Nature*.

Two quick examples will help to illustrate Morton’s emphatic criticism on ambiance: Ulrike Arnold’s earth paintings, and Keith Barrett’s sculptures.



Illustration 7: Keith Barrett. *Rock Art*. Flagstaff, Arizona. 1998



Illustration 8: Ulrike Arnold. *Earth paintings*. Tagoror, Mariposa, Tenerife. 1996

Ulrike Arnold's earth paintings⁵⁷ are created on-site by the artist, in remote, uninhabited, areas. Arnold works with rocks, sand, and other natural materials, which are found *in situ* and are, in many cases, unique to the chosen geographical location. Her work aims to highlight the 'spiritual' importance of a place – where place can be said to take a metaphysical connotation. One can identify both the importance of atmosphere as the effect through which she introduces a sense of spirituality to her work, as well as the reification of nature (Nature), by transforming it into an aesthetic object of contemplation. In similar vein, Keith Barret creates sculptures⁵⁸, which are embedded in the landscape, and are meant for the spectator to reflect on the psychological, emotional and cultural relationship that they share, both as individuals and as a collective. In other words, Arnold wants spectators to have a sense of aesthetic

⁵⁷ ulrikearnold.com, 1999

⁵⁸ keithbarrett.co.uk, 2004

perspective, from which they can view themselves as being an organic part of a greater Nature. Both artists, one could say, following Morton, use ambiance in order to compel a spirituality of sorts that would be informed through the creation of atmosphere. The impact of atmosphere is crucial to the aesthetic experience, because it enables spectators to understand Nature as a (non) place of intrinsic belonging.



Illustration 9: Keith Barrett. *Whalsay*. Shetland, Scotland. 2006

Morton's appraisal, which focuses on the many prejudices that inform the use of the nature/culture divide, sees in the mentioned practices, although not only, a modern gesture that makes contemporary art a continuation of the all too-well-known ideological biases. In his words: 'In rendering nature, nature writing tries to be a "new and improved" version of normal aesthetic forms' (Morton, 2007, p 155). This critique connects contemporary art with an ontological motif that is ideological from head to toe; the nature/culture divide—also under attack in Latour's critique on modernism—proposes a difference between realms of 'the real', which is as problematic as the Cartesian divide. Nature, as the realm characterized by its decantation of all human-created elements, turns quickly into a romanticized notion about space, about belonging, about non-humans, and also about art's ability to present the world of

nature in its pure state, to make it readily available for the rest of us, the spectators (Morton, 2007, p 59). The effects that this ideological turn would produce in artistic practices, as a whole, are difficult to pinpoint beyond Morton's observations about the constant search for ambiance.

As one reads Morton, it becomes clear that his criticism is more directed towards the alleged philosophy that, he claims, informs the artists' intentionality, than towards the artistic practices in themselves. Why? Because of his insistence on denouncing the ideological fantasy, the presupposed ontology, that stands behind the idea of ambiance, which for Morton, is also, the fantasy of the in-between. To properly understand the logic that connects ambiance to the in-between, one must follow Morton's philosophical grasp on the nature/culture divide and its relation to other common oppositions used to inform aesthetic experience, such as the inside/outside. Derrida has taught us to keep always in mind that words do not come with a particular ideological direction attached to them, and that logical connections can easily flow in one direction or another. Thus, the difficulties with dialectical thought come not so much from the use of oppositions per se, but from the critique that is meant to subvert them, while remaining itself untouched by the argumentation that it wishes to unfold.

Morton's words on the in-between are illustrated by what he says about ambient music: Ambiance in music, he argues, proposes an in-between, a sound that is also a noise and as such that is both inside and outside, although such place is simply inconceivable (Morton, 2007, p 48). The inside/outside opposition is problematized by ambiance—as an atmosphere that envelops all it touches—but only to be replaced by a fantasy. What does the term fantasy mean here exactly? This can be understood from one of Morton's examples, this time about film. Film rendering, he tells us, allows for the filmic elements to simulate something (a sunny day in his example). The filmmaker would not have originally filmed a sunny day, but is able to simulate one in terms of lighting: in terms of how objects appear as being bathed by a strong yellow light, similar to a sunny day. For Morton, such rendering is a fantasy because

⁵⁹ Morton goes as far as straightforwardly relating environmental art's use of ambiance to Romantic and Nationalist intentions of producing a sense of place (Morton, 2007, p 97).

it is actually produced as a copy (of a sunny day), but without the original (no sunny day actually took place) (Morton, 2007, p 35). So, to state it as clearly as possible, the rendering feeds on a representation of a sunny day, which is ideal and the product of our collective fantasies, mixed with brute empiricism. The filmmaker, as it turns out, wants to pass on this fantasy as the ‘real thing’, for the fantasy may be even more aesthetically appealing than an actual sunny day. Such manipulative practice, Morton says, may be a conscious, artful, attempt to deceive us, but a self-defeating one nonetheless, because delivering Nature involves a basic paradox: the more nature we want to present, the more writing (the more filming, the more editing, the more human intervention) it takes (Morton, 2007, p 70).

Morton’s film rendering example is somewhat puzzling, because it helps to justify, rather than overcome or leave behind, the inside/outside opposition and, as such, does not deal with the in-between – it simply does not grant it the right to exist, in the first place. If the filmmaker is attempting to deliver a faithful representation of a sunny day and one criticizes the attempt, because it is not a ‘real’ but an ‘artificial’ representation, then one would be simply playing along with oppositional thought, just shifting from one divide (nature/culture) to another. The issue of mechanical reproduction comes to mind when reading Morton’s film rendering example. Here, I would remind Morton of Michael Rush, when the latter says:

The issue of 'reproducing' images via moving or still cameras has little to do with the radically new capabilities now of creating work that has no referent in a non-digital world; indeed, that has no referent in the three-dimensional world as we know it'. "Reproduction" is to the digital world what the hot-air balloon once was to aviation. Using digital technology artists are now able to introduce new forms of "production" not "reproduction". (Rush, 2005, p 181)⁶⁰

⁶⁰ This paradox has been elaborated exhaustively in Derrida’s and Foucault’s oeuvre, but is also one of the main topics in the work of Jean Baudrillard, who coined this phenomenon as ‘simulacrum’ (Oosterling 2014).

Morton seems to be uninterested or unaware of the distinct character of mechanical production both from the point of view of process, as well as from the point of view of the creation of something new. His criticism instead focuses on making us aware about a logical impossibility:

We are treading a path between saying that something called nature exists, and saying that nothing exists at all. We are not claiming that some entity lies between these views. We are dealing with the raw materials of ideology, the stuff that generates seductive images of “nature”.

(Morton, 2007, p 68)

Morton is, surprisingly enough, placing himself between a rock and a hard place. Let me explain. He doesn't want to pass along as a modernist, but he categorically refuses to side with any philosophy that would grant existence to the in-between. His criticism unravels as a Platonic dialogue, and as such, Morton does not seem to have any interest in the effects of the philosophical impasse that he so furiously denounces, on concrete social practices. For him, *ambiance* (as an expression of in-between) is a conceptually impossible yet ‘pervasive’ social form (Morton, 2007, p 89). Again, this statement does not ask us to depart from oppositional thought, but to somewhat displace it: the nature/culture divide would not allow the social and the conceptual to become oppositions, because they would both be part of culture. Morton's assertion, furthermore, appears to imply an idealism of sorts: our understanding of reality is not the same as that reality, because our understanding is dependent on our ability to conceptualize such reality. Once we find ourselves here, Kantian antinomies inevitably come to mind.

Still, prior to asserting that Morton is an idealist, I believe it is fruitful to follow the philosophical trail of thought that informs his criticism. To do so, I start with Derrida's outlook on the work of traditional oppositions in aesthetic experience, which is essential to Morton's critique:

In order to think art in general, one thus accredits a series of oppositions (meaning/form, inside/outside, content/container, signified/signifier, represented/representer, etc.), which,

precisely, structure the traditional interpretations of the works of art. One makes of art in general an object in which one claims to distinguish an inner meaning, the invariant, and a multiplicity of external variations through which, as through many veils, one would try to see or restore the true, full, originary meaning: one, naked. (Derrida, 1987, p 22)

Derrida delivers a straightforward critique on the alleged meaning that artworks are presumed to carry in (or with) them. Keeping the above-elaborated discussion on hermeneutics in mind, Derrida reaches beyond Gadamer in order to more adequately analyze what is at stake in art practices. Is such meaning, the meaning of the whole? Or, is each specific element meaningful by itself? Is the meaning inside or outside the artwork? I have gone over Derrida's critique regarding the inside/outside opposition earlier, so I will avoid going through it again. The relevance of Derrida's criticism for contemporary art, for environmental art in particular, has to do with the way in which ambiance relates to the issue of meaning.

Morton uses Derrida's notion of the re-mark to make this relation clear. The re-mark consists of a series of marks whose goal is to make us aware that we are in the presence of something significant, and as such it would be a fundamental property of ambiance (Morton, 2007, p 48). For instance, the icons, the scents, and the choir in a church would be the markers used to create an ambiance, and so, would be characteristic of the way in which Bernini, for example, tried to revitalize the Catholic faith in the Counter-reformation using the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The question is, of course, how does the art audience know the difference between what is significant and what is not? Trying to answer this question makes us realize that one simply cannot know with absolute certainty. One can certainly go ahead and state that either something matters or it does not, but must do so through the adherence of meaning or non-meaning to any specified element while in consonance with a structural background; a process which must be arbitrary or a matter of principle at some point. Hence, from the perspective of language's ability to denote something, we go semiotically or hermeneutically from one element to the

other. There is no in-between—the inter is conceptually impossible. But, how about a non-linear structure, for instance, a rhizome?

A rhizome, argues Morton, attempts to join and differentiate through a binary play, which, in turn, is intended as a way to avoid collapsing difference into identity (Morton, 2007, p 53). He asks, moreover: ‘If sound b grows “rhizomatically” out of sound a, then is it the same sound or a different sound?’ (Morton, 2007, p 53) Or, to use another of his examples, when one goes to see the optometrist one must either go with this lens or with that other (Morton, 2007, p 52). Both examples, I believe, make sense only under brutal pragmatic considerations, which Morton—the idealist—appears to hold as infallible proof of our need to think through oppositions, as a matter of principles, through either-or disjunctives.

The issue of a meaning that has no in-between is raised and worked out too fast by Morton and, in its answer, is undoubtedly foreseen from the start. To rephrase, Morton criticizes a thought that attempts to articulate identities and differences, because for him, thought is always moving between an already established identity (a) and another equally established identity (b). Identity, not difference, constitutes the starting point for him. Whether one must start with identities, because human thought cannot escape them, or because logocentrism has determined our ability to do otherwise is irrelevant, for the result is the same; too much is being presupposed when saying that one must go either with sound a or b, which I will try to explain below.

Morton’s own example, regarding sounds *a* and *b*, is as filled with presuppositions as the filmmaker’s idea of a sunny day, for what exactly is a sound? Where does it start and where does it end, becoming redundant noise? Now, I am not interested in actually discussing the physics and metaphysics of sound—I wish to save the reader from this byzantine conversation; John Cage’s Intermedial art practices have shown that the cut is always arbitrary, although it might feel like a universal truth. The point of contention is closer and earthlier. The way these questions are actually avoided (Morton included) is by

refraining from making the matter metaphysical in the first place, that is, by accepting to give a definition that will arbitrarily presume that sounds can be accounted for as discrete rather than continuous entities. Such gesture is done for purely pragmatic considerations—sound engineers cannot spend the day arguing about the beginning and the end of sound any more than the regular customer in a bakery will discuss the possibility of the existence of the notion of bread with the baker—he would eventually starve at the counter.

Furthermore, Morton's examples, aimed at challenging rhizomatic thought (thought that wishes to think the in-between), rely heavily on common sense, which makes them highly practical but hardly enlightening. I would add that Wittgenstein had already, and in greater length and detail, discussed the issue of a thought based on identities through his, now immensely popular, duck/rabbit drawing.

Wittgenstein doesn't state that we must always, either confront an irreducible disjunction or accept the violent imposition of identities. He argues, instead, that we can see the figure as a duck or as a rabbit, but not as both⁶¹, yet, unlike Morton, this conclusion is not seen as a shortcoming of human thought⁶². It is beyond the point whether or not one believes ducks and rabbits are cohesive identities; by now quantum physics has made any such questions a matter of physics rather than ontology. In a sense, it is fair to stop for a second to ask, what is exactly Morton's point with the impossibility issue?

If we turn all nature into subject then we lose its otherness. If we turn it into an object then we lose its reified quality. If we say nature is "subject plus object" then we mix the unmixable and relapse into the original dualism. And if we say it is neither, then we fall into nihilism. (Morton, 2007, p 179)

⁶¹ In surrealist avant-garde art practices this double bind has been methodologically applied by Salvador Dali in his paranoid critical method. See for instance the painting *Espana* from 1938. We see either the fights between knights and lions in the desert, or the woman leaning with her right elbow on the small cupboard. We see either difference or identity.

⁶² Wittgenstein is critical, along similar lines, about the philosopher's ability to quickly forget about the use we give to our all-too-human knowledge: 'The fact that we cannot write down all the digits of π is not a human shortcoming, as mathematicians sometimes think' (Wittgenstein, 2001, p 71).

Is he insisting in the idea that human thought is irremediably trapped to forever jump between identity and difference, in a constant movement of ‘différance’? Even if this is the case, it is hardly a distressing point. Do we not distinguish between sounds, or between rabbits and ducks, even if our certainty about such distinction is not absolute? And, more relevant to the research developing here, how should we think nature then, and what aesthetic and micropolitical effects would such a change produce? Morton, unfortunately, does not give us an answer.

Despite Morton’s unfortunate silence, there are several hints that can be used to better understand where his discomfort with environmental art comes from. For Morton, artistic production and contemporary capitalism are a mismatch when it comes to art’s general quality. Capitalism has infused an undesirable quality in art: to be focused on constantly creating fresh products, and new sensations (Morton, 2007, p 53). The practical consequence of this: an ambient poetics, which is a matter of quantity rather than quality, absence rather than presence, generating the aesthetic equivalence of junkspace (Morton, 2007, p 91).

Summing up, Morton denounces three main issues in contemporary art: 1) An artistic community that is naïve, because it believes in an outside, 2) the creation of a fantasy object that is totalitarian, because Nature excludes humans as a matter of principle, and 3) an artistic practice that has become a factory line, because it creates art that is stimulating to the senses, but entirely devoid of meaning. In short, Morton’s criticism would seem to outline the need for environmental art to change its political commitments. Nature must become earthly and inclusive; art must regain independence from commercial interests, while (re)taking a path of reflection and critique.

With these three points in mind, one could move on to ask, what kind of aesthetic experience would Morton find desirable? Yet, before doing so, it is relevant to ask first, whether, as a matter of principle, Morton, is taking what may perhaps be a product of strategy, as Foucault argued with sexuality in *The*

will to know. History of Sexuality 1. What I mean is that one should at least allow for the possibility that the effects of ambiance may obey a strategic intention, rather than a metaphysical orientation. Morton raises this possibility himself, when he realizes that ‘Whether the space being evoked is supposed to be real or taken as unreal, the same rhetorical strategies apply: authentication, rendering, the Aeolian, and other ambient effects such as suspension and stasis’ (Morton, 2007, p. 63).

Ambiance can have both positive and negative effects, much like the *pharmakon* that Derrida thematized as something that, like the drug, can be a cure or a poison, a blessing or a curse. It is impossible to foresee the effects before actually experiencing the *pharmakon* at work. I agree with Morton that ecomimesis, for instance, is an ideological fantasy, because the inside/outside opposition cannot be dissolved (Morton, 2007, p 66). I would not agree, however, that ambiance must necessarily lead us to believe in Nature, Cartesian divides, and paradises that exist nowhere. I would agree with him, yet again, when he says that the distinction is not real, even though I would do so, without fully understanding why he would endorse such statement, while at the same time affirming that ‘there is nothing beyond inside and outside’ (Morton, 2007, p 78).

It is precisely this ambivalence, between the conceptually impossible and the ontologically possible (real), that ends up convincing me that Morton is giving in to an idealism of sorts, where the real in-itself would differ from our idea of that same real. One could even say that, if not Kantian, Morton’s insistence in the divide would, at least, uphold something like Heidegger’s ontic/ontological distinction. The consequence of which, would be a critical assessment of the divide, of modern thought in general, and the attempt to find a long-lost outside.

However, if ambiance, likewise the *pharmakon*, can carry both the medicine and the poison, that is, if the distinction has no reality beyond its pragmatic effects, then a strategic use of ambiance may have more value than what Morton realizes. Furthermore, I would insist on using Morton’s cited example of

Val Plumwood's own attempt to avoid the inside/outside oppositions, to prove that this is so (Morton, 2007, pp 64, 65).

A world perceived in communicative and narrative terms is certainly far richer and more exciting than a self-enclosed world of meaningless and silent objects exclusionary, monological and commodity thinking. (Morton, (citing Plumwood) 2007, p 64)

Plumwood in no way maintains that narrative has precedence over a language articulated through oppositions, but simply that it will grasp the reader's attention in a more effective way, which is a purely pragmatic goal. Practical effects do matter, indeed. This would be the lesson that Morton seems to constantly forget and the one, which I have tried to remind my reader, through the use of well-known 'pragmatic' implications, found in Derrida and Wittgenstein. To follow Morton, one must be willing to put any pragmatism to one side and move on with an understanding of aesthetic experience that fails to effectively deal with contemporary aesthetic practices, which see value in the connectivity that the present means of communication and participation allow for their connectivity. As Deleuze time and again stresses: it is not about what *is*, but whether it *works*. It is all about *becoming*, not about *being*.

Nevertheless, aesthetic experience in Morton departs from any sort of contemplative appreciation of a beautiful object, or an experience of the sublime. Aesthetic experience, argues Morton, is not meant to be beautiful or to put us in contact with the sublime—Kant and Lyotard must be left behind. Aesthetic experience is meant to be neither sensational nor a journey of self-discovery. The modern subject/object divide will simply not do, and I agree. In *The Ecological Thought* Morton explains that beyond ambiance any sense of ecology involved, can no longer be thought of in terms of global or local (Morton, 2010, p 28). He hints instead towards the persistent interconnectivity, ironically exemplified by Intermedial aesthetic experience, which help us deal through experimentation with the state of interconnectedness of all living and non-living things. Morton calls this interconnectedness, 'mesh' (Morton, 2010, p 28).

Mesh as a notion will avoid the inside/outside (foreground/background) opposition (Morton, 2010, pp 28, 30) and as such rekindles our understanding of a totality:

“Totality” doesn’t mean something closed, single, and independent, nor does it mean something predetermined and fixed; it has no goals’ [...] ‘Think big, then bigger still—beyond containment, beyond the panoramic spectacle that dissolves everything within itself. The mesh is vast, not intimate: there is no here or there, so everything is brought into our awareness. (Morton, 2010, 40)

Aesthetic experience within this perspective, one could conclude, must make us aware of the mesh in being itself an expression of the mesh. In Deleuzian terms: expression encapsulates content, form and matter. The mesh will thus allow for a new ecological collective to emerge, one that is no longer rooted in place (Morton, 2010, p 127), but in flows of spaces. No home, no local, no national, etc., but also no class—it is ecology without holism (Morton, 2010, p 127), an ecology that favours composition and self-reflective coherence on different scales, not dissimilar to Oosterling’s argument in his book *ECO3: Reflection* (2013) where the individual becomes a node—the contracted variation of Morton’s mesh—in scaled networks.

Only the mesh will deliver a strategic sense of ecology. It is no longer purity and conservation that defines the natural. Coexistence—a new ecological *sensus communis*—indeed becomes our common goal: ‘Since everything depends upon everything else we have a powerful argument for caring about things. The destruction of some things will affect other things’ (Morton, 2010, p 35). Now, looking back at Oosterling’s *Intermedial* and Bourriaud’s *Relational Art*, the question begged at this point would be: isn’t the mesh, in fact, a sort of in-between? In the final instance, is Morton’s insistence that we stop thinking in terms of the local/global, in terms of a totality or class, or foreground/background, not closing all doors for the oppositional thought he targeted in *Ecology without Nature*?

In his 2010 book he playfully talks about Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit drawing, by reminding us that in today's lab you can actually have a duck-rabbit by putting duck genes in a rabbit (or rabbit genes in a duck) and if you do so, then 'You really would be able to see a duck and a rabbit at the same time, because you really never saw a duck or a rabbit in the first place. There are less ducks and less rabbits not in number but in essence' (Morton, 2010, p 37). Thus, if ducks and rabbits are but essences and Morton is not a realist (in the Aristotelian sense at least), either we don't know anything about ducks and rabbits in themselves (we would be in a Kantian world), or ducks and rabbits are subjectivities that cannot be reduced to ideal attributes. If the latter is true, I cannot but see Morton flirting with subjectivities that are produced, rather than presupposed; agencies which are *in actu* articulated throughout by expression, rather than existing as autonomous beings. In a word, Morton too is proposing a form of relationalism, and, perhaps even, a philosophy of the in-between.

Redefining the mesh in this way, however, does not make the task of pinning Morton's philosophy down, a simple one. If doing justice to his words means believing in a mesh that is neither synthesis nor identity, although still a notion that must be dealt with through oppositional thought then Morton's philosophy, I must confess, escapes me. It is too platonic to encompass my interest in taking aesthetic practice as a serious task of philosophical thought. Furthermore, even if the conversation is restricted to environmental art, one cannot but fail in the attempt of wanting to have a clear idea on how Morton would evaluate certain environmental works, as well as on how the concept of 'mesh' would escape from functioning, either as a concept of the in-between or at least as a notion that places thought beyond the inside/outside opposition.

If we take environmental art, which is meant to be not so much aesthetically appealing, but to produce an ecocritical reflection on behalf of the spectator; or even to have pedagogical or emancipatory goals, while at the same time remaining ambivalent with respect to the understanding of nature proposed—at

times Nature and at times nature—it soon becomes difficult to assess whether such art can still have any value for Morton.



Illustration 10: Jane Ingram Allen. *Earth Day Art Installation*. Taichung, Taiwan. 2006

Jane Ingram Allen's *Earth Day Art Installation* (Jane Ingram Allen.com) attempted to create ambiance, while at the same time fulfilling an essential pedagogical goal. Jane worked with students and faculty at Tunghai University to create an installation that would commemorate Earth Day 2006 and raise public awareness about environmental issues in Taiwan and around the world. Students involved would learn, not only about the current issues, revolving around climate change, but also about the positive uses that recycled materials could have and, in the process of doing so, challenge existing prejudices regarding function, value, and high art. In addition, the installation had a temporal existence that depended on the natural cycle of flowers, which would bloom in midsummer. The question is, naturally, even if such works do not create an environmental conscience that clearly departs from the prejudices behind a reified nature, can one still judge them for their effects? These effects, let's be overly optimistic for a

moment, will make participants more knowledgeable about the politics and economics of climate change, as well as introduce them to innovative uses of recycled materials. Inasmuch as one cannot presume that the project will affect climate change, taken as the totality of humanly induced atmospheric changes, then one could indeed say that the effort is fruitless. If, on the other hand, relations between individuals matter, because the mesh tells us we are all connected then the question would be: how can the knowledge and experience of such small group of participants matter for the whole? How does the feedback of the parts on a local scale influence in a positive sense the whole network on a global scale?



Illustration 11: Vintondale prior to the intervention. 2000

Before reaching clear answers, it is worthwhile to briefly examine another example. In 2000, AMD&ART, a non-profit organisation, began work on its project in Vintondale, Pennsylvania. The project's goal is the restoration of a region that has been exposed to Abandoned Mine Drainage (AMD) and, in general, to the undesirable legacy of coal mining. The work has been undertaken on many fronts that includes not only

decontamination, but also to change the inhabitants' expectations regarding their own region by means of design, engineering and artistic know-how, in order to make the place more appealing and friendlier for families and children. (greenmuseum.org, 2010).



Illustration 12: AMD&ART Park, Vintondale, Pennsylvania. 2008

The project certainly goes beyond being aesthetically appealing, in a traditional sense. Aesthetic appeal is but one ingredient of a far larger intervention in the environment. What is understood as the environment in this case, and does it fall prey to Morton's criticism?

The environment (i.e. cultivated 'nature', rather than a purely ideal notion) materializes into a specific geographic area, yet it still hovers over everything human and non-human that coexists there and in this sense remains abstract. Given that the project sees the human intervention (the mining) as the guilty party (it's ugly and harmful) one could say that the project is informed by the traditional nature/culture divide. However, because its goal is intervening the area, as a whole, then one can presume that their idea of environment is not meant to demarcate the human and the non-human, but instead an attempt to create some in-between, where coexistence and aesthetic appeal would find a place. Thus, once again,

would Morton see any value in such intervention? Would he put it in the bag of environmental art that he sneers upon? Would he even consider it to be an art practice?

These questions should lead us towards a twofold reflection: 1) when capitalism is no longer seen as a totality, but more as a composition of meshes, then the logic that imposes a series of uniform and alienating social relationships quickly dissolves. What is left behind is nothing more than a system of constant de- and reterritorializations, which is not the same as a totality, for the latter assumes the necessary unfolding of all deterritorializations, according to a set of pre-established possibilities, which are judged based on their effects on the whole. Local or micro effects, taken as the range of movement that can be gained, are, in Morton's view, deemed as irrelevant at best, and as guilty of complicity at worst. Instead of the Deleuzo-Guattarian affirmative, schizo-analytical approach to capitalism, the logic behind Lyotard's criticism on capitalism's constant movement of communication of 'the same', of Bourriaud's imposing supplier/buyer relationships and Morton's criticism on capitalist hunger for the 'fresh product', all fall prey to a notion of Capitalism as a closed totality. Disengaging from the inside/outside opposition or recognizing the potential of technological innovation does little to avoid this downfall, for in all of them Capitalism remains a necessary straw man: their critical perspective seems always directed against an all-powerful enemy, which, however, has no body, no face, no boundaries, and no history. I believe, moreover, that the only way to maintain such a critical perspective today is by making Capitalism an ever more ghostly figure, an even more dissipated mist that blinds us all equally. Tackling this illusive understanding of capitalism (as Capitalism), and rekindling its scope, is the purpose of the second part of this research.

Traces of Deleuze and Guattari: conclusions on Intermedial Aesthetics

The first lesson that came from thinking about the charges of complicity that are often raised against Relational and Intermedial Art, was that, if everything that pertains to aesthetic experience is not to become trivial, rendered docile and sheerly expressive, and Lyotard's prophecy realized, then communication channels should be intruded and communicability subverted:

'Finally the authenticity-thesis cannot accommodate a domesticated view of the aesthetic as a sphere of specialized expressiveness. Rather, it takes the aesthetic as a realm in which a specialized sphere of cultivated expressiveness coexists with a "principle of validity" whose relevance encompasses the whole spectrum of decentered Reason, including science, morality, law and politics' (Alessandro Ferrara, 1998, as cited by Oosterling, 1999 pp 100-101).

Artists create folds or interstices—meshes—within the movement of circulation of meaning or sense within the ever-growing informational and communicative networks of our global era. Moving reflectively through these folds is a matter of both strategy and tactic, which comes into effect through art that puts forward what can be termed as Intermedial proposals. Participants in these art practices experience and are sensitized by the material effects of this connectivity on local and global scales. This sensitivity redefines their relations with others, the world and themselves.

Media deterritorialize. Lines of flight become essential concepts that help to grasp the sense of in-between that aesthetic experience in Intermedial practices entails. The singularity of the artwork, which helps it to stand on its own and that still feeds the idea of an autonomous work of art, may be thought of in terms of production and innovation, but not in a way that would claim the existence of an independent sphere of social production. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari encourage us to abstain from reducing artworks to islands but, on the contrary, to think of them as the nodes of a network. These are not empty voids, but material and symbolic knots that serve to mark discontinuities. One can say they are potential

accumulators or connectors, awaiting lines of connectivity to be established. Or in Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology:

In fact, universes, from one art to another as much as in one and the same art, may derive from one another, or enter into relations of capture and form constellations of universes, independently of any derivation, but also scattering themselves into nebulae or different stellar systems, in accordance with qualitative distances that are no longer those of space and time. Universes are linked together or separated on their lines of flight, so that the plane may be single at the same time as universes are irreducibly multiple. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 196)

In a similar fashion, Foucault's insight on power's fluidity and articulation can be equally illuminating in this respect. Power, he says, is fluent; it passes through various focus points from which changes in intensity and orientation take place. The singular artworks as nodes of a network, or as focus points, conserve this distinctive mobility.

Lines of flight, multiplicities, deterritorialization, affects, percepts, etc., are the basic concepts that help to demarcate the framework of aesthetic experience that remains in line with the Deleuzian and Guattarian vein. By the same token, modern concepts, which would explain aesthetic experience (like the beautiful, the sublime, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*) and their political companions (emancipation, resistance, utopia, and *sensus communis*), have been shown to be analytically inappropriate terms with which to understand contemporary art— Relational and Intermedial Art in particular.

In short, aesthetic experience, as Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics, has left behind grandiose modern ambitions, in order to become more actively engaged within social life, and within capitalist production. It remains true that 'shocking' artworks will still dislocate ideological structures and sabotage social mechanisms that are determinants of disciplined and normalized subjectivity—a gesture that would be shared by present retro-avant-gardes. It is not, however, this subversive potential by itself

that can disseminate creativity and new forms of subjectivity throughout the social field, by invading and revolutionizing institutions through critical force alone. Their efficacy is realized through much broader ‘feedback loops’ or, to phrase it more ecologically, artworks involve artistic, scientific, philosophical, technological, and medial flows, which are fed back into networked subjectivities.

Besides creativity and the production of the new, an element that is not explicitly informed by the Deleuzian perspective (although it is not absent either) is discussed. It is the production of new forms of subjectivity through an artwork machine that uses both human and non-human cogs; the artist as a subjectivity that produces masterpieces is certainly left behind. Next to this production-aesthetics, the work-aesthetics of the avant-garde is also passed by. I have argued that creative thought has become the product of an agency-assemblage (French: *agencement*) within a reception-aesthetic perspective, which goes beyond individual skill and hierarchical modes of cooperation. This assemblage, which can be called rhizome, due to its non-linear nature, becomes, in fact, a theoretical paradigm for the constitution of subjectivity, which is fundamental to Relational and Intermedial Aesthetics.

One must keep in mind that this theoretical shift has deep practical relevance in a world where mediated subjectivities prevail, and where traditional communitarian bonds have become less and less representative of the relationships that sustain our modern lives. The use of social media networks (Twitter, Facebook, Hyves, Google+, LinkedIn, etc.) to establish weak relationships with people of multifarious backgrounds, education, and cultural heritage, testify to this reality, and, force us to presuppose, in turn, the existence of (rescaled) communities beyond cyber- and virtual communities, characterized by the prevalence of dissensus. This dissensus is, moreover, not solely rhetorical, but results from the experienced tension that is articulated intermedially and relationally in art practices. Yet, the discursive feedback demands the projection of a new *sensus communis* and the becoming of new subjectivities that characterizes a shift from the ego-paradigm to an eco-paradigm.

Additionally, Intermedial Art practices, with their use of knowledge coming from several disciplines, enhance the communication channels through which practical knowledge (power-knowledge assemblages) is produced and shared. Actual spaces of exchange, whether virtual or face-to-face, depend, as it turns out, on the mediated subjectivities, which produce them through cooperation, enterprise and experimentation. These spaces unfold today's aesthetic experience itself:

More than dropping an art object in open space Intermedial art practices reflect upon and intend to transform the way people relate to each other via art. It is no longer art in public space, but *art as public space*. (Oosterling, 2007, p 376; italics added by DV)⁶³

The consequences of the paradigm shift from ego to eco in aesthetic practices stresses the relational primacy within a perspective that reevaluates the idea of entertainment as the cultivation of the tensions of the in-between. Oosterling summarizes this as follows: 'It is not emancipation that is the final goal, but a sensitizing. It is not edu-tainment or info-tainment, but a self-reflective enter-tainment' (1999, p 99). The full impact of this conclusion can be felt when it is in fact a conclusion of the following underlying premise:

'Once transport media, communication media, but also artistic media, psychedelic means and pharmaceuticals and medical devices, once all these become means of subsistence defining man's basic needs and conditioning his sociability, these media factually rule (Greek: *kratein*). Man's present condition has become radical mediocrity' (Oosterling, 2007, p 227).

Aesthetic experience of Intermedial Art, argues Oosterling, will constitute a sensational, self-reflective, and at times critical experience of this 'mediocrity'. Aesthetic experience does not, however, constitute an experience outside or aside from the one that is made possible through the use of the medium—of the

⁶³ Dan Graham's installations of video and manipulation of spaces through mirrors and glasses in *Three linked cubes* (1986), is an exemplar of Oosterling's point. In Graham's work the change of our understanding of space has an effect on the roles that would be implied for the spectators: the audience becomes both viewer and performer (Rush, 2005, p 64).

Internet and virtual reality. It does not, because “Virtual reality”, for example, one of the more mystifying outgrowths of digital technology, is not a mere translating of data into life-size images that mimic reality. It is its own reality’ (Rush, 2005, p 181).

With this in mind it becomes evident that Relational and Intermedial Art have completely departed from any project that would have as its goal the demise of capitalism or of bourgeois society. Mediocrity has surpassed its psychological sense and implies a technological aspect as well. It is a cyborg-like, psycho-technological state of being. Its relation to capitalism is a symbiotic one, at best, or a parasitic one, at worst. This seems to be the story that Intermedial Artworks tell us.

However, the more entanglement there is between art and non-art (artistic and non-artistic practices), the more difficult it is to qualify the former’s success or failure to impact institutions and normalized practices. For this same reason says Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics is furiously criticized, by Rancière, who sees it at most, as a watered-down form of social critique (Bourriaud, 2002, p 82). For Rancière, Intermedial proposals, even with their disruptive and emancipatory intentions, cannot but stumble upon the same political realities that older artistic forms have met.

‘This way of addressing the “truly political”, however, does not manage to sidestep the incalculable tension between political dissensuality and aesthetic indifference. It cannot sidestep the fact that a film remains a film and a spectator remains a spectator. Film, video art, photography and installation art rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects. As such, they may open up new passages for political subjectivation, but they cannot avoid the aesthetic cut that separates consequences from intentions and prevents them from being any direct passage to an “other side” of words and images’ (Rancière, 2010, p 151).

Similarly, Lyotard is critical of the central role that is given to communication; for communication alone is far from being a sufficient condition that would reassure us of art’s continued political relevance.

The new technologies, on the other hand, in as much as they furnish cultural models which are not initially rooted in the local context but are immediately formed in view of the broadest diffusion across the surface of the globe, provide a remarkable means of overcoming the obstacle traditional culture opposes to the recording, transfer and communication of information. It scarcely seems that this generalized accessibility offered by the new cultural goods is strictly speaking a progress. The penetration of techno-scientific apparatus into the cultural field in no way signifies an increase of knowledge, sensibility, tolerance and liberty. Reinforcing this apparatus does not liberate the spirit, as the Aufklärung thought. Experience shows rather the reverse: a new barbarism, illiteracy and impoverishment of language, new poverty, merciless remodeling of opinion by the media, immiseration of the mind, obsolescence of the soul. As Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno repeatedly stressed. (Lyotard, 1991, p 63)

These worries, however, have not gone unnoticed by Deleuzian inspired understandings of aesthetic experience. In Marrati's exploration of Deleuze's *Cinema*, for instance, the political relevance of film today is indeed an important part of her own worries, which revolve around the crisis of Grand Narratives:

We no longer believe that our actions have a bearing on a global situation, that they can transform it or even simply reveal its meaning. And, accordingly, we no longer believe in the capacity of a community to have hopes and dreams powerful enough to bring about the confidence necessary to reform itself.

We no longer relate to history in order to secure our subjectivity. 'Our ties to the world are broken, and this does not hold true only for major historical or political events, which often seem to exceed our capacity for agency', but also for our everyday life, for 'a form of the everyday that has faded away. The world is lost, not in itself but for us' (2003, p 105). Therefore, says Marrati:

We still have something to learn from great Hollywood movies, and in particular we still have to learn how to believe in the world, how to hope for the possibility of new forms of life, for new ties between us and the world. But to learn from these films is precisely not to repeat them; it is rather to find new ways of making experience continue. (Marrati, 2003, p 111)

By the end of her analysis, Marrati's concerns, unfortunately, end up expressing an air of nostalgia for the old hopes and dreams, rather than a reappraisal of the realities that must be confronted— a nostalgia that is by no means exclusive to her. Her insistence on an older attitude is, despite its optimism, not really promising. I believe, on the contrary, that Oosterling's more sober words can render greater use when addressing the reality of an ever-expanding society that has no real communitarian identities at its base:

The result is a socio-political paradox: while becoming members of expanded virtual communities [...] real communities are actually dismembered. Phrased less metaphorically: individuals no longer belong to one community, but to many. (Oosterling, 2005, p 97)

There is little to gain, thus, from judging art's political relevance with reference to a lost bond, or to the re-appropriation of any communitarian roots. This means too, that communicational channels must be taken at face value as having a limited ability to impact social life. This does not imply that all efforts are irrelevant, or that they testify in favour of the unquestionable complicity with a rampantly deterritorializing Capitalism. Nonetheless, it suggests the need for a serious strategic shift.

In concrete terms this will mean, if we take a step back to Fricke's paintings, that Zepke's idea of emancipation of the institutionalized body will surely sound Deleuzian, but will also sound too modern still. Instead, Fricke can be said to underline the fact that such emancipation can never be complete, without this meaning that all efforts are made in vain. Leaving behind the need to establish a completely autonomous sphere for Art, allows one to see that Fricke's work is indeed an example of that sort of in-

between (in-between consciousness and invisible forces, in-between individuation and the pack, the signifying and asygnifying, etc.) that is conveyed through Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics— of forms of art that, even when critical of the social institutions, are not aggressively focused on their demise.



Illustration 13: Anita Frick. *Zero de Conduite*. Oil on Canvas. 2005

The image *Zero de Conduite* is an interesting choice in this respect, for it truly makes of the figurative a play of forces (Zepke, 2010, pp 70, 71). This play of forces, which Zepke himself points out, depends entirely on a revitalization of resistance that decidedly ceases to focus on destruction and allows for in-between moments of capture to appear; for amalgamation, mutation, contamination, and parasitism of sorts, to be seen as practical and valid modes

of political action.

Yet, the sense of in-between that is anticipated in this research will develop a more straightforward relationship between work and spectator. This straightforwardness comes as a result of the concrete highlighting of possibilities that are present in Intermedial works of art; possibilities which are the product of well known roles, but which still convey the possibility of new relationships to be made, and new forms of subjectivity to be created. By still throwing the spectator into shock, into a myriad of percepts and affects, what this experience will imply for the spectator as a political subject will be 1) the recognition of lines of flight—of connections between media, man, machine, and mind, 2) the possibilities for experimenting with subjectivity that such use of tools, machines or media allow for and encourage, and 3) the blurring of boundaries between the proper spaces of aesthetic contemplation

(museums, galleries, etc.), and those of modern disciplined production (the nuclear family, the factory, the school, the office, the flex hub,). Creativity—in postmodern terms—is no longer the exclusive quality of artists, because—in Marxist terms—the means of production have never been more available for anyone to creatively relate to others, to the world and to oneself.

PART 2

The artist-spectator paradox

Political Art and the role of the Intermedial

To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act.—Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator*.

Introduction to Art and Politics

There is a political instance in aesthetic understanding, which arises from thinking about the effect that artworks can have on social life, in the broadest of senses. Such effect is indeed a political effect, inasmuch as it is intended to establish communication between an artistic community and a community of spectators that participate in this community; inasmuch as it is a sens(a)ble dialogue between political bodies, i.e. power-installed fields of forces, as Deleuze and Foucault conceptualized the sub-individual plane of affects. Yet, realizing that the relationship between artist and spectator is never direct but always mediated by the work at hand, makes the traceability of any political effects discussed difficult to explain, along lines of ideology, reflection, and dialogue. From the mural painting to the theatre play, the work of art is always a third term between an apparent intention of the artist and a hoped-for attitudinal effect in the spectator. This third term, despite its seemingly communicational purpose, is not transparent. It is neither the carrier of the artist's voice or thoughts nor the projection screen of the spectator's expectations. It does not carry instructions for its understanding, nor the coercive ability to force anything upon the spectator, even if it were to be explicit on this. Rancière's quote above is exemplary for the supposed receptive role of the viewer, who is confronted by an artwork that is meant to be both message and messenger. This same characterization, it can be argued, draws a distinctive separation between the role of the artist and that of the spectator. It even creates an unfathomable distance between artist and spectator, which is meant to insure the triad's proper functioning. Artist and spectator become cause and effect, respectively, of an unclear process of transmission.

This somewhat obscure operation is what Rancière wishes to confront in the series of writings that make up *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). By following Rancière's trail of thought, in the aforementioned work, I hope to tackle several problems that are presented to any understanding of aesthetic experience in contemporary art, when wanting to qualify its political relevance or irrelevance—its denunciatory power, its critical perspective, and its presentation of a seemingly veiled or easily missed reality. It is

through this same reasoning that the presumed gulf between artist and spectator will be analyzed in depth.

As a caveat, I must note that much of Rancière's reasoning is not directed towards aesthetic experience in an unqualified fashion, but originates with a focus on theatre, although he often does extend his arguments towards other forms of contemporary art. It is in this extension that Rancière's arguments touch upon Intermedial forms of art.

His analysis can be said to begin by raising the following questions: Is theatre today mere entertainment, mere spectacle and mimicry of reality, as a platonic inspiration would have it? Should one rather see in theatre a gateway through which the spectacle is put in parenthesis and reality's cruelty disclosed, as Marxist approaches would have it? These questions are constantly returning, and are rekindled as one reads Rancière's attempt to answer them, as he displays an original insight on aesthetic understanding.

Restating the distance

Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud delineate solutions to a curious, although pervasive, problem for playwrights, and theatre enthusiasts in general: the spectator's passivity. Brecht would say that eliminating this passivity is simply a matter of creating engagement: engaging the spectators by means of making them investigate, seek knowledge and gain perspective about what is developing on stage (Rancière, 2009, p 4). This means that the distance between the play and the spectator would be directed and moulded depending on the intention of the playwright. The distance does not disappear, but instead gains certain dynamism. Through the proper use of this inevitable distance the artist should be able to create an engaging experience for the spectator, which would aid and guide him in grasping the truths about the social reality, which surface as the play unravels.

Artaud's suggestion, on the contrary, goes in an entirely different direction: what needs be achieved is, actually, the elimination of the distance between actor and spectator, for this distance gives the spectator an illusory experience of mastery, which would constrain her from having a vital participation (Rancière, 2009, p 4). Whatever develops on stage, he argues in turn, must touch the spectator, must shock and startle her so even in a physical sense as to insure the effectiveness of the play—its ability to turn passivity into action.

For Rancière both solutions rely on a similar understanding of aesthetic effects. An understanding, which presupposes that a distance must be presupposed and render functional; a functional distance would be one that enables an original intention to snowball into political action. This reasoning positions the artist, the work, and the spectator in a manner, which demarcates for each a specific role to play, throughout the experience; prefigured incommensurable spaces are set in place. Artist, artwork, and spectator would form, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, a 'machinic' assemblage consisting of three elements—a triad—through which social awareness would be communicated or awakened. The work would mediate between knowledge and ignorance, allowing for knowledge to be passed on—relating in turn to Rancière's view of the schoolmaster and student paradox, which runs along similar argumentative lines:

The teacher and pupil related to each other as long as the latter is in a position in which to learn from the former. This position is one in which he is aware that a distance separates them, that their intelligence is unequal, that one possesses knowledge and the other does not; the first thing the student learns is his own inability (to teach himself), his own ignorance; lesson after lesson the schoolmaster must recreate a distance between them in order for the learning process to take place successfully: what this process confirms over and over again is its initial presupposition: that their intelligences are unequal. (Rancière, 2009, pp 8, 9)

Between artist and spectator a recurrent distance, which is both metaphorical and spatial, is fixedly established. What initially renders the distance problematic is that without there being a patent separation of intelligences the arrangement cannot work, and enlightenment ceases. It is the presumed positions of both the spectator and the artist that, for Rancière, give a particular orientation to aesthetic understanding (as one of gaining enlightenment) and to the effects that would be expected to follow throughout the social field; effective theatre would create collective awareness of a veiled reality, which would inexorably move spectators into political action. It is a problematic gesture that, on the one hand, equates spectator, ignorance, and passivity, and on the other, artist, knowledge, and activity. Rancière wants then to examine the matrix of oppositions and equivalences that repositions these perspectives of theatrical engagement, but thereafter, of aesthetic experience in a broader sense: equivalences between audience and community, gaze and passivity, exteriority and separation, mediation and simulacrum; oppositions between collective and individual, image and living reality, activity and passivity, self-ownership and alienation (Rancière, 2009, p 7).

The activity/passivity duality works in unison with not only the knowledge/ignorance opposition, but also with the assumption of reality as being essentially veiled, as being, thus, essentially divided between truth and appearance. Keeping it within Marxist boundaries, this division would be consolidated by an economic structure, one of inherent exploitation, which is not perceived as such by the exploited and ideologically alienated, because of the existence of various mechanisms that create a façade of political equality. This is said to pre-exist and overdetermine the form of the economic regime. The political effect that artworks would have, hence, would rely on their ability to disclose the veiled reality, which would make of the fight against exploitation, a shared conviction—a sense of community. This disclosure would be achieved by putting the spectators' focus on the discontinuities that pervade social life, product of equally pervading social contradictions. This would mean that the political effect of Picasso's *Guernica*, to name a classic example, can be measured through its ability to disclose the

intolerable reality of the massacre perpetrated by the Germans and the suffering produced, against the propaganda of liberation that Franco's regime put forward simultaneously. This begs the question of how should we understand the effect of the disclosure in analytical terms? The quick answer is that this effect can be labelled awareness. Awareness, firstly, of being the victim of a hoax: of a sham image of reality concocted by the dominant forces in society and justified through equally dominant opinions. This state of mind would, in consequence, serve as a catalyst, which would throw the spectator into political action.

One immediately sees Lazzarato's path of shock-awareness-subjectivity being delineated, at least to some extent. The *Guernica*, if one follows Lazzarato's argument, is intended to produce shock and to make the public aware of the massacre; indeed following this corridor from awareness into action. Whether that awareness throws the viewer into political action rather than into ethical reformation, would be what brings us closer or farther from Lazzarato's – Deleuzian – view. For Rancière, Lazzarato's path points us in the direction of desiring an aesthetic self-education of humanity: a 'politics of aesthetics', where a political project, a new way of life, plunges into forms of aesthetic presentation. This project, says Rancière, dates back to Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling—where the autonomous individual creates a new ethos for himself that would be part of a consensual image of the world shared with his fellow men (Rancière, 2010, p 119).

Additionally, Rancière argues, artistic practices that, in general, aim or attempt to create awareness on the viewer can be taken as proper 'pedagogical models': as proposing art that attempts to be a social critique and to motivate a critical (revolutionary) attitude on the viewer by means of awareness (Rancière, 2010, p 136). This critical engagement that calls for awareness is still common today, adds

Rancière, as huge numbers of artists continue to appeal, henceforth, to forms of *sensus communis* and to a revolutionary attitude against capitalism and the logic of commodity (Rancière, 2010, p 144)⁶⁴.

A Deleuzian explanation in line with the need to create awareness on the viewer need not take us in Lazzarato's direction, but can be also reworked and shifted towards the sublime, as can be found, for example, in Gustavo Chirolla. Following Deleuze, Chirolla argues that, 'If art does not stop summoning a people that is lacking it is because it is addressing a people that does not yet exist, a possible people or a people to come' (Chirolla, 2010, p 29). For Chirolla, awareness would be a motivational force, to be sure, but one working upon the mind at a level that is not entirely linguistic, ethical, or even strictly political.

First, if the people are not a constituted force neither is art capable of creating a people, for "a people can only be created by abominable sufferings". Second, when art appeals to a people that is lacking it does not mean that they do not exist, rather that they do not exist yet, that they are in the process of becoming. Third, fabulation is common to both the people and art because they have suffering and resistance in common. As a result, there is creative fabulation when the non-enunciable becomes enunciated, when suffering and resistance to ignominy become a political enunciation; a politics of life against death. (Chirolla, 2010, p 29)

The mention of pain and suffering relates immediately to Lyotard's understanding of the unrepresentable sublime. Fabulation and 'enunciating the non-enunciable', rather than being explicit about the political specificity of the work, would suggest too, a somewhat romantic use of these terms. At any rate, they are expected to create an air of transcendence that would confirm Rancière's fears regarding an interpretation of aesthetic experience that has awareness as its main ingredient, and which may or may

⁶⁴ A quick example can be seen in Marcel Odenbach's *Eine Faust in der Tasche Machen*, (1994), where he makes sculptural use of monitors aligned next to each other. Seven monitors display news footage of 1986 upheavals in seven countries. The footage is intercut with footage of the Third Reich's burning of books (Rush, 2005, p 147). The use of modern media is secondary to the images displayed, which are intended to be highly critical of modern democracies, while sustaining a sense of community, which would identify the protestors of the different upheavals.

not be inspired by the creation of political militancy alone. Yet, for Rancière, a Deleuzian understanding of art will imply

that the transcendence instituted at the heart of Immanence, in fact, signifies the submission of art to a law of heteronomy which undermines every form of transmission of the vibration of color and of the embrace of forms to the vibrations and to the embraces of a fraternal humanity [a people to come]. (Rancière, 2010, p 182)

So, instead of securing art's autonomy, as one had it with Zepke, Rancière sees, on the contrary, the confirmation of a subjugated art in an explanation like Chirolla's, as the latter appeals to the people to come, which for Rancière can only mean the community to come—and the building of a communitarian project based on some idea of *sensus communis*. However, for Rancière, the modern turn in artworks that presuppose awareness on behalf of the public, is not exclusively misguided, solely because it results in art's heteronomy. Awareness itself is the problem, for it is nothing other than the presumption of an inherently (and negatively) passive spectator, who must become actively engaged by her apprehension of the artist's intentions as they are channelled in the artwork—awareness would be a decidedly active engagement, an activity which would reject any form of contemplation or *possibility*, as Lyotard coined this phenomenon.

For Rancière the need to have an active spectator is therefore, a modern gesture and a pedagogical model in two senses. On the one hand, one could say that he agrees with Lyotard, when the latter argues that such 'activity' still takes hold of the modern need for the subject to be a master of objects (Lyotard, 1991, p 117). On the other hand, Rancière says that, the need for awareness relates to the idea of art becoming life, which would lead us not only to highlight art's pragmatic core, but also to view artistic work as 'pure practices'⁶⁵. Rancière, furthermore, relates the modern attempt of creating 'pure practices'

⁶⁵ 'The allegedly "pure" practice of writing is linked to the need to create forms that participate in a general reframing of the human abode' (Rancière, 2010, p 121).

with current product design: he compares an engineer who designs and informs according to (a product's) function, with Mallarmé who wants to make of poetry design, in order to bring it to everyday life: 'they both share the idea that forms of art should be modes of collective education' (Rancière, 2010, p 122).

Rancière's quick identification of Mallarmé's poetry with functional design is, one must note, anything but transparent. He claims that Mallarmé wants to take representation out of the poem replacing it with a general form, a design, and a choreography (Rancière, 2010, p 121). From this ascribed relationship, however, it is unclear how such 'design' in Mallarmé, which by negating representation negates the role of the signifier, of identity, and places imagery instead, can be compared with a function-driven design, whose attention to function not only relates it to a clear purpose (to a prescribed end), but whose communication of such function is bluntly explicit. So, even if it were true that the idea of educating the public would be present in both, this one would differ substantially in its deployment and its goals.

I believe Rancière's concern with the pedagogical intentions of both awareness towards a *sensus communis* continuum, and awareness towards forms of the unrepresentable, is not without analytical problems of its own, inasmuch as Rancière's own intentions to simplify are brutally evident. Yet, were we to bear with him, the question of awareness would indeed determine the presumed positions that are occupied by both the spectator and the artist. It would also make aesthetic goals fall back upon themselves. If it is true that for an artwork to be (politically) effective it must make of the inherently ignorant and passive spectator an actively engaged political subject, then there is indeed a prejudice with regard to the spectator's intelligence—and control over her own life—that must be taken into account.

Now, as I follow Rancière, the first point to highlight will not just end with the important role given to social awareness. Next to this, the artistic need to create awareness on the viewer reveals, in fact, an understanding of reality as, in principle, split or divided; an all too-well-known gesture in the history of

philosophy. Once reality is split in two, then producing awareness by way of unveilings, of class conscience, or by any other means that are aimed at disclosing ‘the real’, will always be a necessary step, in order to achieve both emancipation and epistemological enlightenment; these latter objectives become by the same gesture a crucial part of the desired effect on the public and cannot be said to be exclusive to a Marxist inspired art. It includes, by the same logic, the possibility for a reversal of the Marxist discourse on exploitation, by a simple change in the valuation of the initial presuppositions concerning ‘the real’: of an economic regime which is essentially exploitative, and a collective mass which is inherently ignorant. This reversal is seen already by Rancière, who argues that oppositions such as ‘viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity—are quite different from logical oppositions between clearly defined terms’ (Rancière, 2009, p 12). They are different because they are not mere analytical tools, but function rather, as subtle metaphysical concepts—they function by defining an arbitrary distribution of the sensible, which ascribes equally arbitrary positions such as roles and capacities, in a way that is fundamentally unequal. ‘They are embodied allegories of inequality. That is why we can change the value of the terms, transform a ‘good’ term into a ‘bad’ one and vice versa, without altering of the opposition itself’ (Rancière, 2009, p 12).

Rancière’s intention of nullifying the arbitrarily presupposed valuations that burden the oppositions, namely to stop assuming that reality is veiled; that to know is to act, while to ignore is to passively receive, is undoubtedly his primary aim, and an interesting analytical feat, to be sure, although not unproblematic, as I have noted above. The first clear obstacle has to do with the way in which we choose to explain the place of the artist and the spectator, once we have decided to deliver an understanding where these two roles can no longer be reduced to positions of knowledge and ignorance; an understanding which, nonetheless, will still take into account how both are constituted as subjectivities, that is, as being active participants of political processes. In other words, given that the notions of artist and spectator do not refer merely to positions of activity and passivity, which would be reduced to

epistemological perspectives—where one knows reality and the other does not—but which, as Rancière says, depend on an already presupposed political viewpoint on society, then any changes on the former will imply a theoretical shift of the latter⁶⁶.

The point of departure that defines the spectator as part of a community or social group, and which gives her a clear identity, and a set of responsibilities towards the community, as well as towards herself, must be rekindled entirely. Rekindled, because such reasoning, says Rancière, leads us to a political constitution of society along lines of identification which are effective as long as they remain immobile and, by the same token, clearly demarcated. It is this unexpected and conservative notion of community, which Rancière urges us to demolish first, for it unavoidably lies at the basis of all artistic intentions to create awareness. In addition to Rancière's somewhat militant call to action, there is, I will argue, a most patent reason to pursue this reflection. Rekindling the notion of political community, and the roles of artists, spectator, and artwork, must be done so too, if both artwork and spectator are to become agents and not mere cogs of a, supposedly, operational machinery that is put to work by the artist (as some form of First Cause). However, this caveat or distinction is not meant to disqualify Rancière's actual reflection, but is simply aimed to distance my own interests from his.

In Rancière's take, the relation that is forged between community, emancipation and (re)appropriation must be brought out into the open:

the original meaning of the word “emancipation”: emergence from a state of minority. This state of minority from which the activists of social emancipation wanted to escape from is, in principle, the same thing as the “harmonious fabric of the community” [a lost bond]. [...] In fact, social emancipation signified breaking this fit between an “occupation” and a “capacity”, which entailed an incapacity to conquer a different space and a different time. [...] ‘But this idea and

⁶⁶ It can also be argued that epistemology cannot be simply reduced to a division between objectivity and subjectivity. Hence, all political instances cannot be quickly isolated.

practice of emancipation were historically blended with a quite different idea of domination and liberation and, in the end, subjected to it: the one that linked domination with a process of separation and, in consequence, liberation with regaining a lost unity. [...] Emancipation could then only appear as a general re-appropriation of a good lost by the community. (Rancière, 2009, pp 42,43)

Rancière's argument sees in the notion of community a call for an implicitly natural division of labour. Through this assertion he is able to transform Marxist claims into arguments that belong in Plato's Republic. It is in the need to justify a communitarian bond that Marxism calls for revolt and emancipation turns into a conservative utopia, closely escorted by a fascist desire. In consequence, artworks intended to produce political action by means of disclosing a veiled reality (of exploitation-alienation), will be equally reactionary inasmuch as they immerse spectators in the idea of a world that they have lost, in the idea of a struggle to retake their proper place⁶⁷. It is perplexing to see Rancière's argument throwing all forms of critical thought into a disjunction of the form, either Capitalism (the never ending spectacle) or some form of the Republic (the natural community), either unstoppable deterritorialization or fascistic re-appropriation. However, I will leave this point in mid-air for the moment, in order to progress further with Rancière's case.

For him, and I agree, the bottom line about the whole discussion must undoubtedly be whether disclosure and emancipation are the intentions of artists today. For Rancière, artists are no longer interested in giving the spectator a (moral or political) lesson or 'message' (Rancière, 2009, p 14). It is difficult to assert that Rancière is critical of this lack, for he insists that what artists are interested in is in producing 'a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy for action. But they always assume that what will be perceived, felt, understood is what they have put into their dramatic art of performance' (Rancière, 2009, p 14). If Rancière is critical at this stage it is because he sees in such

⁶⁷ It is still valid, notwithstanding, to ask whether the Marxist gesture of disclosure can only be significant under the assumption of a return to nature, as is seemingly what Rancière sustains.

arousal of the senses, a presupposition between an intended cause and an expected effect, which can only be explained by the equally presumed principle of inequality between artist and spectator, which is a reminder of the similar authority that the schoolmaster grants himself (Rancière, 2009, p 14). The move from a causality of sorts to the self-ascription of authority is not as straightforward as Rancière would hope for. Yet, it is worth trying to understand why he believes that this ‘inegalitarian principle’ is a necessary outcome of a presumed cause and effect relation. He sees that the issues arise from a misunderstanding of the distances that are at stake. On the one hand the distance between authority (schoolmaster) and obedience (pupil) and, on the other hand, the distance between the artwork and the spectator. The artist, and this is Rancière’s point, confuses the relation between spectator and artwork with a relation of authority, where the function would be to convey an original intention on an inherently receptive spectator. The artist fails to understand that the work or performance ‘is owed by no one’, but simply subsists between both artist and spectator, bringing them together but doing so while ‘excluding any uniform transmission, any identity between cause and effect’ (Rancière, 2009, p 15).

Rancière’s answer is enlightening with respect to the active role that the artwork plays; a role, which is misunderstood if reduced to a communication between two minds (artist and spectator). Despite this acute point I cannot but remain suspicious of the ambivalent intentions that he ascribes to the artist.

Artists no longer want to ‘instruct’ spectators, yet they still affirm that an identity between cause (artist’s interest in creating percepts and affects) and an effect (awareness that throws the spectator into political action (?)) continues to exist. If all that artists wanted was to create a sensible experience in the spectator, then the cause-effect relation would not fail. If a spectator is affected by such experience in a way that goes beyond the mere arousal of the senses, then such an outcome would simply lead us to conclude that the aesthetic experience is characterized by a surplus where a cause is conducive to multiple and unpredictable effects.

The cause and effect argument seems straightforward when reducing the artist-work-spectator relationship to one of transmission, where identifying the failure or success in the transmission of a certain meaning would be the key behind the analysis. It is, on the contrary, a much more contentious point precisely at the moment in which the surplus aspect of aesthetic experience comes to light, because it displaces the role of the artwork as a stable transmitter.

Rancière's position, however, should not be so quickly dismissed. His argument is further illustrated when referring to the intention of disclosure, by the photographic image, *Untitled* (2002), by Josephine Meckseper, which taken in Berlin, shows anti-war demonstrators in the background with a burning shopping trolley in the foreground:

But were this visual demonstration [Meckseper's image] to be taken to its logical conclusion, it would lead to the abolition of the critical procedure: if everything is nothing but spectacular exhibition, the contrast between appearance and reality that grounded the effectiveness of the critical discourse disappears, and with it, any guilt about the beings situated on the side of the dark or denied reality. In that case, the critical system would simply reveal its own extinction. Yet this is not how it is. [...] They still tell us: here is the reality you do not know how to see—the boundless reign of commodity exhibition and the nihilist horror of today's petty-bourgeois lifestyle. But also, here is the reality you do not want to see—the participation of your supposed gestures of revolt in this process of exhibiting signs of distinction governed by commodity exhibition. Artistic critique, therefore, proposes always to short-circuit, to generate a clash that reveals the secret concealed by the exhibition of images. [...] But it is always a question of showing the spectator what she does not know how to see, and making her feel ashamed of what she does not want to see, even if it means that the critical system presents itself as a luxury commodity pertaining to the very logic it denounces. (Rancière, 2009, pp 29, 30)



Illustration 14: Josephine Meckseper. *Untitled*. 2002

What stays unchanged for contemporary artists such as Meckseper, if one is to take Rancière's view, is the attempt to portray society as hypocritical and as a spectacle, which would imply that what one sees is not the real thing. Yet something has changed. What changes or disappears, are the emancipatory calls that would accompany the disclosure of a hidden reality. Such calls are inexistent inasmuch as the critique targets equally, both the dominant forces of capitalism, as well as the exemplified forces of resistance. For Rancière, in consequence, a palpable pessimism takes over the critical intentions of artists today⁶⁸:

This critique of the critical tradition therefore still employs its concepts and procedures. But something, it is true, has changed. Yesterday, these procedures still intended to create forms of consciousness and energies directed towards a process of emancipation. Now they are either

⁶⁸ Situationism and postmodernism is constantly displaying the pessimism denounced by Rancière. Artists like Mike Smith and John Jesurum play with satirical images, dark humour and desperation (Rush, 2005, pp 67-69). In their work, there is a constant reminder of the death of the modern subject and the romantic notion of autonomy.

entirely disconnected of this horizon of emancipation or clearly directed against this dream.

(Rancière, 2009, pp 31, 32)

Rancière wishes to keep a safe distance from contemporary artists that throw the public into an aesthetic understanding that would be based on a series of disclosures, which would occur en masse, and would simply reaffirm that there is no possibility for a social critique that develops along lines of inside and outside. This form of understanding is precisely what Rancière says can only reveal the extinction of the critical endeavour itself, for with all its disclosures the only possible affirmation that can be made is that there is no (un)veiled reality, but simply the continuity of the spectacle throughout the social field. An affirmation of this sort may well be taken as pessimistic, but this pessimism can hardly be said to be accompanied by any attempt at the spectator's deliverance from the spectacle, through (re)appropriating a lost sense of reality. Hence, we could at least argue that this would certainly appear to avoid the reactionary gestures that Rancière denounces. Besides this point about pessimism, there is yet a serious ambiguity to Rancière's claim that emancipatory calls remain in the form of an appeal to gain a higher state of consciousness.

Rancière's claim that relates artistic emancipatory calls with a break from a minoritarian state is insufficient to analyze what is gained by the pessimistic vein that he says characterizes the postmodern understanding of aesthetics⁶⁹. Qualifying an aesthetic critique that appears to be purely negative leaves little or no space for the minoritarian break, which Rancière holds for (some) contemporary artists. Rancière's reasoning seems to maintain that if artworks stress, in principle, the impossibility of a break from our pre-existent reality, then the result of these artworks, and their effects would be the sad awakening of pessimism. The main obstacle of this conclusion is that it still takes hold of the identifying principle, between artist intention and the expected effects on the spectator, which Rancière wishes to circumvent. Still, this is not the only difficulty, for if, on the other hand, denouncing the impossibility of

⁶⁹ The word minoritarian does not relate here to the use given to it by Deleuze. Rancière uses the word in its (more common) negative connotation, in order to contrast a lower from a higher state of consciousness along the lines of child-adult.

a break with a pre-existent reality is, a purely pessimistic gesture, then this valuation can only be deduced from presupposing that the pre-existent reality is essentially or factually evil⁷⁰, which is another of the presuppositions that Rancière wants to avoid from the start. To avoid these gaffes, the analytical comprehension of this postmodern aesthetic gesture of endless disclosures, needs to be rekindled.

Eliminating the distance

To rephrase Rancière's last point, persistence in showing spectators what they ignore, in the way attempted by Meckseper (and postmodern artists), will imply that, aside from whatever the reality disclosed by the artwork, the aesthetic process proposed (to the spectators) would not culminate in enlightenment, but would instead persist as an ambivalent movement of (un)veiling(s). A certain Heideggerian affinity would seem to come forward in this conclusion on aesthetic experience, although, more than an epistemological endeavour, what Rancière mainly underscores from such a view, would be the prevalent change of societal positions, of social (re)shuffling, that it proposes. This idea of social shuffling and reshuffling is facilitated, and accentuated, by the use that (postmodern) artists make of several juxtaposed media. Following Rancière:

Next, there is the idea of a hybridization of artistic means appropriate to the postmodern reality of a constant exchange of roles and identities, the real and the virtual, the organic and the mechanical and information-technology prostheses. This [...] idea [...] often leads to a different form of stultification, which uses the blurring of boundaries and the confusion of roles to enhance the effect of the performance without questioning its principles. (Rancière, 2009, p 21)

⁷⁰ The term evil would specifically relate to an arbitrary, exploitative, and coercive social regime.

The principles that Rancière argues will remain are those that make up the initial positions of artist and spectator: the spectator is passive and ignorant, while the artist is active and knowledgeable. Against the continuation of this view Rancière proposes the following:

‘There remains a third way [besides the ‘total work of art’ and the mentioned ‘postmodern’ perspective] that aims not to amplify effects, but to problematize the cause-effect relationship itself and the set of presuppositions that sustain the logic of stultification. [...] In sum, it proposes to conceive it [referring to the theatrical stage, but generalizable to all forms of art] as a new scene of equality where heterogeneous performances are translated into one another. For in all these performances what is involved is linking what one knows with what one does not know; being at once a performer deploying her skills and a spectator observing what these skills might produce in a new context among other spectators. [...] An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators. (Rancière, 2009, p 23)

Now, for Rancière, emancipation will no longer be the product of awareness. He has attempted to work outside the framework of oppositions that would sustain such affirmation in the first place: ‘Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed’ (Rancière, 2009, p 17).

In Deleuzian vein, Rancière acknowledges there is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. ‘Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries between territories. [...] Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story’ (Rancière, 2009, p 17). This means, therefore, that already emancipated spectators will confront the artwork straightforwardly, on the one hand, and on the

other, that whatever comes as a result of that encounter, cannot be equated or judged with exclusive reference to the artist's original intention.

Rancière attempts to work outside the presuppositions he says are withheld by critical thought on aesthetics. He argues that, the presupposition of a state of minority that the artist would ascribe to the spectators, while maintaining an enlightened view for himself, the presupposition of an identity between artist's intention and spectators response, and the presupposition of a natural communitarian bond, are what lead him to imagine the explicated third way. Even if it is the case that the third way would be the most desirable understanding to pursue, several questions would still pop up undoubtedly from such conclusion: if the spectators' response is singular, isolated, or product of some form of subjective interpretation, instead of the product of social (collective) awareness, will this not imply that artworks (the objects themselves) have become politically ineffective? Or, to reverse the question, what kind of political effects can artworks have for a community that is actually a non-community? Parallel to these questions, but no less important, does talk about a community of narrators and spectators not throw us into some sort of hermeneutic trip, where all transformations must be explained through successful or unsuccessful translations?

Rancière's schoolmaster-pupil paradox, which would keep the discussion within epistemological boundaries, is unearthed and superimposed on an aesthetic set of problems that have a strong political underpinning—that cannot be reduced to a matter of knowing and ignoring. Talking about a minoritarian state of consciousness, while referring to the spectator of theatre or artworks, is no longer a discussion about epistemological vantage, nor is it simply one that can be exhausted in the existence of a shared notion about knowledge and ignorance. The state of minority ascribed to the spectator refers to the knowledge of a state of affairs that is politicized through and through, and that would have an effect on the quality or transparency of knowledge in the first place.

Taking a step back, Rancière reaches the conclusion that in order to ensure the parity between artist and spectator certain horizontality has to be deemed tenable. The equality of intelligences that he proposes, however, do not suppose an automatic elimination of all communitarian bonds, nor of the characterization of the work of art as a communicational medium. However, if it is, in fact, this characterization, this presumption of communication between artist and spectator that needs to be avoided or sabotaged then undoubtedly, one must be prepared to leave behind the idea of a harmonious notion of community.

Doing away with any stringent form of *sensus communis* is an exemplary gesture that creates immediate separation between the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (as ‘total work of art’) and the dissension that wants to be portrayed by what Rancière, following Lyotard albeit in a negative turn, termed as postmodern forms of art. On this dissensus, Rancière himself says:

What “dissensus” means is an organisation of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities. (Rancière, 2009, pp 48, 49)

Rancière, without a doubt, wants to relate dissensus with the idea of individual narrators and interpreters—which would allow him to hold the alleged equality of intelligences. This image of individual worlds entering a dialogue with the work of art rather than with the artist himself, one soon realizes, does not do away the presupposition concerning the need of a stringent communitarian bond, neither directly nor unequivocally. It does not, because the hermeneutic picture presented by the scheme of narrators and interpreters does not necessarily conserve the basis of dissensus that Rancière wanted to

keep—it seems rhetorical to talk about language without already assuming a shared notion of community.

Furthermore, even if interpretation is not seen as a process of transparent translation (from artist to viewer), this does not turn it haphazardly into a process that delivers a common understanding, although now departing from dissensus. As was argued earlier in this text, the hermeneutic picture cannot be completed without taking into account the possibility of various interpretations emerging and their relative distance from the narrator's intention. If the process of translation is taken for granted, in order to continue focusing on how artist and spectator communicate and generate dialogue, based on shared communitarian bonds, then the role of the work changes little from its initial function as a transparent medium, which should merely facilitate a triangulated communication. This will imply that the more neutral an artwork is, the better it is for its communicative purposes. Taking into account that, contrary to this, I have been at pains to show the importance of the medium, because it is transformative rather than transparent, I cannot but find Rancière's view, notwithstanding the Deleuzian openness in the abovementioned citation, as a step backwards and away from finding any interest in Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics.

Rancière, I believe, turns his attention to the procedural character of aesthetic experience as a way to continue the enquiry about political art along the well-known modern lines I have delineated thus far: political programmes, communication, awareness, and communitarian bonds. He seems, however, to idealize aesthetic experience, making of it a pure event (political, subjective, intelligent, and autonomous), where a critical perspective is somehow reached on behalf of the spectator:

Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination that it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a

collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are “equipped” to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.

(Rancière, 2009, p 72)

Rancière’s focus on the narrator and interpreter is merely a way of stressing the dissensus, the differences, which he wishes to put at the base of the relationship that exists between artist and spectator⁷¹. If artworks can still have a political effect then, he urges, this one must arise from the differences that constitute an already emancipated community⁷². This would simply mean that today’s art forms must be proposals that acknowledge the reality of emancipated spectators, which in practice means nothing more than avoiding the imposition of any type of identity politics. The critical perspective remains, but would have to do so at a level somewhat prior to reflection, so as to avoid subsuming the artwork to a political programme. This would entail considering an understanding of aesthetic experience, which is neither entirely reflective nor solely a matter of sensations (and different from an experience of the sublime). The problem of dissensus in Rancière, naturally returns, however, given the difficulties of conceptualizing the political actions of such an enlightened/emancipated group, while at the same time avoiding a fall back into a society of autistics, who remain safeguarded from totalitarianisms as well as from any shared endeavour or social group; the issue of community and identification resurfaces indefinitely in Rancière’s reflection:

⁷¹ Rancière’s main contention is to be able to retain a certain independence for the spectator and a horizontal connection between artist and spectator: ‘This is a crucial point: spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as, in their way, do actors or playwrights, directors, dancers or performers’ (Rancière, 2009, p 13).

⁷² ‘However, this [specific to artworks] political effect occurs under the condition of an original disjunction’ (Rancière, 2009, p 72, 73).

The aesthetic community is a community of dis-identified persons. As such, it is political because political subjectivation proceeds via a process of dis-identification. An emancipated proletarian is a dis-identified worker. But there is no measure enabling us to calculate the dis-identifying effect. On the one hand, the effect escapes the strategy of the artist; on the other, the artistic strategy completes the process of dis-identification. Going beyond the point of political subjectivation towards the “earth’s song”—that is to say towards the construction of new forms of individuation—Deleuzian haecceities—that cancel any form of political subjectivation.

(Rancière, 2009, p 73)

The issue of dissensus, in addition, is not one that needs to be addressed by the construction of a negative ontology (Lyotard); the aesthetic experience as a catalyst for critique as well as for the creation of new forms of subjectivity and social relationships seems to me too foggy, too difficult to apprehend, and even more difficult to sustain without ending in some form of experiential ontology (where phenomenology would fit the part with relative ease) or an aporia (Lyotard). When talking about the actual role of the work of art, of the artist’s labour, and of the effect of the first on the spectator, one can hardly say that Rancière’s view has moved us an inch from the starting point (Artist-Art-Spectator/Cause-medium-effect). It is true, I must confess, that Rancière has, in fact, distanced us from the dangers of a return to totalizing forms of political art and from purely sensational or positivistic explanations of aesthetic experience. However, he remains caught up in a difficult position: trying to stay away from an entirely positivist interpretation, which would be sterile in terms of social critique, as well as from a Deleuzian perspective, from which a political project that is entirely autonomous to the work cannot be stated. One must remember that in Deleuze the work of art presents the spectator with a maze of percepts and affects that elude habitual forms of understanding or general opinions; artworks avoid, thus, common sense from the start. It is this maze as a form of social critique, which Rancière labelled as social shuffling, what could seemingly bring him closer to Deleuze:

The artist is the master of objects; he puts before us shattered, burned, broken-down objects, converting them into the regime of desiring-machines; breaking down is part of the very functioning of desiring-machines; the artist presents paranoiac machines, miraculating-machines, so as to cause desiring-machines to undermine technical machines. Even more important, the work of art is a desiring-machine. The artist stores up his treasures so as to create an immediate explosion, and that is why, to his way of thinking, destructions can never take place as rapidly as they ought to. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 32)

The Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective appears to hold a worrying role for the artist: ‘master of objects’—with its distinctive modern overtones of manipulation. One may agree or disagree on the connotations behind such word usage by Deleuze and Guattari. Rancière’s reflection, however, does appear to argue against them, because it sees them as a continuation of the pervasive active/passive opposition. Yet, the work of art as a challenge in itself, as a form agency, is completely absent from Rancière’s critique on Deleuze, and can soon become an obstacle, while following his human-focused reflection. Rancière centres entirely on making artists and spectators communicate in a way that would be enlightening, but still none imposing. It is a particularly difficult task being able to maintain this view, without assuming that the spectator has indeed some activity to perform; an activity which would be motivated by the work at hand, to be sure. Rancière’s urge to distance himself from ‘the active’ at all costs leaves little room for attempting to move in a different direction; a direction that does not end up with a synthesis, a sublimation, or an appeal to a primordial form of receptivity of the form of Lyotard’s passibility. Moreover, Rancière’s emancipated spectators, appear to have no will to act on their own, or, at least, he passes over that possibility, which would be a decision that would confirm his view on artworks as passive objects, as channels that communicate the only forms of agency involved (artist and spectator), which are looked with suspicion as soon as they become active (one because of attempting to subjugate and the other for being a puppet).

Rancière's argument unfolds in a way in which it is almost impossible to avoid making the artist-work-spectator relationship fall into any of the oppositions he had gathered from the start. Rancière, in addition, takes the oppositions too seriously and too literally, although for the sake of maintaining 'equality', I would presume. The spirit of equality of intelligences he wishes to assert is, in any case, not preserved, by banning the use of a particular set of oppositions, which is fairly large and still not necessarily exhaustive. Along these lines, circumventing any sense of community becomes an insurmountable difficulty, if a choice must be made between community and disunity, each seen as two fixed poles. His own answer regarding the dissensual community of narrators and spectators marginally escapes, if at all, such dichotomous thinking.

To sum up, the active and passive opposition preoccupies Rancière, due to its possible adherence to modern values: mastery and control. For him, the point of making both artist and spectators equal, would necessarily imply making them equally active or equally passive, or rather to make of passivity and activity modes of action which would entail neither ontological predisposition nor social value. The analytical problem that arises has to do with the difficulties of actually explaining how art can be effective when all the entities between artist and spectator appear as inert channels between two forms of subjectivity that are merely qualified as emancipated (as following no identity given to them from above). It is not clear what the point of social critique (as a form of dis-identification) in art can be; as a critique can only gain value in reference to a reality that must be regarded as shared at some point or at a certain level—but one must keep in mind that Rancière is not a friend of gradations.

Undoubtedly, as Rancière notes from the start, valuations are not automatically or by decree ascribed to concepts. Setting in place the equality of activity and passivity is an uneasy move by Rancière, and appears to be exclusively intended as a theoretical weapon against artists who, for example, attempt to induce guilt in the spectator.

It [the work, the voice of the work, the image] denounces the inversion of existence that consists in being a passive consumer of commodities which are images and images which are commodities. It tells us that the only response to this evil is activity. But it also tells that those of us who are viewing the images it is commenting on will never act, will forever remain spectators of a life spent in the image. The inversion of the inversion thus remains a form of knowledge reserved for those who know why we shall continue not to know, not to act. The virtue of activity, counter-posed to the evil of the image, is thus absorbed by the authority of the sovereign voice that stigmatizes the false existence which it knows us to be condemned to wallow in.

(Rancière, 2009, p 88)

More than a pressing need to equate the passive and the active, Rancière wishes simply to avoid any perspective of contempt for the spectator, which is indeed a noble and necessary task. The latter, and I agree, is not guilty for wanting to avoid direct political action, but that surely does not mean that those who do have no merit, or that denunciatory calls are only meant to excite guilt. Rancière's words seem to be too strong for the hardly distressing point he wants to make.

I have argued along with Rancière that political art cannot presuppose a passive spectator that would be turned active militant through the motivational power of awareness or guilt. Under such light, furthermore, the spectator's relation to the question of community is swallowed by identity politics, where modern *sensus communis* would remain a pivotal aspect. It is following this logic that Rancière presupposes a reactionary vein, albeit not without hesitation.

Now, if one solely wishes to avoid the imposition of a political program on behalf of the artist, then challenging the idea of a sense of community as such, seems a rather fortuitous enterprise, for in the annulment of any direct identification, between artist intention and spectatorial response, the transmission of rigid political program informed by modern *sensus communis* cannot but be deemed

impossible. The artwork is not a good transmitter of political discourse or, if it were, then it wouldn't be good at producing deterritorializations and hence, at creating an aesthetic experience characterized by the destabilization of meanings and a distribution of the real along new coordinates (reterritorialization).

There is no need to talk about imposing political perspectives if artworks are not direct lines between artist and spectator—that ghost has already been exorcised from the moment that aesthetic experience was theorized along postmodern lines. This is, in fact, not unlike the criticism to the authoritarian guise that is denounced by the schoolmaster-pupil paradox, and reaffirmed by Rancière, for instance, when saying:

What our performances—be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it—verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of autonomous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations. (Rancière, 2009, p 17)

Still, stating the existence of equality does not do away with the theme of community once and for all. There is certain uneasiness about the relation between the two presuppositions: the communitarian bond and the artist-spectator bond. The artist-spectator bond depends on the status of the work itself. Whether the artwork is seen as a third wheel, as means of communication, or as surface of refraction, the bond between artist and spectator will remain, although the strict identification between artist intention and spectator response will no longer hold, and will, erode the presupposition of a totalitarian politics. This would at least imply that the aforementioned presuppositions are not mutually exclusive, for abandoning talk about cause and effect will not necessarily mean that the political effect of the artwork (if any) will not come by way of the construction or presumption of a communitarian bond, on behalf the spectator as part of her aesthetic experience. This can also be rephrased in terms of the schoolmaster-pupil paradox:

once the student realizes that he is equal to the schoolmaster, will not mean that he has nothing to learn from the master or nothing to teach to less advanced students⁷³.

The point to note here from Rancière's argument, however, is that oddly, it becomes a milder version of what it set itself up against in the first place. The artist and spectator have become equal inasmuch as both are now said to have a majoritarian state of consciousness—awareness ceases to be the sole expression, through which the artwork's political success could be judged. This means, therefore, that the presupposition of community remains, but now, as a somewhat ghostlike space of encounter between two—equally enlightened—forms of consciousness. Rancière, however, instead of unravelling this vaporous sense of community, goes back to re-establishing the irreducible distance between artist and spectator, which was phrased before in terms of majoritarian/ minoritarian forms of consciousness. To achieve this, it must be noted, his argument makes an unexpected shift:

The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of things and signs surrounding it, so as to take its place among human beings. [...] From this ignoramus, spelling out of signs, to the scientist who constructs hypotheses, the same intelligence is always at work—an intelligence that translates signs into other signs and proceeds by comparisons and illustrations in order to communicate its intellectual adventures and understand what another intelligence is endeavouring to communicate to it. This poetic labor of translation is at the heart of all learning. [...] Distance is not an evil to be abolished, but the normal condition of any communication. (Rancière, 2009, p 10)

Rancière, curiously enough, ends up naturalizing the initially problematic distance through a rather too quick biological justification. The equality of intelligences, he wished to affirm, turns now towards a naturalism of sorts, becoming something of a cognitive or neurological equality. To affirm that all

⁷³ Rancière himself states very early in his argument that 'Intellectual emancipation is the verification of the equality of intelligence. This does not signify the equal value of all manifestations of intelligence, but the self-equality of intelligence in all its manifestations' (Rancière, 2009, p 10).

humans have equal intelligences seems to me, moreover, a rather bleak statement. Yet, it also confirms that the cause and effect presupposition was not the cause of upheaval from the start, but more of a poorly stated premise that could be used to seal shut the artist-work-spectator machine. The underlying tension that remains untouched is twofold: firstly, an analysis of precisely this triad-like arrangement, once the spell of a direct relationship between artist and spectator is broken, and, secondly, the role that a weak (non totalitarian) sense of community will play under this particular situation.

Briefly put, the tension arises as one holds on to either an absolute sense of community, or to an ideal understanding of direct causation as being the sole principles through which one explains and judges aesthetic effects. If one judges an artwork to be relevant inasmuch as the spectator's *sensus communis* is transformed by the artist, then all forms of art that are not able to do so would be safely dismissed as politically irrelevant. If, additionally, *sensus communis* is no longer a universally shared set of principles, then the whole issue of social awareness must also be de-scaled, so as to trace its effects on a different level, which would allow artworks to be judged accordingly.

If the effects of a work of art cannot be calculated according to a model of causation, where political forces would be vectors to be added up, then the three-part machine (artist-artwork-spectator) needs be reconfigured, because as it stands, it still assumes too much about the determinant objects and about the agents that could procure political change⁷⁴. It is untenable to hold that the spectator would confront the artwork as a blank slate only to be affected by the artist's political provisions. Yet, it is equally untenable to say that the spectator would always and irremediably overlook those same intentions. It is this unstable context that causes the theme about community to constantly return, and it is the presupposition of an all encompassing sense of community that makes the imposition of political agendas the only—analytically viable—way to study the problem, without ever resolving it, because one continuously

⁷⁴ My argument wishes to state only that the dashes between artist-artwork-spectator may actually contain a whole myriad of machines that have been overlooked entirely—rhizomatization.

needs to fall back on this sense of community, for a communicational space to open between artists and spectators.

The issue would quickly become, not only one of explaining an odd process of identification through a communicational space, but also one of explaining the mode of presentation that artworks in general must follow, as objects which would miraculously create a one-way communicational bond, whose final purpose would actually be to empower its spectator. In Lyotard, for instance, this is precisely how the problem of communication via aesthetic experience should be understood: It is the modern gesture of being a master of objects (and of one's own productive forces); that which has delineated aesthetic experience as a necessarily communicational bond, and also that which forces the spectator to become active; active engagement would be the only feasible way to define the propriety of such experience (Lyotard, 1991, p 117).

Lyotard proposes, instead, to abandon the will of wanting the work to communicate, to be a messenger of something so as to arrive at a different understanding of aesthetic experience entirely, one, which would also remain free from being determined by the active/passive opposition, in line with Rancière's hopes.

This possibility as *jouissance* and obligatory belonging to an immediate community is repressed nowadays in the general problematic of communication, and is even taken as shameful. But to take action in the direction of this activity which is so sought-after is only to react, to repeat, at best to conform feverishly to a game that is already given or installed. Passibility, in contrast, has to do with an immediate community of feeling demanded across the singular aesthetic feeling, and what is lost is more than simple capacity, it is propriety. (Lyotard, 1991, p 117)

And thus, 'The question of unanimity of feeling bears not on what is presented or on the forms of presentation, but on the modality of reception, as demand for unanimity' (Lyotard, 1991, p 117). My

contention with Lyotard is the Kantian transcendental air that it brings along with it. It can be spotted with relative ease when, for example, he argues that passibility ‘is an a priori condition even if it is never marked in a perceptible way in the psycho-social process’ (Lyotard, 1991, p 118). In addition, the passibility condition would be the necessary (and sufficient?) condition for the sublime, a desire for what one lacks, to take hold of aesthetic experience:

In Kant, passibility does not disappear with the sublime but becomes a passibility to lack. It is precisely the beautiful forms with their destination, our own destiny, which are missing, and the sublime includes this sort of pain due to the finitude of ‘flesh’, this ontological melancholy.
(Lyotard, 1991, p 118)

The active/passive opposition is surely rendered obsolete, and the disappearance of communicability undoubtedly serves the purpose of avoiding all talk regarding *sensus communis*. The appeal to the unrepresentable, furthermore, would even return to aesthetic experience its autonomous characters, in the sense that has now truly escaped from societal grasp:

The subject is promised the possession of a new world by this figure that he cannot possess in any way. The goddess [referring to the Juno Ludovisi] and the spectator, the free play and the free appearance, are caught up together in a specific sensorium, cancelling the oppositions of activity and passivity, will and resistance. The “autonomy of art” and the promise of politics are not counterposed. The autonomy is the autonomy of the experience, not of the work of art. In other words, the artwork participates in the sensorium of autonomy inasmuch as it is not a work of art. (Rancière, 2010, p 117)

Rancière relates aesthetic experience with autonomy by relating the inability to master the experience (by way of identity, of reason) with a sense of freedom. The viewer frees herself from reason—from the grasp of representation. This means, in turn, that the kind of autonomy that Rancière refers to here is the

autonomy from reason, where this would imply that what is autonomous for Rancière is the experience itself, but not the work of the artist (Rancière, 2010, p 117). This would naturally seem to disqualify all Intermedial and Relational Art, for it could be difficult to believe that commonly used objects and technologies would be able to deliver such an autonomous experience.

The point, to restate is that, the sublime experience as a sensible, and not as a reasoned form of experience, would confirm Rancière's point on the autonomous and emancipatory character of such experience. This autonomous experience, if one wants to keep as open a perspective as possible, can be either an experience of the unrepresentable sublime, in the best of cases, or simply a subjectivized sensation in the worst⁷⁵. Whatever route taken one still leaves unanswered the question of the status of the work, that is, the question regarding its role beyond being a medium of relative transparency versus a necessarily obscure untranslatable assemblage. Moreover, it remains relevant to proceed with an analysis that allows us to fully understand the place occupied by Relational and Intermedial artistic work in terms of the relationships that it implies as a sphere of production; the objects such an activity mobilizes and gathers, as well as the subjectivities involved and the relationships at stake when creating artwork, delivers an autonomous experience. It is only when these questions are addressed that artworks today can be said to be properly grasped in their full scope.

⁷⁵ In Deleuze and Guattari one can also see that the new percepts and affects are independent of a linguistic appropriation of the aesthetic. The new sensation, one must bear in mind, is not exhausted for them in the material conditions of the work, which means that it is not exhausted by the particular sense data perceived by the spectator. For this reason, the new sensation in Deleuze can have effects that surpass the *shock* itself. And Zepke too, as is shown above, sees in it the possibility to emancipate the institutionalized body.

Communication, dissensus, and the political scope of contemporary art

Beyond Rancière: Aesthetics and Politics (of the) in-between

The main contention with Rancière's perspective on political art today, lies within the notions of narrator and interpreter themselves. The use of both concepts, which carry from the start an oppositional underpinning, does not in the end clarify matters. Seeing the artist and the spectator as separate worlds throws the conversation into an obscure metaphysics of aesthetic experience that would have to articulate both communication and sensation, and do so without recourse to activity or passivity. In addition, the artist-work-spectator machine seems to be set aside and the conversation reduced to hermeneutics without proper warning. With it, the role of the artwork disappears completely from aesthetic experience; which has already ceased to be an event that mobilizes anything besides two subjectivities that touch upon each other in a non-qualified but very real fashion.

Rancière's reflection, I must admit, is far from sterile. The problem of a politically significant art, which does not return to any form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is surely outlined in his thought. The main problems that one must face when theorizing about an aesthetics that is not appealing to a totalizing unity, but that is instead, affirmative of disunity, present an immediate challenge to all political thought that continues to make calls for communities and collectives in an ontologically and rhetorically universal manner, either in the present or in the future to come.

The problems delineated by Rancière, in short, deal primarily, and this is my point, with the status of in-between that any sense of community today must preserve. A dissensual community will have to take theoretical distance from totalizing notions of communitarian bonds. This means, and this is how my argument will develop, that for Intermedial and Relational Art to be politically relevant their practice and deployment must be able to ensure that three fundamental conditions are met:

1) Artists and spectators are not divided worlds, but should instead be seen as an intersecting set of spheres, and there is no sphere that can remain isolated; one is never in a sphere but rather in-between several spheres. There are myriads of intersections and communitarian bonds must be established at a series of levels (varying in geographical space, political presuppositions, and accepted mechanisms for cohesion and resistance). Additionally, the local cannot counter pose the global in their aesthetic proposals, for they must insist that there are only relations between localities, and a locality is always a community, never an individual.

2) There must be a pragmatic perspective that relates the present and the future (being apart and being together)⁷⁶. Social criticism is, no doubt, a task of aesthetic experience that must remain positive; it cannot be reduced to a point blank resistance against all institutional forms, or to subjectivized sensations. One must keep in mind that, social critique in Intermedial and Relational Art comes embedded within a sensation-driven experience that encompasses reflection but is not explained by it. Artworks will carry political relevance, therefore, not because they incite an abstract reflection with regard to a totalized political body (a sort of Utopian appeal), but because they carry (as artworks) the power to affect their viewers, to deliver an alternative pathway—there are no deterritorializations without reterritorializations.

The point is simple: the analytical separation between the human and the non-human, the social and the natural—within aesthetic experience, taken as an empirical whole—is not the basis of a successful explanation, because there is no point in understanding the political relevance of art, while at the same time assuming that artworks remain inert channels between the real social agents (artists and spectators).

⁷⁶ ‘The paradoxical relationship between the “apart” and the “together” is also a paradoxical relationship between the present and the future. The artwork is the people to come and it is a monument to its expectation, a monument to its absence. The artistic “dissensual community” has a dual body. It is a combination of means for producing an effect out of itself: creating a new community between human beings, a new political people. The tension of “being apart” and “being together” is bound up with another tension between two statuses of artistic practice: as a means for producing an effect and as the reality of that effect. To the extent that it is a dissensual community, an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection’ (Rancière, 2009, p 59).

3) There is a sense of in-between that relates to the mediated social reality that is populated by both artist and spectator, which is illustrative of the myriad of intersections that they share from the start. When thinking about contemporary artworks, a concrete mediatization is exemplified by the uses given to new media, and to the arrangements between new and traditional forms of media, which are employed by relational and Intermedial artists, but also by spectators alike in their daily lives. In both cases, artist and spectator, there is a question of subjectivity; of the type and the mode of deployment behind all subjectivity. The importance of mediatized deployments of subjectivity—subjectivity that is theorized as occurring in-between—amounts to the production of differences that does not mirror the way in which machines of production (the computers, the Internet, the robots, etc.) have been, or can still be, appropriated by the forces of resistance (the artists), but rather, asserts that these machines no longer carry a univocal function; there is no proper or improper use of media, no traditional versus revolutionary uses, but only different perspectives, and thus, open possibilities.

Given these final assertions, one arrives at a reappraisal of Rancière's words:

But it is possible to escape both positions by constructing the work as the very tension between the apart and the together. This is true of works that try to explore the tension between the two terms, either by questioning the ways in which the community is tentatively produced or by exploring the potential of community entailed in separation itself. (Rancière, 2009, p 78)

The next section will thus take on the problematic oppositions that Rancière has opened up, but will do so from a different perspective. If the current section has allowed for a critical exploration of Rancière's thought to be undertaken, it remains the case that such critical reading does not provide in and of itself a positive proposal regarding the issues that it has highlighted: dissensus/sensus communis, aesthetic experience as a politically relevant event, the role of emancipation and enlightenment in aesthetic, and what I have called the actor-work-spectator (AWS) machine.

I will propose, as a solution against the returning oppositions at stake (dissensus/consensus, activity/passivity, autonomy/subjection, etc.), to retain the positive lessons from the Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, while effectively delineating with the limitations of that same oppositional thought that supports them. I will argue that the best way to this is by further exploring the implications and advantages behind the concept of the Intermedial. With the notion of the Intermedial properly set in place, it will be possible for the political perspective behind aesthetic experience to become a feasible proposal, that is, into one that will neither return us to modernism nor—as Rancière insists—throw us into a spiral of melancholy and pessimism.

Situating the Intermedial: a relational reflection on agency and community

The ontology of the dissensual is actually a fictional ontology, a play of “aesthetic ideas”. The set of relations that constitutes the work operates as if it had a different ontological texture from the sensations that make up the ontological experience. But there is neither a sensory difference nor an ontological difference. The aesthetic work takes the place of—is a substitute for—the work that realizes the law of the medium (according to Greenberg’s notion) or the law of pure sensation (according to Deleuze’s view). (Rancière, 2009, pp. 67, 68)

I begin with Rancière, for after his insistence on the subject of community, he now urges us to take the issue of dissensus a step back; to rethink what an analysis of dissensus sets out to accomplish. The notion of dissensus hints towards an atomized state of affairs. One that tells of individuals, who have no allegiance to a community, no interests in political projects, and no standing as part of any cohesive political body. The question begged, after the lengthy discussion on Rancière, seems to be: does arguing that dissensus is a fictional ontology, not amount to arguing that (modern) *sensus communis* cannot be rekindled; that it cannot be transformed into anything that would be relevant in our current times?

I believe Rancière's answer is a firm 'No!' Yet such a negative answer must be further analyzed. The issue of dissensus does not require us to put forward a negative ontology. The work of art, Rancière does concede, proposes a play of aesthetic ideas, which, however, that is his first contention, would fool us into believing that the disunity of the materials can actually be transformed into an ontological shift that would maintain, rather than annul the initial difference experienced. I have argued that the disunity proper to Intermedial Art will prompt spectators to suspend belief sensorially, by means of precepts and affects. The spectator, Rancière would say on the contrary, may experience the materials in a different manner, in a way that would amount to a free play of ideas, but still the very experience of the work would not go beyond shallow or unreflective sensorial stimuli.

It is truly surprising how Rancière's dismissal, of the possibility of an ontology that could recognize difference in a radical manner, leads him to assert that the Deleuzian approach to aesthetic experience would in the end do little more than to throw us into a sensationalism of sorts. The former's talk about an artwork that operates as if it had a different ontological texture cannot but bring to mind Platonic concerns about mimicry, about the image and the reality, about the original and the copy.

The Intermedial aesthetic experience, furthermore, would constitute a superficial attempt to substitute the notion of medium specificity, and to understand the latter as purity (Greenberg). An exemplar of this medium specificity as purity would be the abstract paintings of the avant-gardes—from Malevich to Newman—where a clear dividing line between media was traced, and where no contamination of one medium on another became the rule; the only practical way to ensure that art remained autonomous and medium-specificity a valid aesthetic proposal.

Using Rancière's raised arguments as a point of departure, I will argue, in turn, that the ontological issue highlighted is indeed a crucial one, but one that can be solved through the introduction of the Intermedial as a concept informed by a relational approach. This approach, I will argue moreover, follows from my

previous exploration on Deleuzian thought, as well as that of Intermedial Aesthetics, where I discussed the use of the concept in Oosterling, and its heuristic role in the understanding of aesthetic experience proposed. I will now take this discussion a step further by addressing the ontological concerns in a more explicit manner.

There is a fictional ontology, argues Rancière. The queer label appears to collapse under its own weight, given the casual way in which it takes us back to metaphysical issues already discussed extensively by Derrida among others⁷⁷. If, in fact, Intermedial Art puts forward an experience that is not a ‘real’ aesthetic experience, because it is embedded in a fictional ontology, then what we face primarily is nothing but a distinction without a difference, where the supposed differences gathered by the artwork were simply never there in the first place, never retained as differences. At least, such apparent differences must be handled with care, which means they are not to be treated as realities, at least, in the ontological sense of the term. Following Rancière here would mean asserting that the artwork is actually no assemblage proper, that there is no multiplicity of elements being gathered, no new percepts and affects and no deterritorialization-reterritorialization continuum. In other words, Intermedial artworks are mere puzzles that can be reduced to the sum of their constituent parts⁷⁸. Rancière’s critical position on Intermedial Art is, in a word, entirely positivistic; the experience can be explained off by a sensationalism of sorts and the artwork as an assemblage has no more unity than the one found in a bar salad. The argument’s strange twist, nonetheless, towards a realism of sorts—that would serve as background for the fictional/authentic ontology issues—I cannot help but think, derives primarily from his dislike of dissensus as denotative of a community, and as a state of affairs that is accepted rather than fought against by those he labelled as postmodern artists.

⁷⁷ Derrida’s *Dissemination* is perhaps exemplary in its explicit mention of Platonic philosophy as a starting point for the metaphysical discussion about copy versus original, about imitation and imagery, presence and absence.

⁷⁸ I began this research by discussing why such approach to aesthetic experience does no justice to the artwork, which is why I will refrain from returning to the analysis of aesthetic experience as being beyond a hermeneutic apprehension of the whole based on coherence and cohesion (Gadamer and Heidegger). I will argue here about the importance of the notion of the Intermedial for the relational ontology that is proposed in this analysis.

I have argued thus far that aesthetic experience delivers an experience that combines both reflection and sensation. This implication means, in turn, that reflection and sensation—ideas and appearance in the Platonic sense—do not constitute a fundamental opposition. The use of the terms at this point must be understood as nothing but the analytical appropriation of an event, which is essentially characterized by its multiplicity. The artwork as an assemblage and the community as a dissensual community are both relational entities, inasmuch as their footing in reality derives from the relations they propose⁷⁹. Medium specificity is, therefore, not intended to imply a return to Greenberg's perspective on purity in artistic practice. Medium specificity is better seen as accentuating the role of the medium in a way that brings us back to McLuhan rather than to Kandinsky.

My contention is that neither aesthetic experience nor the role of the medium can be properly grasped by oppositional thought. Agency, by the same token, persists as a contested element in aesthetic experience, as long as it remains trapped within an oppositional divide that cannot do away with the ensuing tension, product of the misguided approach that seems to uphold the veracity of the oppositional series, brought up from the very beginning of the critique.

Rancière does not endorse the idea of medium specificity, because the autonomy that this perspective endorses is to him, apolitical in nature—it is about securing the place of art in an outside, in a truly separate and autonomous sphere of production. It is about saving art from the vicissitudes of life.

Rancière's interest in autonomy is the one that derives from his master-pupil paradox, where securing the role of agency in both artists and spectators is the goal pursued. He relates, thus, aesthetic experience with autonomy, when he refers to the inability of the spectator to master the experience (by way of identity politics and rational interpretation). In this sense the question of autonomy at stake is reminiscent of a modern appreciation, where mastery over the experience would be an expression of autonomy as freedom, and of emancipation with respect to the political status quo. This particular

⁷⁹ I will return to this point in the next section when dealing with Latour's conceptual framework of alliances and networks etc.

reading would, furthermore, justify a Marxist approach to aesthetic experience (and to artistic intention), where the spectator's experience would be one of realization (we realize that we have been duped, that we are alienated and uncritical and so forth) and of emancipation (by distancing ourselves from that common sense view of reality, we become effectively ready to produce a new one). A Marxist reading requires that the artist be the first one to gain emancipation—which she reaches given the non-capitalist nature of her workshop and the absence of the division of labour in her art practice —and thus this is the only feasible way in which Marxism is able to ensure that art remains autonomous and also politically relevant.

The role of reason as an instrument for social enlightenment, I have shown, is one of modernism's tropes that Rancière criticizes, throwing us, instead, to locate autonomy within an aesthetic experience, beyond the master-pupil paradox. In the latter, autonomy appears as the way in which the spectator frees herself from reason—from the grasp of representation, including here, the reason (teleological in nature) behind any form of identity politics. In a sense, autonomy is granted from the start to the spectator, which is something that distances Rancière from the traditional Marxist perspective. The route he takes, therefore, explains the former's insistence that what is autonomous—from the perspective of the spectator—must be the experience itself, but not the work of the artist (Rancière, 2010, p 117). The autonomous experience, moreover, would not rely on the nature of the artwork, but on the autonomy of the spectator's thought. I don't believe this approach resolves the issue of agency, in particular when viewed against the quote that opened this section, where the type or nature of artwork seemed anything but superfluous. So, if Rancière's goal is to ensure that art remains politically relevant, that is, able to move people into political action by way of securing the autonomy of thought of all the actors involved in aesthetic experience, then he would have no other choice but to be clear by distancing himself from presupposing a totalizing notion of capitalism. To state it differently, if the political role of art is reduced to moving people into joining in the demise of capitalism, the whole endeavour of moving away from

modernism is doomed to fail from the start. I have already discussed the issue of totalizing capitalism, when discussing Morton, as well as in the previous section (on Rancière's AWS machine), so I will avoid an unnecessary repetition here. At this point my interest is the way in which subjectivity continues to be a contentious issue, if we want to take dissensus seriously. In other words, if we want to avoid theorizing agency as an obstacle against true communities (and true ontology), and instead, take it as an open possibility for the construction of community and ontology, then there is still much to say about the role and mode of agency that is at stake in Intermedial Aesthetics.

I turn once more towards Deleuze & Guattari, in order to tackle Rancière's worries about agency and autonomy and to outline the way in which subjectivity can coherently couple with the Intermedial perspective proposed. I will do so with the aid of the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of disjunctive synthesis (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 75). I must add that the issue of agency in modernity (where agency and subjectivity are interchangeable concepts when discussing autonomy) is, on the contrary, an issue to be grasped using a different but close notion: the conjunctive synthesis (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 84).

Let me explain: Deleuze & Guattari tell us that Oedipus—the signifier—informs us as desiring bodies in a totalizing manner, in the sense that not following the coordinates daddy-mummy-me would imply falling into the horror of the undifferentiated—of nothingness, of the horror of lacking an identity, with all the darkness entailed (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 78). The main insight is—and they stress this point—that Oedipus creates both the differentiations as well as the terrifying undifferentiated with which it threatens us (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 78). The issue is not simply one of following or rejecting the coordinates proposed, but in realizing that the way in which the setting of these coordinates operates, already requires a threat to be in place. Desire as lack is criticized; desire as connective abundance is affirmed. Without the threat of the negative—you will not ...—identities themselves would be ineffective. We choose to become a coordinate within the daddy-mummy-me triangle—the nuclear

family—because the limitations and the repression implied in these are still preferable to the horror of being literally a castaway, a pariah of society.

I believe that something not entirely dissimilar is the case with the AWS machine that Rancière has built for us. He may allow us to redefine the coordinates at stake, but we must do so always under a great threat: the melancholy and pessimism of postmodernism or the fascist politics of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a proposal that frames the reach and type of relationship that we as spectators have with the artwork is a gesture that duplicates this same oedipal operation of subtle but effective repression: it forces upon us a *sensus communis* (a totalizing politico-cultural body) that erases difference (dissensus), but does it primarily because it presents this gesture of erasure as the only feasible option; it presents it within the only plausible coordinates for art to remain politically relevant (for spectators to be moved towards political action), while at the same time presenting dissensus as a nightmarish scenario, where art becomes meaningless and where political ideas go to die.

Political dissensus and ‘Dissensual community’, should lead us, on the contrary, towards a critical appraisal of the inside/outside perspective still present in the AWS triad and, by the same token, towards Deleuze & Guattari’s notion of the disjunctive synthesis, where disjoined terms are affirmed side-by-side: either, ...or, ...or, ...or, as an affirmation of connectivity rather than an exclusively either/or disjunction being upheld (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 76).

Difference in Intermedial and Relational practices is real not fictional. It is not a presupposition but a state of affairs—one which Rancière himself requires, in order for his pupils to be as autonomous and enlightened, as their master. Subjectivity must, therefore, be explained as an emerging or procedural event that is produced through a play of differences. If one remains stuck within the coordinates proposed, then everything that follows in this text cannot but appear as the description of that horrific

nothingness of the undefined. Choosing instead to abandon those coordinates—that is the crux of my argument—will prove to be a much more fruitful endeavour.

Returning to the disjunctive synthesis, one must note a subtle, but still important effect. Subjectivity is not produced through the disjunctive syntheses, which is a process of recording and distributing. It is difference itself that is recorded or recoded as possible coordinates of a particular subjectivity. To state it differently, subjectivity is always produced; it comes as the effect of a process of production, which in Deleuze & Guattari is an effect that is explained by what they call a conjunctive synthesis, where two terms are joined and presented in the form of ‘X and Y’; through this synthesis the subject is produced (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 17): in retrospect the subject says ‘Ah, that’s me’. The key to this self-reflection lies not in recognizing the place of subjectivity beyond modern thought, but in being able to escape delirium, which ensues when the conjunctive synthesis is informed by a particular metaphysical orientation (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 88). Deleuze & Guattari use the example of king and the kingdom as a way to illustrate this delirium. The king has an effective ability to direct and manage everything that corresponds to his kingdom, yet this fact does not amount to a proof about the metaphysical character of the coordinates he inhabits (that of being the King). It is becoming convinced about the central aspect of the king as the cause (as the true and only agency in this conjunctive synthesis) that will lead us to delirium. Avoid falling prey to delirium consists in refraining from placing a centre under which subjectivity, as a set of corresponding attributes, would be solidified as a structurally rigid entity that binds agency to humans alone and transforms all other entities into mere effects. In a word, delirium is conducive to an exclusively anthropocentric view of agency.

One must, moreover, not confuse the production of subjectivity—the conditions of possibility under which subjectivity emerges as produced and productive—and the conceptualization of subjectivity as a coherent whole that appears as if carrying certain attributes, and as travelling towards a certain destination—as being infused with a certain teleology and, in a Marxist sense, with an ideology. It is the

destination that is primarily at stake in the question about the political relevance of Intermedial Art. It is precisely the way in which artists propose a community out of dissensus that preoccupies Rancière.

Relationalism and the Intermedial

I have argued that, throughout Rancière's text, there is a constant tension arising from the series of problematic oppositions that frame aesthetic experience, *sensus communis* and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: contact/distance, passivity/activity, reflection/sensation, presence/absence, and purity/impurity. The ensuing tension in Rancière's criticism is, moreover, not dissimilar to the tension that I said earlier could be equally highlighted in Morton's dichotomic approach to *ambiance*. In a word, I argue that it is Rancière's conceptualization of aesthetics, more than anything else, what puts him between a rock and a hard place—it limits his ability to formulate the political relevance of contemporary art without falling back on the modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

I have shown, in the previous section that my main concern was not so much focused on denying or criticizing the concrete issues raised through Rancière's criticism, but rather on his refusal to adopt any form of conceptualization along lines that would lean towards the Intermedial. I maintain that this apprehension—as was the case in Morton—is for the most part unjustified, or at least unnecessary from Deleuze & Guattari's point of view on aesthetic experience. Instead of presenting a feasible alternative, Rancière's thought preoccupies itself incessantly with the tension described; to a point in which that same tension ends up stifling, rather than developing the conversation about dissensus at the base of a political community and the consequences of artistic practices that are enmeshed within capitalist tools and relations of production.

I have argued too, that the tension is not casual, but to a degree dependent on a thinking art and aesthetic experience along oppositional divides or dichotomies. The oppositions proposed, moreover, can be

useful inasmuch as the tension raised does help to illustrate just how problematic any assertion of art's political stake on social life can be. Beyond this point, however, Rancière's own method of constant deconstruction (and the same was true of Morton) cannot stand on the shoulders of a series of giant oppositions that are taken as fundamental, at the same time as maintaining a critical distance from them.

Unravelling this issue led me towards a reflection about the ontological considerations that must be put forward, in order to grasp what is truly at stake with aesthetic experience within the perspective of Intermedial and Relational proposals. I have insisted on the need to recognize the notion of the Intermedial as a fundamental stepping-stone, where, in addition, an ontological guise towards Relationalism becomes inevitable. I have gone this far, because I have stated, throughout my exploration of aesthetic experience and my reflection on dissensus, that everything starts with Intermediality—with the crossbreeding of media⁸⁰. I began my exploration of aesthetic experience with the Derridean notion of the remainder as an essential aspect that dissolves the hermeneutical approach to artworks, by showing its irremediably and for the most part, unjustified reductive perspective. When I say now that everything begins with the intermediary, I am assuming a much more fundamental position in which interpretation itself would begin always by situating itself in-between a set of relationships—interpretation would always ensue as the result of these relationships, rather than despite them. The position I am advocating for now hints at the fundamental aspect that relations have in determining subjectivity, where the notion of agency would then amount to the transformative ability that acting as an intermediary presupposes.

I am aware that the vocabulary begins to get messy at this point, given that a suitable framework for the type of relationalism that I am proposing will take us beyond Deleuze & Guattari—I will address this issue in a more consistent manner in the next section, when I introduce Latour's conceptual framework and his ANT, owing to the Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective. I cannot leave, just yet, the issue of

⁸⁰ This Intermediality can be, in turn, understood as the non-rational element of intermediation (Derrida, in Oosterling 2005, p 84).

aesthetic experience (of how it functions) as simply an issue of understanding the role of intermediaries (as agents) and moving on. The question of aesthetic experience is not only an issue of criticizing the limitations of dichotomic thought, but also one of properly qualifying the role that the medium and the Intermedial have in successfully enabling us to leave oppositional thought behind.

If oppositions continued to be useful for my own developed critique, their use was limited to a purely strategic need as it is in the work of Deleuze. This strategic use of oppositions must now be displaced and a more fundamental plane must be disclosed on which a radical mediatization allows for the problems of agency; the position of agency shifts at the moment in which Relationalism levels the playing field of agency—as the ability to produce transformation—for all entities (humans and non-humans) throughout the social field.

Remember for a moment, the way in which oppositional thought began to show its cracks, as the remainder in aesthetic experience⁸¹ came to the surface. The problematic nature of the remainder pushed us to either dismiss it (subjective interpretation and positivism) or to transform it into a surplus of meaning, into a form of excess that surpasses conceptualization. The latter was the pathway that I have followed, developing, in turn, a Derridean entrance to a Deleuzian understanding of aesthetic experience. This same pathway, one must bear in mind, opened too, towards a second reading, where understanding the surplus entailed a rekindling of the sublime experience in Lyotard as well as in Zepke, whose Deleuzian interpretation, I argued, came equally close to the contentious sublime.

I would argue, furthermore, that the autonomous experience that Rancière wants to endorse becomes a feasible approach to aesthetic experience by falling back on the sublime; the sublime experience is able to criticize modernity and is able to annul the direction of authority implied in the relation between artist and spectator. The sublime experience in Lyotard, to Rancière's liking, would also dismiss Intermedial and Relational Art due to their complicity with capitalist production.

⁸¹ See Part 1 *Aesthetic Experience and Interpretation* (pages 38–44).

The sublime experience of art, however, remains ambivalent with respect to the status of agency in the work of art: is the spectator passive or is she active? The status of the artwork—as an intermediary—remains unproblematic in Lyotard and Rancière. The main reason for this, I will argue, is that they continue to grant the ‘special status’ of agency to humans alone—making of non-humans fundamentally passive tools—they have a purely instrumental take on the technological aspects of an artwork. This is for me an untenable position that simply chooses to pass over the web of relations (as nodes in networks we are all intermediaries) that is not only characteristic of current capitalism, but also, and most importantly, of Intermedial and Relational Art practices.

If one were to choose only one lesson to keep from Intermedial Art, it would be precisely this one: given the complexity of capitalist relationships today—its socio-cultural interactions and politico-economic transactions—where the role that technology plays cannot be overlooked, as a result of which, agency, as an attribute exclusively granted to humans alone, must be reconsidered. I will elaborate on the relationship between the media, machines and men, i.e. between intermediary and agency in greater detail in the following section, when I introduce Actor Network Theory.

Coming back to the topic of the remainder, of the surplus or excess, it is important to emphasize that there is a subtle, but important difference, between the excess of discursivity in Oosterling, with respect to the one mentioned by Lyotard. In the latter, the awareness that comes as a result of the sublime experience, where the subject creates an aesthetic idea, i.e. an image without a concept, falls back into a world of meaning. Thus the opposition between meaning and non-meaning continues to inform the purpose or objective of the experience at stake. The sublime in Lyotard functions against a background of meaning and non-meaning that poses it (the sublime experience) as an undefined, yet all-powerful and impacting experience that shakes the spectator⁸². It shakes the spectator by facing her with the inability to think or to distil meaning and non-meaning from a sublime experience, while, at the same

⁸² This is something of a reversal of the oedipal triangle, in the sense that the undefined is no longer presented as terror, but as sublime—as in the final instance, beyond the primary shock and awe, carrying a positive connotation.

time, resisting the reduction of the experience to sensation alone or not at all. In Oosterling, it is the contrary. The excess of discursivity problematized, is actually intended to fall back on a sens(a)ble practice, not dissimilar to what I have argued is the deterritorialization-territorialization process in aesthetic experience in line with Deleuzian thought. This sensitizing becoming, demands a series of concepts that are not present in the sublime: percepts and affects (sensation), the continuous nature of becoming, and the crossbreeding concepts as open assemblages that make the art practice reflective. It is against this backdrop that, I believe, Oosterling formulates his concept of Radical Mediocrity (RM) as the non-reflective application of all sorts of media by their users. Analytically speaking, RM is not yet an affirmative approach to our present state of being. For this, Oosterling will later introduce the notion of ‘inter-esse’, i.e. being in-between as an ontology of relations. To properly grasp this, a few words on Oosterling’s approach are in order.

Mediatized reality becomes a radical proposition with RM. The concept of RM is informed by the foundational role of the in-between, on the one hand, and by the materialistic, i.e. mediamatic approach to relations, where the key is recognize that assemblages are always at work (they function); never stifling in their movement, never entirely solidified—‘the middle is where things speed up’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p 21). From an ontological perspective, says Oosterling, positions—just as subjects—are the results of the crossbreeding of relational and provisional forces involved in power relations (Oosterling, 1999b, p 43).

If everything starts with the in-between then this requires for the role of agency to be understood and situated as equally ensuing in-between. RM refers to the way in which humans construct their identity in relating via media, always doing so from an embedded position, from a position of immanence, i.e. a web of relations prior to any rationalization—and the in-between pre-exists our conceptualization of any position (Oosterling, 1999b, p 44). Humans, therefore, find themselves always in-between, that is, always part of a web of relationships that defines them, that gives them an identity of sorts and a role

within the social field. Oosterling's RM is both a denotative concept as well as a performative concept: it describes a state of affairs, and also a process by which subjectivity is constructed, although in a passive, non-critical, non-creative manner. RM's moral undertone (to being mediocre) is not incidental, but plays an important part in Oosterling's use of the term and in his appeal to a reflective appropriation of the medium. Mediocrity is a psycho—technological concept that indicates exactly what it says: to be ruled by media.

The engagement he asks for, however, cannot be reduced to a gesture of control, of gaining some sort of mastery over our relations, which would be a choice that disregards Deleuze & Guattari's warning about delirium. Oosterling's appeal I argue is instead better grasped as one of reflective and sens(a)ble engagement, where passivity can be taken as a sign of a lack of medium specific and Intermedial reflectivity (as mediocrity in an ideological sense: not being conscious of what determines your consciousness). Oosterling hints to the particularities of the sort of reflection he envisions, when saying that Intermedial reflectivity is 'An embodied interactive reflection that is triggered by the interactions between media' (Oosterling, 1999b, pp 41, 42)⁸³. 'Embodied' can point towards the urge to think from within and with your medium, like for instance painters or dancers do.

With RM, the Intermedial switches gear towards outlining the role of agency and the constitution of subjectivity, on the one hand, as well as towards shedding some light on the political character of aesthetic experience. One must bear in mind at this point that there is a procedural aspect to the self-reflective use of the media that distinguishes it from understanding reflection as conducive to an outsider's perspective. Reflective media use is an equally relational process. This means that reflection does not hint towards enlightenment via a position of disengagement from our relations: a sort of outside perspective or blank slate from which to reconfigure our relations. A reflective appropriation of the medium will therefore demand a reconfiguration of our relationships from the inside, from a position of

⁸³ He presents this statement, however, in the form of a question, while I believe phrasing it as a statement is more consistent with the implications behind his notion of RM.

immanence. Such a process of reconfiguration cannot but require a negotiation of sorts, a giving up, by the same token, of a modern informed desire⁸⁴. This aspect of negotiation is without a doubt already political, inasmuch as it asks for concessions and exchanges to be made, in order for any such reconfiguration to be feasible. Any reconfiguration is, by implication, pragmatic too, for concessions and exchanges can only be made with respect to a state of affairs and to a series of goals that are attainable—a blank slate perspective such as a utopia is out of the question for Relationalism and Deleuze & Guattari.

Before diving into the way in which such negotiations should guide the reflection on how to construct a political community, there is still a prior concern that must be addressed: the place of agency within RM and how Intermedial aesthetics and Intermedial reflection as processes of material production are conducive to the constitution of subjectivity.

Radical mediocrity, micropolitics and the development of the Intermedial

How and why do I argue along with Oosterling that we find ourselves embedded in a state of affairs that is also a state of mind—in Cartesian sense both *res extensa* and *res cogitans*—called Radical Mediocrity? Why must the Intermedial become a heuristic tool, without which a relational ontology would be unable to understand the role of the medium, the role of an omnipresent mediatisation of reality? The role of the Intermedial as an explanatory tool is not casual. It is not casual but product of a shift in human (and non-human) relationships that the world – or better: globe – has witnessed over the

⁸⁴ I will note in passing that when desire is conceptualized as a lack, which can only be addressed by means of an appropriation leading to satisfaction, there is an immediate clash with the Relationalism I am putting forward. I would also, follow the equally machinic conception of desire present in Deleuze & Guattari, who argue there are three errors that show how modern thought understands desire: law, lack, and signifier (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 111). They would agree, for instance, with Lacan in that ‘desire does not really have an object; it cannot be said to be for something’ (Luepnitz, 2003, p 224). The issue of desire could lead indeed to a much broader digression, it suffices to restate that ‘desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 26).

past five decades. McLuhan's 'The medium is the message', a play of words characteristic of our experience as members of a fragmented community made out of exchanges (socio-cultural interactions, politico-economic interactions), is today more 'real' than ever (Oosterling, 2005, p 97)—RM grants authority to McLuhan's statement and is explained by its consequences. Pervasive mediated relationships are, in parallel fashion, exemplar of the lack of any possible Outside; of the ontological weight that immanence has as the only feasible underpinning to this position of radical mediocrity.

Following McLuhan, Oosterling applies a broad definition of media. Next to the strict application as to mass and social media, he aims to gather in the definition too, transport media, artistic media, means of existence and, in short, all those technics and technologies that made modern man's life comfortable. The use of these media first triggered resistance, but gradually settled and is today so all encompassing that these media have been transformed into *dispositifs* (Foucault). Who can nowadays live without an iPhone or a car? This mediocrity is radical, because through those media modern man is rooted (Latin: radix=root) in the world. This is the micropolitical dimension of our radical mediocrity. Following in the footsteps of McLuhan is, nevertheless, not a choice made with the aim of theorizing the Intermedial as some sort of universal category (e.g. a Kantian category), through which human relationships would be informed in a uniform manner. There is no such thing as the medium in the abstract, but only specific mediatizations of relations that are pervasive, yet not by their mere presence, but by the effects that they bring upon human relationships (with other humans as well as with non-humans).

The political scope implied in the notion of radical mediocrity is, therefore, framed by the relations of production that ensue as product of this omnipresent mediatization⁸⁵. RM is, furthermore, a process and a state of affairs that cannot be situated within a universal structure of economic relations called Capitalism. In McLuhan's vein, the Intermedial nature of production processes is an occurrence that takes place in a form of capitalism that does not produce uniform but differentiated relationships

⁸⁵ Part 3 will return to the issue of how such relations of production must be grasped today, and how classical explanations along modern lines (Marxism and Liberalism) fail today in providing the necessary conceptual tools to do so.

between agents. Our mediocrity is highly productive: it creates new needs. Oosterling's words may be helpful at this point:

Though at the dawn of industrialization there may have been such a thing as primary needs, and it was the job of mass production to ease the desperation of the needy, the homeless, and the sick; today, however, with increased everyday comfort and intensified transport, communication and leisure activity, the satisfaction of primary needs has been replaced by the consumption of design. Design has become a basic need. (Oosterling, 2009, p 1)

In other words, we have come to realize media have finally become basic needs (Oosterling, 2009, p 6). This was always already a given—starting with the spear and fire—but since we lost control as a result of our autonomous manipulation of 'nature', this insight has become a *sensus communis* with ecology as its paradigm. Relationships of production cannot take place without an array of available, functional, and reliable media, which allow and incentivize every aspect of the human life to become increasingly mediated. Without the medium, the often belated weak relationships of social media are unthinkable as are too the flexible workplace of freelancers, the virtual galleries of the Google Art Project, the jogging in the desert whilst connected to an iPod, the conference calls via Skype, the almost universal availability of knowledge via Wikipedia, and so on and so forth. Mass tourism connects all these to transport media. By mentioning these concrete phenomena, my intention is not, in any case, to present the emergence of an omnipresent mediation as some sort utopia of human emancipation through media. My interest is to emphasise that everything that takes place in and for the media is understood here as an event of Intermediality, that is, as a phenomenon that must be grasped by means of a theoretical deployment that focuses on the Intermedial; and which has the structure of the Intermedial, hence, that is rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari), immanent, and relational.

Oosterling's use of the triple term mediocrity/mediacrity/medi@crity is not incidental and the issue of mediocrity is, no doubt, one that deeply concerns him. For him the play media/mediocrity is not intended to denote the two-edged sword aspect of the medium. To understand what he intends exactly with such ambivalent use of the term, one must take a look at his idea of Dasein as Design:

Authentic Dasein is an unceasing attempt to give a decisive turn to our state of thrownness [Heidegger] in the world by moving together to design a society. Dasein, then, equates to making decisions about form, in order to liberate ourselves from the arbitrariness of life. (Oosterling, 2009, p 3)

Oosterling's Heideggerian turn, towards 'Dasein' and a state of 'thrownness', is aimed at giving both a foundation and a resolution to RM. Radical Mediocrity, I believe, amounts precisely to a contemporary version of Heidegger's state of thrownness, where Dasein as Design would refer to the way in which embodiment and reflectivity enter the picture; keep in mind the role of temporality in Heidegger's concept of care, where we have past (thrownness/disposedness) future(projection/understanding), and present (fallen/fascination). And it is the inspiration of Heidegger and the political reworking of his notion of 'Inter-esse' or interest by Hannah Arendt that enabled Oosterling to propose an affirmative shift from RM towards micropolitical practices, in which Intermedial Art plays a decisive role.

The almost idiotic fascination displayed by many, through their relations to internet-based technologies—the use of software such as Instagram and the use of postproduction tools, in general, to create images that are mainly shared with friends—is illustrative of the relation between Oosterling's RM and Heidegger's discussion on thrownness and fascination. Dasein as Design appears in Oosterling's thought, therefore, as a theory of existence, where the notion of self-care and self-creation in aesthetics of existence (Foucault) would come to mind. Yet, the role of Intermediality is fundamental to Oosterling's idea of design, while missing in Foucault's appeal for self-creation.

I have argued thus far that Intermedial Aesthetics appears always as an artistic proposal that fully embraces the media at its disposal. In this way it is safe to say that Intermedial Artists choose to present their work in a way that challenges the state of RM, because they are entirely at odds with the idea of a passive and unreflective spectator, which is implied in Oosterling's notion of mediocrity. Artists are trained to handle their media creatively and self reflectively. The difficulty of the concept of RM is to be able to distinguish between RM as a state of throwness and RM as an attitude towards media—although I must ask the reader to allow me to use the word 'attitude' in a loose way, given its psychological overtones. Such attitude, therefore, towards the Intermedial could be seen as either as one of radical mediocrity, or as one of reflective and sens(a)ble engagement: Dasein as Design.

It is in the understanding of RM and subsequent Intermedial reflection proposed, that my own version of the Intermedial differs from Oosterling's approach. Such distance may appear as negligible, from Rancière's perspective, for instance, yet not so from the perspective of Relationalism as a set of ontological presuppositions on the quality and function of relations. Now, authentic 'Dasein' in Oosterling certainly keeps the door of emancipation as an Outside closely shut, but, as it turns out, opens the window towards emancipation by means of finding a particular sensibility⁸⁶. In order to see how this sensibility emerges, we must follow Dasein as Design, as a (re)solution of RM, as it is related to the aforementioned third term: 'inter-esse'.

Make no mistake, the issue of RM amounts to one of choosing between a (selfish) comfortable life and a self-reflective Intermediality (Oosterling, 2007, p 358). I have said that the first difficulty with RM was whether it denoted a state of affairs or an attitude towards that same state characterized by passivity—by the passive consumption of the medium. The ambiguity is, in fact, whether it is an ethical, rather than a political proposal, that comes through in Oosterling's appeal to authentic Dasein. To better see this, we must follow Oosterling more closely at this point.

⁸⁶ See also *Intermedial sensibility and the Gesamtkunstwerk* in Part 1.

When design orients our thoughts and actions, our creativity and freedom of choice, from the inside out, it becomes a form of relational design. Then Dasein as design becomes reflective, and our radical mediocrity turns into inter-esse. (Oosterling, 2009, p 18)

How would we be able to transform our state of mediocrity into one of inter-esse (of reflective Intermediality)? Or, perhaps more pressingly, how could such transformation take place without granting too much weight to the enlightenment aspect of Intermedial reflection? The answer can be found in what Oosterling says about the role of aesthetics:

[I]n being intermedially ‘sensational’ art subverts and criticizes. Beyond explicitly applying political concepts, Intermedial artists implicitly criticize the gaze and taste through sensations, i.e. percepts and affects’ [...] ‘life becomes transaesthetic [surpasses art due to an excess], once in designing bodies and identities the opposition between nature and technology is erased. Dasein is design, when our ‘mediocrity’ is radicalized, i.e. when our nature is fully ‘rooted’ in media and mediations. (Oosterling, 2009b, p 37)

So, RM does indeed refer to, both, a state of affairs, and to a state of mind, sort to speak. Both are perhaps even meant to be indistinguishable in Oosterling. The role of aesthetics would be then to allow spectators to take control of the media at their disposal and to Design their lives in a reflective manner—in a manner that, among other things, erases the opposition between nature and technology. It is the ethico-aesthetic perspective on existence what makes of Dasein as Design, no doubt, a new way of envisioning the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in its incapacity to totalize life: by infusing our life with an aesthetic dimension that is based on an Intermedial conception of aesthetic experience, then we allow for authentic design to come through, that is, we allow for our state of RM to become one of inter-esse, fully aware of our embedment as a node in a range of networks.

There is one specific concern in Oosterling's train of thought that I believe needs to be readdressed. Dasein as Design may indeed be rooted in a Relational Ontology, yet the role that those relationships actually have, seems to entirely revolve around the individual as a centre. In Oosterling, Dasein as Design appears, to paint a picture of a twenty-first century dandy, which uses an aesthetic perspective to project a series of attributes on an individual, but where the negotiable character behind all relations, which I mentioned above, is deemed negligible at best, or purely instrumental at worst⁸⁷. Negotiations are deemed negligible or instrumental, when reduced to being aware: how, for example, my own position—as a twenty-first century dandy—is affected by that of others. Such reduction dismisses what I believe is the most important aspect of negotiations: how any acquired position will always and fundamentally relate us to others, and will do so in a medium-specific manner. It is a non-starter for a Relational ontology to understand the issue of negotiations as nothing more than an issue of coming to terms with the fact that I cannot just always act as if 'it is my way or the highway'. It is naturally not a matter of complacency or conformism—what could be more mediocre than that—but a matter of understanding the transformations, where the first thing that must be transformed is the way I understand my interests, as those that concern me alone, and the others' as those that I can safely remain indifferent to.

If it is the case that the Intermedial reconfigures the boundaries and the relations between art, science, politics and philosophy (Oosterling, 1999, p 99), then such reconfiguration must be understood as truly radical in a strict sense—and nothing can be more radical today than a step away from our egotistical sense of self. It is this lack of emphasis on the radical transformations behind a reconfiguration of relationships that worries me, about the idea of a new *Gesamtkunstwerk* understood as the other side of the same coin. I believe that the question of dissensual community—which has been at the centre of my critical reading of Rancière—is not truly resolved or explained in Oosterling. Even further, I think the

⁸⁷ Citations to Foucault's footnotes in *The Will to Know* to Baudelaire and his own references to all those artists that made their life into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – Duchamp, Schwitters, Dali, Picasso, Warhol, Beuys, Koons – at least seem to suggest this

notion of a new *Gesamtkunstwerk* would dismiss it entirely: if, in the modern version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the role of aesthetic experience would be to ensure the constitution of a collective identity, then, it would seem to me, that the role of aesthetic experience would be to ensure the constitution of Dasein as Design—where dissensus is simply accepted at face value.

Oosterling says that *sensus communis* becomes sensible, that is, that it is not emancipation that is the final goal, but a sensitizing or becoming *sens(a)ble* (Oosterling, 1999b, pp 89, 99). Here, again, the issue of community and relations seems unimportant or at least secondary to his reflection. My own brew of the Intermedial, on the contrary, is particularly interested in emphasising the role of relations in constructing communities by means of Intermedial reflectivity, and on the need to rekindle, by the same token, the role of human agency, which as I have said, cannot be equated to subjectivity, because the latter is both produced and sustained collectively.

I believe that Radical Mediocrity cannot be taken as an overtly deterministic notion about our sad state of affairs. A reappraisal of agency is called for, in order to avoid making RM a way of referring to the ‘state of nature’ of humans today, which would, by its radical nature, put too much weight on the enlightening and emancipatory force behind Intermedial reflection, while neglecting the part that relations—as transformation—play in this same reflective gesture. RM as first nature (as our contemporary state of throwness) hints too much towards predetermination. I agree with Rancière on his criticism of artworks whose aim was to ‘reveal’ the true nature of our state affairs. Oosterling raises the suspicion of predetermination along similar lines, from the moment he decides to make of RM a play of words between mediocrity and mediocrity—the moral overtones of mediocrity cannot but remind us of the moral overtones behind notions such as alienation. More pressingly, however, is whether RM implies, following Marxist lines, that our material relationships already decide for us what the quality of our engagement is: our mediatized relationships would begin with mediocrity. In this scenario, we would all be mediocre and we would have to transform ourselves into ‘authentic Dasein’, by means of

Intermedial reflectivity. Taking this route would mean to look down on the mediocre in the same way as the master would look down on his pupils—and Rancière would tell us ‘I told you so’ and not without a smile on his face.

I believe that RM must explicitly distance itself from any hint of predetermination—even if it is only a faint one. The best way to do this is by situating agency at the very beginning of any relation. I am not turning my back on Relationalism by doing so, I must add. Agency, when it comes to RM, does not mean that humans can situate themselves in a position of outside with respect to their relations; one never chooses from a position that would be relations-free so to speak. Humans cannot choose whether they want to be relational entities or not, but they do and always choose the type of engagement pursued in any such relation. This much I will say: Intermedial reflectivity is first and foremost an active engagement, but one which consists in stopping all resistance. The first resistance, I believe, functions as a gesture of denial, of denying the weight of our relations in determining our identity as relational beings (not as mediocre at this point)⁸⁸. Furthermore, this resistance does not simply amount to the belief that underneath it all there is an ‘I’ to be found. Such resistance is not a belief but a process with a functional nature of its own: a machine that is constantly trying to understand relations as revolving around individuals (around egos), while Intermedial reflectivity would propose an entirely opposite conclusion. Intermedial reflectivity is not so much awareness of a current state of mediocrity, but instead a renunciation, a giving up of the selfish sense of self that is at odds with the relational nature of our possibilities for subjectification.

RM is a state of affairs, but Mediocrity is a choice; there is also a sense of autonomy in the spectator that is regained through Intermedial Aesthetics as well as a responsibility. The issue of agency has still much more depth, but I will leave it as is at this juncture, for I will return to it in greater detail with the introduction of the framework in Actor Network Theory in the coming section.

⁸⁸ The core of my divergence from Oosterling at this point would be that he sees in self-creation the courageous approach to Radical Mediocrity, while I see that it is in selflessness where the courage would lie.

I will now address instead the important distinction between agency and subjectivity. I argued that we always choose for the quality of our relationships, where the main product of such choosing would be, in turn, coming to terms with our possibilities for creating new forms of subjectivity. Subjectivity, therefore, cannot be equated to an individual or to an ego. Equating subjectivity with the individual leads to Deleuze & Guattari's conjunctive synthesis in the King and the kingdom. RM can, in fact, be taken as a subjectivity of this kind (a conjunctive synthesis), which is essentially selfish, autistic and reactionary—it chooses to be blind to the radical character of relationships and interprets the world according to the sovereignty of the individual qua subjectivity; it wants to make of the individual a subjectivity in the relational sense, embracing, in turn, an instrumental perspective over non-humans and humans alike.

If subjectivity is produced and sustained through relations, then wouldn't this amount to a crisis of the distinction between the local and the global, given that relations do ensue at both levels without anything but an empirical distinction between each? Such a crisis is pondered by Oosterling, when arguing that globalization is today's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where a clear tension between the local-global arises (Oosterling, 1999b, pp 34, 46). The persistence of relations and the issue of dissensus already tell us that individuals don't belong to one community but to many (Oosterling, 1999b, p 97). Yet, I would argue as well, that the change is not only about quantity, but also most importantly about quality.

When working along Intermedial lines, educators of the Intermedial argue that community lives off difference (Diprose, 2010, p 119). It is along these lines, for instance, that Oosterling states that 'Virtual communities', based on technologically mediated connections between individuals, highlight the fact that every totalization is an artifice (Oosterling, 1998, p 97). The question is, hence, not so much one of conceiving a community of dissensus, which is a question that calls upon a utopian and metaphysical answer to it. Virtual communities are dissensual communities, therefore, the issue is actually to

understand first, how they function, followed by what type of subjectivity those virtual relations are able to produce.

Take a step back. Bear in mind how multiplicity in aesthetic experience of Intermedial Art—which made the Deleuzian approach such a central aspect of my proposal—is conducive to a particular kind of reflection, which occurs in-between things (images, bodies, words). This particular reflection ensues by means of the assemblage proposed. Multiplicity characterizes the artwork's assemblage form, where its elements work jointly, but distinctively. By the same token, it is argued that multimedia creates more dynamic experiences. Video, for example, provides access to information that is difficult to describe, and it helps in the consolidation of multidimensional mental models (Risko, 1999, p 131). Video, therefore, is not simply visual or audiovisual content that is intended to replicate the audio-visual experience of face-to-face relationships. Multimedia is transformed into an Intermedial experience, at the moment in which it proposes an experience that surpasses any face-to-face interaction; it is because it proposes a surplus that multimedia can, in fact, subvert the way spectators interact with a specific medium (video, images, graphics, etc.) and propose, in turn, a new set of possibilities—an Intermedial relation with the medium specific content, where a reduction of complexity is no longer necessary.

Dissensual communities are produced and sustained in similar fashion. Social media networks, for instance, are entirely misrepresented as the replacement of traditional human interactions, when they are criticized as being impersonal and superficial. I will not contend that they can indeed be conducive to superficial and impersonal relationships, i.e. to mediocrity, because as I have said, this is still a mode of engagement that some people will prefer over Intermedial reflectivity. I will argue, however, that to understand the power of Social media we must acknowledge the specificity of the medium: the medium allows for innovative modes of cooperation to be possible as they have never been before, from crowd sourcing to peer reviews, and the neutral sharing of information from social to the planning of political protests and activism of every kind.

The issue of how a dissensual community can emerge and be sustained is a question of Intermedial reflectivity: a question of agency at work. It is also a question of pedagogy, and, of course, a question of Media Literacy⁸⁹. The purpose of such a unique type of literacy is summed up as follows:

First, there is the reflective aspect to Media Literacy, where individuals learn how to critically read and write across various symbol systems (Semali, Pailliotet, 1999, p 6). There is secondly, an operational aspect, which means that individuals are prompted to go beyond decoding a text to transforming them into agency, into positive effects (Semali, Pailliotet, 1999, p 8). There is thirdly a creational aspect, where individuals learn to create meaning by focusing on the associations at stake; intertextuality is exemplary as we follow Barthes and Derrida (Semali, Pailliotet, 1999, p 6).

The educational goal, if mediocrity is our concern, is to go from that type of engagement into Intermedial reflectivity, where Dasein as Design may be one of the paths to follow. Intermedial aesthetics does not have a pedagogical goal, at least not one that can be put in terms such as the ones mentioned above by educators of Media Literacy—no master-pupil paradox. The goals of Intermedial Art are to provide the necessary tools for spectators to reconfigure their relations, with the aim of creating new modes of subjectivity. This will mean concretely, that spectators may be able to subvert the functional direction of their relations to computer software, in turn, producing new products that will propose a different engagement for consumers.

To properly understand the way in which Intermedial reflectivity is put to work through a web of relations, a new set of conceptual tools must be brought forward to focus on the specific relation between actors and networks. In the next section I will introduce the conceptual toolset of Actor Network Theory, in order to be able to develop a more in-depth approach to the Intermedial, as well as

⁸⁹ SeeLadislaus et al. (1999) *Intermediality: the Teacher's Handbook of critical Media Literacy*.

to be able to argue in full, why Intermedial and Relational Art can be pivotal to the configuration of innovative relations of production that will have visible and substantial political consequences.

Actor Network Theory opens the A-W-S machine

Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 82)

Introduction: tracing aesthetic experience and reaffirming art's political footing

Before jumping into the deep reflection about the Intermedial I have argued that three main conditions are required for Intermedial and Relational Art to be politically relevant.

1) Spectators are never in a sphere, but rather always in-between several spheres, where myriads of intersections and communitarian bonds can be established at a series of levels (varying in geographical space, political presuppositions, and accepted mechanisms for cohesion and resistance). 2) There must be a pragmatic perspective to Intermedial Art that relates the present and the future (being apart and being together): social criticism comes, thus, embedded in a material or sensation driven experience and is not the sheer product of a reflection, which means that artworks are politically relevant, therefore, because they carry (as artworks) the power to affect their viewers, to deliver an alternative pathway—there are no deterritorializations without reterritorializations. And 3) artworks must remain exemplary in their use of new media technologies and in the combinations of new and traditional forms of media. The importance of which is that that these media, these machines, no longer carry a univocal function; there is no proper or improper use of media, no traditional versus revolutionary uses, but, only different perspectives, and thus, open possibilities.

I will now argue that artworks, which propose an aesthetic experience, and which can have political effects, must be able to encompass the aforementioned conditions, that is, they must be able to articulate various senses of in-between, which will give a dissensual political body a positive base, instead of an obstacle to be overcome. I believe that this is a task that belongs mainly to forms of Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics produced by artistic practices that have taken a clear distance from any proposals that would insist on the delineation of communitarian principles.

To a certain extent, dissensus simply means coming to terms with the decline of politics based on any form of *sensus communis*. The political body is neither an absolute whole, nor can it be identified with principles that would be themselves spoken of as absolute. Modern forms of subjectivity, informed by the subject/object divide, are no longer there to be praised (because they would preserve the uniqueness of the human self-consciousness) or critically unveiled (for they would justify existing conditions of subjection). In consequence, the dis-identification—the social shuffling—produced by artworks, will not entail the subversion of a supposedly suffocating social order, but will solely reaffirm the little understanding of subjectivities themselves that persists and often accompanies totalizing or closed notions of society.

I have shown that judging the political relevance of art by asking about its effects on a presumed social whole poses a question that is prejudiced from the start. It is a question that will force us into a narrow interpretation of concrete events of aesthetic experience. One is pushed to neglect concrete experiences entirely, because of their inability to affect the social whole, in order to pass judgement only when aesthetic experience is reconfigured as a transcendent moment, where artistic genius has functioned as the engine of societal transformation. In sum, a society that must be harmonized, under one humanity, subjectivities that must discover their true potential, and artists who are catalysts for both processes, are all pretensions that must be dealt with, and to a certain extent accepted, when attempting to formulate the issue of political art in a modern fashion. As I have tried to show with the aid of Rancière, the question

of political relevance in art cannot be reduced to a question of how artists and spectators affect or communicate with each other. The issue of dissensus moves my analysis away from a level of abstraction in which concrete objects, concrete events, and concrete humans play nothing but a supportive role within our general state of affairs.

Therefore, capturing the political effects of artworks, beyond a focus on their ability to be critical, to effectuate dis-identifications, becomes an impossible task, while maintaining a level of abstraction that wishes to arrive at generalized and simplified conclusions about the political role of aesthetics. An artistic proposal may not attempt to construct a new political community (a non-exploitative one, an emancipated one), yet this will not make it politically sterile either. It can still enable disconnected individualities to relate to each other, in a political sense, beyond sheer entertainment and also beyond the critical assessment of uncovering the real split within the reality they face. I will argue that spectators are faced, instead, with a purely positive (productive) aesthetic experience that puts forward proposals of transformation, that will allow them to dislocate from their own localities—to deterritorialize—and which will allow them to construct their own modes of subjectivity—to reterritorialize—creating their own modes of being together and being apart. What I have proposed, so far, is close to Rancière's view on image:

What is called an image is an element in a system that creates a certain sense of reality, a certain common sense. A 'common sense' is, in the first instance, a community of sensible data: things whose visibility is supposed to be sharable by all, modes of perception of these things, and the equally sharable meanings that are conferred on them. Next, it is the form of being together that binds individuals or groups on the basis of this initial community between words and things. The system of information is a 'common sense' of this kind: a spatiotemporal system in which words and visible forms are assembled into shared data, shared ways of perceiving, being affected and imparting meaning. The point is not to counter-pose reality to its appearances. It is to construct

different realities, different forms of common sense—that is to say, different spatiotemporal systems, different communities of words and things, forms and meanings. (Rancière, 2009, p 102)

Moreover:

The images of art do not supply weapons for battles. They help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible. But they do so on condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated.
(Rancière, 2009, p 103)

One must remember that when asking about art's political effects Rancière's preference for a reduction towards 'the social' becomes clearly visible. Objects of art (including those of conceptual art) do nothing besides play a mediating role between two active—but idealized—agents: artist and spectator. The work would seem to have a symbolic part, as it transmits meaning or feeling from one agent to the other. Through the analysis undergone, it is clear why imposing a *sensus communis* would indeed be a major concern for Rancière. All forms of *sensus communis* assume or dictate a series of principles regarding social reality (which would imply a set of socio-political relationships). Totalizing principles cannot but become a threat against a society of dissensus, where autonomy and self-enlightenment are the only common enough markers of social life.

Furthermore, the fact that, in Rancière, the presumption of common principles quickly ends up being a question about the ability or capacity to either impose or resist them, reveals another serious arising problem. An aesthetic experience, in which an artist's political ideas would move the spectator towards political action, if successful, would appear, at firsthand, to only be explained following a modern understanding of political art, where one would, in turn, confirm the presupposed unidirectional causation as well as the childlike character of the spectator.

Were one to deny the authoritarian guise behind an event that produces enlightenment—something that I argued Rancière fails to do—based on the persuasive rationality of the political ideas rather than the artist's ability to impose them, then one would patently support a rationalist perspective, which Rancière, and me with him, would be trying to avoid from the start. Given our postmodern dislike of an identity politics based on rationality, narrative coherence, and universal truths, we would surely doubt the good intentions and mainly the authority of any such discourse.

Yet, following Rancière up to this point has been hardly rewarding, although not an unnecessary digression. It is hardly rewarding, because in its rejection of modern thought it continues to reduce the spectator to a passive recipient who, if in agreement with the artist's politics, has done so by giving up his autonomy in the process; there is no space for a wilful—active—spectator. Rancière wants to reject the subjection of the spectator to an artist's imposing politics, and is somehow equally hesitant to grant the latter autonomy, because of the lack of a notion of *sensus communis* that ceases to be totalizing—pre-existent and authoritarian at its core.

I believe, with Rancière, that the spectator must regain dignity, but as I see it, this is done so only by recognizing her ability to act, to decide for herself the type of action that aesthetic experience can initiate. Nonetheless, this will require one to allow for a type of political action that is, neither based on the presumption of a set of totalizing principles, nor aimed at the destruction of existing social relationships.

Yet, recognizing an agency role will not mean reducing humans to a process of rational decision-making. It simply means that whatever occurs between artist and spectator cannot be disclosed as being the effect of some queer causality in which objects are nothing but mediums, and that agency cannot be explained away by the existence of social forces that pre-configure the range of action that both artist and spectator could have. Following this path can only deliver explanations that are characterized by

overdetermined humans, and where objects remain entirely neutral and lifeless without their human masters.

Hence, these and the questions that Rancière raised regarding the image must still be addressed: how do artworks enable a new possible landscaping between humans? How does that landscape look, when one speaks of assemblages between humans and non-humans? Addressing these questions satisfactorily, demands, as I have already hinted, opening the triad between Artists-Work-Spectators. It is easy to foresee, nonetheless, that once the machine is open a myriad of new elements will come forward to claim a role in the construction of aesthetic experience, and in determining their effects on spectators. To name a few: the art critic, the museum policymakers, political imperatives on subsidizing art, the international art market, etc. The issue of opening up this triad could quickly become an issue of purification and of defining a new machine—the market, the investors, capitalism, entertainment—although a more complex one, to be sure. My intention is, yet, not to follow an analytical path of distillation, where some actors would be reified, while others would be confirmed as negligible. I believe that the task is not to create a more complex, a scarier looking, machine, where a series of new elements would now be included: museums, cultural policies, the Internet, MTV, Microsoft, and so forth; where to stop and what to include would be nothing but an affront against coherence and an abuse of critical thought.

I will, instead, address this question in a twofold way. Firstly, I will make a methodological shift with the aim of creating an analysis that will enable the concrete to be acknowledged without reducing the questions of political art to a statistical analysis. With this in mind I will use Bruno Latour and the conceptual framework of Actor-Network-Theory. Secondly, I will attempt to delineate a network using empirical literature in economics as well as consumer theory, marketing, philosophy and a few analytical elements from political science. Touching upon these, in principle, dissimilar methods of analysis (and so objects of study) is certainly not meant as an exhaustive recollection of competing theories, but as a

gathering of elements that will help me to construct a possible open network in which artist, work, and spectator could be accommodated. A network in which concrete modes of political action can be identified: where patent effects on the intricacies of ‘the social’ can be expected.

I begin in what follows, with a proper justification of my use of Latourian methodology and its reconciliation with my approach so far: an approach that cannot hide its postmodern roots, which have been especially, but not exclusively, Deleuzian.

Latour, Modern thought, and the issue of the social

Modern thought, says Latour, proceeds as a process of distillation aimed at purifying reality, where such an act of purification would have the aim of identifying two distinct substances behind social phenomena. For Latour, the very essence of being modern lies in the attempt to separate a world of things and a world of culture (nature/society), where, consequently, the world of scientific facts (laboratory) is separated from the political world, the social facts (Latour, 1993, p 27). A social science that is built on the basis of the modern divide will constantly struggle as it navigates between the shores of social relationships (embedded in a set of pre-existing social forces which would be primordial to human life and human productions at large), and the beaches of positivist, naturalist thought, where physical facts would inform the status of reality of everything in the universe, including human groups. Whether to move forward by building on ‘the social’ or despite ‘the social’ becomes the main disjunction that the social scientist would face⁹⁰.

Latour’s own take, on how best to explain social realities, is original, understandable, and a thought provoking manner of constructing explanations for complex phenomena. His method and object of study

⁹⁰ The constitution of modern thought is based on two paradoxes and is summed up in Latour (1993) page 32.

depart from the modern divide in several specific ways. For him facts cannot be reduced neither to elements of a radical (or transcendent) evidence discovered by humans of good will, nor to being the result of the arbitrary concoctions of nothing but another human activity called science. The Latourian way would result in a particular form of ‘constructivism’ whose specificity he highlights with insistence:

In other words, ‘constructivism’ should not be confused with ‘social constructivism’. When we say that a fact is constructed, we simply mean that we account for the solid objective reality by mobilizing various entities whose assemblage could fail; ‘social constructivism’ means, on the other hand, that we replace what this reality is made of with some other stuff, the social in which it is ‘really’ built. (Latour, 2005, p 91)

The social scientist should be always in search of assemblages rather than forces or direct causalities. Latour reminds us, however, that recognizing the existence of assemblages between humans and non-humans is not aimed at reifying the realm of natural sciences, which would do nothing but reinstate the analysis within the boundaries of modern dichotomies:

There may be thousands of ways of imagining how kinships bring children into existence, but there is only, it is argued, one developmental physiology to explain how babies really grow in the womb. There may be thousands of ways to design a bridge and to decorate its surface, but only one way for gravity to exert its forces. The first multiplicity is the domain of social scientists; the second unity is the purview of natural scientists. Cultural relativism is made possible only by the solid absolutism of the natural sciences. (Latour, 2005, p 117)

Far from wanting to make the social sciences ‘harder’, Latour fully embraces the postmodern reversals, but with the caveat of always keeping in mind that the possibility of reversals must itself not be seen as the possibility of reaching an absolute (the insurmountable impasse of human rational thought).

Explaining something in terms of something else is always possible, but not a proof of its irreducibility.

It is also an ontological principle meaning no underlying or principle substance can be presumed (Harman, 2009, p 72). The impossibility of an absolute is Latour's methodological starting point, which Harman calls the 'principle of Irreduction' (Harman, 2009, pp 14, 15). In Latour's words this principle will imply that 'Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else. Never by itself, but always through the mediation of another' (Latour, 1993, p 113).

Given the principle of irreduction, and the wish to avoid a form of cultural relativism that confirms rather than denies the absolute status of scientific truth, Latour phrases his epistemological perspective as one of relativist relativism:

The universalists defined a single hierarchy. The absolute relativists made all hierarchies equal.

The relativist relativists, more modest but more empirical, point out what instruments and what chains serve to create asymmetries and equalities, hierarchies and differences (Callon, 1992).

Worlds appear commensurable or incommensurable only to those who cling to measured measures. Yet all measures, in hard and soft science alike, are also measuring measures, and they construct a commensurability that did not exist before their own calibration. (Latour, 1993, p 113)

Neither modern, nor pre-modern nor postmodern, affirms Latour with insistence⁹¹. His method of analysis, as I see it, can be characterized as one in which empirical and pragmatic viewpoints converge with a dose of healthy scepticism on epistemology, in order to function in methodological unison, which means, in turn, that the usual 'isms' that accompany these terms cannot but be left behind. What he wishes to capture from social phenomena after separating himself from both modern and postmodern

⁹¹ 'Modernizers are not obliged to continue their revolutionary task by gathering their forces, ignoring the predicament, gritting their teeth, and continuing to believe in the dual promises of naturalism and socialism no matter what, since that particular modernization has never got off the ground. It was never anything but the official representation of another much more profound and different work that had always been going on and continues today on an ever-increasing scale. Nor are we obliged to struggle against modernization—in the militant manner of the antimoderns or the disillusioned manner of the postmoderns—since we would then be attacking the upper half of the Constitution alone, which we would merely be reinforcing while remaining unaware of what has always been the source of its vitality' (Latour, 1993, p 132).

standpoints, however, will not be phrased in an eclectic (or eccentric) mélange, but is rather straightforward in its aims and limits:

[T]o retain the production of a nature and of a society that allow changes in size through the creation of an external truth and a subject of law, but without neglecting the co-production of sciences and societies. The amalgam consists in using the pre-modern categories to conceptualize the hybrids, while retaining the moderns' final outcome of the work of purification — that is, an external Nature distinct from subjects. (Latour, 1993, p 134)

Latour proposes a method in which an actor's role is recognized beyond its encounter with a reality of forces that it can neither fully identify nor put under her control (the forces of natural objects that follow causation alone or the institutionalized norms that could entirely determine human range of action). The Latourian effort to rediscover agency will force us to find feedback mechanisms—channels through which agents adjust to the consequences of a seemingly distant reality that in many senses surpass them, but which yet do not annul their ability to act. Additionally, Latour's reappraisal of agency gains further distance from modern and postmodern social thought by the recognition of non-humans as forms of agency (Latour, 2005, p 10).

Latour's stance regarding agents and their role in the production of reality is, nonetheless, based on the acknowledgement of a reality that has been produced by modern narratives (by modern science and modern politics). A reality that has exceeded in its constitution and its consequences; modern representational thought, which remains based on the nature-culture divide. Latour sees throughout modernity the birth and dissemination of quasi-objects, which are objects that have gained in complexity, but whose complexity links them with both a natural and a cultural pole of reality. Given the seemingly irreconcilable polarities that the nature/culture divide represent to the modern mind, the dichotomic root that holds all entities would have no bearing in Latour's thought.

Modernity, argues Latour, has ended up creating quasi objects: ‘Real as nature, narrated as Discourse, collective as Society, existential as Being: such are the quasi-objects that the moderns have caused to proliferate’ (Latour, 1993, p 90). Quasi objects are, in fact, neither object nor subject, but hybrids: half object-half subject (Latour, 1993, p 117). Modern hybrids, thus, escape forms of agency based on a passivity/activity dichotomy, based on free will versus determination as a necessary split. The need to rekindle agency is crucial step forward for both the Latourian critique on modernity, and my own interests in connecting politics and aesthetics. Defining agency must be able, primarily, to encompass the relationships that sustain them, that allow them to gain recognition as such. At the base of these relationships lie alliances; alliances that must, in turn, deal with the resistance from both humans and non-humans, and with the ongoing process of articulation or transformation of intentional or motivated action, of forceful energies. In short, agents, or *actants* as Latour coins them, gain in strength only through their alliances: ‘For Latour, an object is neither a substance nor an essence, but an actor trying to adjust or inflict its forces’ (Harman, 2009, p 15). Hence, an actant’s ability to affect its reality can only be measured by the strength of its alliances: ‘Actors become more real by making large portions of the cosmos vibrate in harmony with their goals, or by taking detours in their goals to capitalize on the force of nearby actants’ (Harman, 2009, p 31).

Accepting the limited ability of actants (former agents) to impose their will, says Latour, should lead us to accept the need that actants have for allies, which means, in turn, that they must be willing to reconsider their goals as they become part of a greater network. For this reason, the politician, as a perennial negotiator who must always take pragmatism and principles into account every step of the way, is exemplary for all kinds of imaginable actors (Harman, 2009, p 33). Phrased in terms of the modern divide, interactions would not only be seen as having the form subject-subject, but also as object-subject or object-object:

The engineer is not a free-floating mastermind of stockpile and calculation, as Heidegger imagines. Instead, the engineer must negotiate with the mountain at each stage of the project [...] The same is true of [...] a lover deciding when to show vulnerability and when unyielding strength, a food tester detecting the faint signals of poison, and an artillery officer gauging the proper angle of a gun. All are engaged in the same exercise, however different their materials may be. (Harman, 2009, p 30)

In terms of the Intermedial this means that the interaction of the agent with her medium is active, in being sensible for its medium-specific resistance to human manipulation. These terms however are still inspired by modernist dichotomies that Latour wants to avoid. An actant can only be measured by the extent of its alliances. These alliances include non-human actors who resist or make possible the transformations needed for those same alliances to endure, and in general for a networked agency with plans, ideas, goals, and relations to be produced. But one must refrain from thinking that another form of structuralism is emerging in ANT. Producing explanations based on static, overly determined structures is not Latour's preference, and would be in direct conflict with the principle of irreduction. Delivering explanations in which the social scientist ends up enlightening the informant actors, because of the former's ability to see a big picture that the latter cannot see, is precisely the fatal consequence that ANT allows us to circumvent⁹². The underlying issue is the structure itself, which is said to be the cohesive building of all social forces that determine an actor's ability to act freely. With ANT 'the social' will no longer denote a set of overwhelming forces that will fully qualify the actions of individuals and human groups in general. For Latour, 'the social' is neither the essence behind all human productions, nor the

⁹² For Latour, the social scientist's explanations can quickly turn the actor into a follower of sorts in the best of cases, and a child in the worst, while making of the analyst the founder of a wisdom that seems to exceed the ability to act that was given to the actors in the first place: 'Group delineation is not only one of the occupations of social scientists, but also the very constant task of the actors themselves. Actors do the sociology for the sociologists and sociologists learn from the actors what makes up their set of associations. While this should seem obvious, such a result is actually in opposition to the basic wisdom of critical sociologists. For them, actors do not see the whole picture but remain only 'informants'. This is why they have to be taught what is the context 'in which' they are situated and 'of which' they see only a tiny part, while the social scientist, floating above, sees the 'whole thing' (Latour, 2005, p 33).

image that shows in the rear-view mirror of all scientific discourse about social phenomena. In Latour's words,

To be social is no longer a safe and unproblematic property, it is a movement that may fail to trace any new connection and may fail to redesign any well-formed assemblage. As we are going to learn throughout this book, after having rendered many useful services in an earlier period, what is called 'social explanation' has become a counter-productive way to interrupt the movement of associations instead of resuming it. (Latour, 2005, p 8)

Is social what goes together?', with one that says, 'social designates a particular kind of stuff'.

With the former [ANT] we simply mean that we are dealing with a routine state of affairs whose binding together is the crucial aspect, while the second designates a sort of substance whose main feature lies in its differences with other types of materials. (Latour, 2005, p 43)

For Latour it is precisely the wielding of relations, the forcefulness that is taken for granted in social explanations that has to be unravelled and constructed anew by those same explanations, and not the other way around. The constitution of groups, of aggregates, of assemblages, of societies, is not determined, thus, by identifying a pre-existing set of forces. It is instead the emergence of aggregates themselves that must be explained as such. Now the point does not end there, because naturally, the elements that are gathered in every aggregate have been always, in fact, a matter of debate themselves: 'Should we take social aggregates to be made of "individuals", of "organisations", of "classes", of "roles", of "life trajectories", of "discursive fields", of "selfish genes", of "forms of life", of "social networks"?' (Latour, 2005, p 28)

The risk of the choice made will be the emergence of aggregates that:

[N]ever seem to tire in designating one entity as real, solid, proven, or entrenched while others are criticized as being artificial, imaginary, transitional, illusory, abstract, impersonal, or

meaningless. Should we focus on the micro-level of interactions or should we consider the macro-level as more relevant? Is it better to view markets, organisations, or networks as the essential ingredients of our collective life? (Latour, 2005, p 28)

What can then sustain our aggregates? Latour's first answer: It is not a set of pre-existent social forces⁹³. Reducing groups to social forces at work will mean that the actual formations of those groups are mainly accidental. These formations would be the manifestations or expressions of the actual forces at work, which would be abstract and untraceable in practice. ANT's way will, on the contrary, forget about abstract forces and will consider aggregates as fragile assemblages, whose endurance vanishes once they cease to be traceable, that is, functional. Latour introduces the distinction between ostensive and performative: 'The object of an ostensive definition remains there, whatever happens to the index of the onlooker. But the object of a performative definition vanishes when it is no longer performed' (Latour, 2005, p 37, 38).

This change of focus, towards the performative, makes sense as part of Latour's effort to remain pragmatic and to highlight the lack of necessity behind all aggregates. This will not imply that all aggregates are equally fragile, to be sure, but it will, however, allow one to reassess the importance that strong alliances have for actants. Given that all nodes of a network will always retain to a certain extent, agency power, will mean that alliances are neither the expression of a unified consensus, nor the manipulation of the weak by the strong. Actants will always have to be willing to negotiate in order for alliances to emerge, to endure, and to be profitable for their own interests. Hence, any discourse on power will be sterile if attempting to characterize power as either another entity or as the social force at work par excellence.

⁹³ Latour goes as far as wanting to dismiss the word 'society' from social scientific analysis at large: 'This is why, from now on, the word 'collective' will take the place of 'society'. Society will be kept only for the assembly of already gathered entities that sociologists of the social believe have been made in social stuff. Collective, on the other hand, will designate the project of assembling new entities not yet gathered together and which, for this reason, clearly appear as being not made of social stuff' (Latour, 2005, p 75).

The critique on ‘power’ as institutionalized, disciplined relations cannot but fall on Foucault’s territory, as he is undoubtedly the quintessential philosopher of power relations in the twentieth century. Contrary to an interpretation that would antagonize both philosophers, however, I believe that Foucault has actually spotted, both, a) the importance of alliances and b) the importance of negotiation through and through. I do not see his discourse on power as intended to describe an all encompassing hovering force that would be present and effective in all social relationships. I argue, therefore, that power—regimes of truth, ideology—is by no means a totalizing concept in Foucault. It is, as I stated before, a strategic concept, not an essence, but a discursive practice. In Deleuze’s words:

As the postulate of property, power would be the “property” won by a class. Foucault shows that power does not come about in this way: it is less a property than a strategy, and its effects cannot be attributed to an appropriation “but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings”; “it is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the “privilege”, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions”. (Deleuze, 2009, p 25)

Power, in particular, is no privileged and undifferentiated notion under which all humans are subsumed. It is precisely the distinguished, localized, yet malleable use of concepts, that makes Foucault’s discourse on power, the use of the concept itself, interesting and very much in line with the argument that unfolds here.

Following Deleuze’s *Foucault*, it is easy to see why the notion of power in *Foucault* is distanced from traditional postulates of power—from seeing power as property, as a repressive force, as subordinating, as essence, as legality—and is in a way not dissimilar from Latour’s approach in ANT.

The issue of power articulation: Transformation and Accounting

If art has a political impact, be it on a macro- or on a microlevel, we have to realize that the crucial concept in this practice is not force but power. The main points of contention with the notion of power can be read as a generalized critique on three presuppositions about power: 1) power as a property held or won, either by individuals or social groups, 2) power as an essence, that is, as an attribute of certain individuals (the smart, the strong, the rich, etc.) or particular social groups (the capitalists, the enlightened, the state bureaucracy, etc.), and 3) power as a modality of exerting domination either by physical violence—repressive—or manipulation of the mind—ideology. These three presumptions of power depart from both Foucault and ANT, because they abstract from practical relationships; they are static and extemporal, and they are not the result, but the condition for social relationships to exist the way they do. Power is neither won nor held ipso facto. Power in Foucault is always the result of a strategy pursued by discursive practices in which actors are but one element; it is the effect that strong alliances have over parts of a collective. Social groups do not violently win power, and automatically preserve it, as an attribute of how they function in the dynamics of human interactions. This applies indistinctively no matter whether the aggregates are based on an undifferentiated or deterministic notion of class or a partially empirical notion of dominant political groups; the issue of power is never about appropriating something⁹⁴. If power is to be exercised this is because associations must emerge and be functional if they are to become sustainable alliances, that is, alliances in which actors have already negotiated their roles and intentions. This meaning, therefore, that alliances are, neither made up of actors that have given up their autonomy, nor are the product of a central knot, which would extract and

⁹⁴ In a similar fashion, Deleuze points out that if power is not an attribute, then it certainly cannot be localized, as if belonging to a specific portion of the social space. Deleuze calls this caveat, postulate of localization, and draws the following consequences for the State: ‘Foucault shows that, on the contrary, the State itself appears as the overall effect or result of a series of interacting wheels or structures which are located at a completely different level, and which constitute a “microphysics of power”. Not only private systems but explicit parts of the machinery of State have an origin, a behavior and a function which the State ratifies, controls or is even content to cover rather than institute’ (Deleuze, 2009, p 25).

distribute the rewards that have been won over the entirety of society. Given that power is not a thing appropriated by the few, it cannot be an attribute of domination exerted over the dominated:

Power [...] is not an attribute but a relation: the power-relation is the set of possible relations between forces, which passes through the dominated forces no less than through the dominating, as both these forces constitute unique elements: “Power invests [the dominated], passes through them and with the help of them, relying on them just as they, in their struggle against power, rely on the hold it exerts on them”. (Deleuze, 2009, p 27, 28)

Power is a relation:

A relation between forces is a function of the type “to incite, to provoke, to combine...” In the case of disciplinary societies, we should say: to allocate, to classify, to compose, to normalize. The first [violence] is indefinite and varies in each case. Power “produces reality” before it represses. Equally it produces truth before it ideologizes, abstracts or masks. (Deleuze, 2009, pp 28, 29)

ANT tells us that alliances are associations, and that human agencies do their best to associate with non-humans in order to mobilize them in their favour, and in the favour of the greater alliances they may have invested in. Power is then an issue of articulation between actors negotiating to associate, and the effects for others (actors and alliances) of such articulations or, in Latour’s terminology, of such transformations. All associations are an ensemble of human and non-human actors (actants), whose relationships cannot be reduced, to any one single level of reality: it is not physical force alone, but it is surely not the socialization of weak or well-trained minds either⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ Avoiding reduction here means also abstaining from seeing in the appropriation of power a manipulation by means of an imposing set of rules: a legal framework that is made to keep those in power there. Deleuze says that, a legal framework is not simply a code that divides what is allowed from what is not. It is neither static nor a completely closed system of regulation: ‘One of the strongest themes in Foucault’s book consists of replacing the crude opposition of law and illegality with the subtle correlation between illegalisms and laws. Law is always a structure of illegalisms, which are differentiated by being

The importance of modality has to do with retaining, for the actors involved, their ability to do precisely that: to act. Actors are never passive or even solely reactionary. Their actions are not determined by the aggregates they are involved with, but by the way in which they negotiate with those aggregates: actors do not react in a determined fashion, but invest their energies in concrete ways. These ways will determine their position in that aggregate and against others, but they are ways, nonetheless, which come as the result of a strategy and not of the passive transmission of dominant forces. Repression and ideology are there, where they function, not the product of a struggle between forces (dominance/resistance), but the product of alliances, of an organisation that is operational and sustainable through time⁹⁶. An organization that, as it turns out, cannot be equated to a single dominant force or centre of attraction.

For Foucault, power is a malleable concept that is helpful in understanding the functional role of alliances and the fragility of social aggregates or collectives (as Latour calls them). Power is the complete opposite of an abstract, or rather, a mysterious force that would seem to emanate from a centre. Power is equally not an abstract generalization that is meant to reduce all social relationships into modes of domination. Power is meant to be articulable; it is exercised, not appropriated. There is no transmission of power, but alliances that will prevail over others. This is not only a matter of imagining sizable groups struggling against each other, from gangs to capitalists. Each human agent will be part of a myriad of interconnected alliances, of networks, which means, in turn, that their loyalty lies not on one but on many levels and scales. If, in fact, one wishes to talk at the level of class then one must be able to explain beyond power articulation, beyond that same class level and at the level of the actors at stake.

formalized. We need only to look at the law of commercial societies to see that laws are not contrasted worldwide with illegality, but that some are actually used to find loopholes in others. Law administers illegalisms: some it allows, makes possible or invents as the privilege of the dominating classes, or even uses in the service of the dominating class; others again it forbids, isolates and takes as both its object and its means of domination' (Deleuze, 2009, p 29).

⁹⁶ 'It [*History of sexuality*] will also show how repression and ideology explain nothing but always assume an organisation or "system" within which they operate, but not vice-versa. Foucault does not in any way ignore repression an ideology; but as Nietzsche had already seen, they do not constitute the struggle between forces but are only the dust thrown up by such a contest' (Deleuze, 2009, p 29).

Both, Latour and Foucault, would want to establish a type of analysis, where the social ceases to be a static structure too heavy for any agent to lift or even to understand in full. Society will not surpass all humans that constitute it either⁹⁷. If there is a crucial element, which is not clearly highlighted in Foucault (at least not in comparison to Latour), it is the role that non-human agents play in all articulations of power. There is no explicit mention, as with Latour, of everyday objects, of tools, of machines, of microchips, cell phones, and soda cans.⁹⁸ Nobody can forget the weight given by Foucault to the institutionalized body as it goes through school, the factory or the barracks, but it is still difficult to pinpoint whether the barracks are a format of support, a sort of template, or simply an object charged with a symbolic meaning sustained by its function or *raison d'être*. The body itself seems to remain caught in a difficult split as it becomes institutionalized. In fact the most articulated medium that Foucault thematizes is precisely this 'docile body'. For what is a body without it already being institutionalized? One must avoid falling back into the nature/culture divide, but doing so makes the notion rather more complex and less explanatory of the processes that constitute the adult human agency in western countries today or since the dawn of modernism as an Eurocentric project.

It is the focus on the concrete associations, with all its humans and non-humans, what simply makes ANT a more transparent framework, in comparison to Foucault's own thinking. Dealing with networks, I believe, delivers a more traceable diagram, than dealing with regimes of power. What makes the Latourian framework more manageable are the concepts chosen to trace the articulations of power, as they spread throughout the social space. The goal of ANT, in a word, is to deal with transformations and articulations of power. This will mean: to trace clear networks, account for every agent's role in play

⁹⁷ For Deleuze, posing social space as an immanent space is the way to avoid the making of society as transcendent (one of Latour's paradoxes of the Nature/Culture divide), and precisely the gesture that he argues is found in Foucaultian analysis: 'A functional microanalysis [of Foucault] takes whatever is still pyramidal in the Marxist image and replaces it with a strict immanence where centers of power and disciplinary techniques form multiple segments, linked to one another which the individuals of a mass traverse or inhabit, body and soul (family, school, barracks, factory, if need be prison). The thing called power is characterized by immanence of field without transcendent unification, continuity of line, and contiguity of parts without distinct totalization: it is a social space' (Deleuze, 2009, p 27).

⁹⁸ We have to look at Foucault's analyses of art practices for thematizing this aspect, for instance his writings on surrealism (*This is not a pipe*) and impressionism in for instance a recently published text with a foreword by Bourriaud on the paintings of Manet: *Manet and the Object of Painting*, London: Tate Publishing, (2011).

(mediator or intermediary), and to put forward an explanation of social phenomena that is able to produce society as an amalgam of the concrete and not as the continuation of already pre-existing forces.

In order to reach this goal, ANT must be able to discuss such transformations in a language that remains clearly separate from any form of direct causation or transparent translation. This implies that it must be willing to explain action at a distance without ending up talking about articulation as a communication between minds. Latour's approach does this in a twofold way. First, he will deny total immanence (or holism), which will mean that not everything affects each other (Harman, 2009, p 47). This then makes of networks, localities, which implies that their reach is limited by the objects they mobilize and by the strength of their associations. Secondly, every actor is a 'medium of translation able to link the most far-flung objects and equally capable of failing short in this effort' (Harman, 2009, p 102). Actors become media as well, inasmuch as they are not determined to perform in a particular way, to have a specific function, or to fulfil a distinct role. The actors' adaptability is what allows them to strategize their alliances and to pursue associations that are neither limited to alienated ideology nor mindless pragmatism.

Two main concepts, with media as their core meaning, allow Latour to deal with transformations or articulations of power: intermediaries and mediators.

An intermediary, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. For all practical purposes, an intermediary can be taken not only as a black box, but also as a black box counting for one, even if it is internally made of many parts. Mediators, on the other hand, cannot be counted as just one; they might count for one, for nothing, for several, or for infinity. Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators transform,

translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry. (Latour, 2005, p 39)

The term Black box is borrowed by Latour, in order to grasp a specific type of intermediary, whose singularity lies in the relative solidity of its internal relations: ‘an actant so firmly established that we are able to take its interior for granted’ (Harman, 2009, p 33). A black box opens the network’s space of analysis in order to introduce those objects, which at various moments are taken by their full value, that is, whose functionality goes for the most part unchallenged: ‘The internal properties of a black box do not count as long as we are concerned only with its input and output’ (Harman, 2009, p 33). A black box can be almost any object, at one point or another in time: from a computer to a pair of jeans, as long as one takes the object’s internal relations for granted (the computers functioning hardware or the jeans’ weave) then one will be able to mobilize those objects’ presupposed attributes or qualities (the computer ability to store, to order information, to display it in a document that can be saved in different formats, saved through the internet, manipulated in Photoshop, or turned into HTML code, etc.) in order to improve one’s own abilities to build alliances. In terms of Oosterling’s RM this is the self-evident quality of our daily comfort, which we take for granted and that enables us to connect without questioning, without experiencing any resistance. Culture in this sense becomes an upscaled assemblage of black boxes. If, for instance, I am able to install specific software in my computer, which allows me to build websites, both the hardware and the software will work as black boxes for me, while I am creating a website, for I take their ability to transform information for granted. Once I have built my website, I will turn it into a black box at the moment I try either to sell it as a template for businesses or to expand my presence on the net by focusing on bringing traffic to it (and the list of possibilities for creating associations can expand almost indefinitely).

Not only objects, but also events can be black boxes (Harman, 2009, pp 36, 37). Imagine a job that constantly changes the responsibilities of the employee, versus a job which is successfully fulfilled in the

same way repeatedly and which forges relationships that last between employees, tools, and a working space. Black boxes are naturally but a particular type of intermediary. Overall, intermediaries will allow the analysis to capture associations with objects whose effects are for the most part predictable: as predictable as knowing that if I turn on a light switch, a light bulb in the room will shine; if I send a paper to my printer, the latter will be printed according to already specified characteristics; if I order a hamburger at McDonalds, this one will retain a well-known colour, smell, and taste.

The issue of articulation is, nevertheless, mainly an issue of taking into account all the mediators within a network. Mediators can be both human and non-human. Mediators will transform the inputs they receive in ways that may vary in comparison to similar mediators or to similar events. An employee executing an order received from above is a mediator. The extent to which orders are transformed into actions is never entirely transparent and may quickly encounter obstacles. If the employee is constantly being ‘bossed around’ she may not carry subsequent orders with the same impetus or may even purposefully divert from the boss’s intentions.

Dealing with machines and technologies for the first time can make them appear as mediators. They resist naive manipulation. If one is not familiar with complex software such as Photoshop, for example, this one will indeed appear as anything but a black box. For the first time user, working with image data will be anything but a technical procedure. In order for the software to become a black box the user will have to dedicate hours of learning and experimenting. Once it’s mastered, however, the program will be a proper black box, a transparent intermediary. Acquiring skills is crucial in transforming a mediator into an intermediary.

The detail driven analysis that can, thus, be pursued using ANT has, for Latour, one major advantage over an analysis that is based on uncovering ‘social forces’: accountability. Costs can no longer be

externalized nor infrastructure taken for granted, which is an interesting insight from an ecological point of view.

The transaction costs for moving, connecting, and assembling the social is now payable to the last cent, allowing us to resist the temptation that scaling, embedding, and zooming can be had for nothing without the spending of energy, without recruitment of some other entities, without the establishment of expensive connections. (Latour, 2005, p 220)

Furthermore, ANT recognizes the changing nature of objects and of the relationships between them and humans; the strength and fragility of alliances is crucial if one wants to warrant any specificity to a network. These allow for concrete events to be properly captured without losing coherence and without having to maintain different levels of abstraction in order to do so.

Power, as I have shown, will be articulated using ANT in a manner that is not at odds with Foucault's thinking. The engine driving Latour is his interest in rendering visible and traceable, those relationships that make up social life. His analysis will make empirical data more interesting as it enriches its findings with traceable networks. The issue of defining social groups or aggregates, nevertheless, does not end by replacing them for words like collective, alliances, and networks. A network, as a field of connections between, in principle, disparaging localities may drown in a sea of ambiguity if it abstains from establishing connections between social interactions and social aggregates. How does ANT fend with the problems of identifying micro and macro effects, of describing so-called macro and micro phenomena? How will networks be applied to levels of abstraction that appear as irreconcilable?

Scale: Dealing with the Macro/Micro social

The Macro and the Micro perspectives appear as the commonsensical approach to the study of social phenomena. These perspectives presuppose the possibility of conducting an analysis that successfully separates the reality of human groups according to different levels of abstraction. The Macro as, for instance in economics or geopolitics, would have to deal little, if at all, with concrete human action or intentionality. On the contrary, it would allow the researcher to focus on institutional layouts, on negotiations between political bodies at the national or supranational levels, and on the construction of long-term narratives about the development of collectives along lines of technological or economic development. The Micro would deal, in turn, with human interactions or intersubjective relationships: power games, intentionality, commodity exchanges, and in the construction of generic psychological profiles. Intersubjectivity, however, will not be said to occur in vacuum, but will presume the validity of hovering rules (institutions, cultural markers, group affiliation, ideology, selfish interest, etc.), which will frame the actions of the humans involved (non-humans are again relegated to being nothing more than props).

As is common with Latour, the division is seen as a calculative manipulation on behalf of the analyst—a simplification that lacks scientific justification—and will only be properly solved if one is willing to forget the presumptions behind the need for both levels of abstraction:

Just as the adjectives “natural” and “social” designate representations of collectives that are neither natural nor social in themselves, so the words “local” and “global” offer points of view on networks that are by nature neither local nor global, but are more or less long and more or less connected. (Latour, 1993, p 122)

The prevalence of two modes analysis, argues Latour, has to do with the way in which connections are established between local points and global aggregates:

We rediscover the same problem as that of trains, telephones, or universal constants. How can one be connected without being either local or global? Modern sociologists and economists have a hard time posing the problem. Either they remain at the “micro” level, that of interpersonal contacts, or they move abruptly to the “macro” level and no longer deal with anything, they believe, but decontextualized and depersonalized rationalities. (Latour, 1993, p 121)

Using ANT will imply that whatever the extent of the connections studied, this one must be qualified, rather than resolved by assuming the embedded nature of certain phenomena, and of certain actors, inside institutionalized contexts:

Macro no longer describes a wider or a larger site in which the micro would be embedded like some Russian Matryoshka doll, but another equally local, equally micro place, which is connected to many others through some medium transporting specific types of traces. No place can be said to be bigger than any other place, but some can be said to benefit from far safer connections with many more places than others. (Latour, 2005, p 176)

Therefore:

It's not that there are a macro-sociology and a micro-sociology, but that there are two different ways of envisaging the macro-micro relationship: the first one builds a series of Russian Matryoshka dolls—the small is being enclosed, the big is enclosing; and the second deploys connections—the small is being unconnected, the big one is to be attached. (Latour, 2005, p 180)

ANT will trace connections instead of assuming framings. Actors will not take decisions according to the context that frames them, but only according to the connections they have already invested in. The global, as a completely depersonalized level of interaction, disappears entirely and along with it actors

whose decisions are either guided by contextual rules or by a rationality that ignores the always pre-existing investment in specific alliances⁹⁹.

In brief, ANT's approach develops according to three steps:

I will proceed in three steps: we will first relocate the global so as to break down the automatism that leads from interaction to "Context"; we will then redistribute the local so as to understand why interaction is such an abstraction; and finally, we will connect the sites revealed by the two former moves, highlighting the various vehicles that make up the definition of the social understood as association. (Latour, 2005, p 172)

For my interest at stake here, it is pivotal to highlight the importance of tracing connections, and of liberating the analysis from the presumably transparent notion of interaction. I say these two elements are especially important, because the Artist-Work-Spectator machine has to be opened with the aim of tracing those connections that actually associate the mentioned actors. We have to trace the mediators in their radically mediocre impact. These connections, in turn, cannot be taken as being nothing more than the context of a mediated interaction between artist and spectator; that deliberately neglect to qualify the type of vehicle that a work of art is, as well as the type of networks that may actually allow the artist and spectator to associate in one way or another. The political relevance of art, that is, all arguments about 'art affecting life' and vice-versa depend entirely on the connections traced if they are meant to be something other than empty gestures of a long gone era.

In addition, Latour's rekindling of the global/local dichotomy becomes the gateway for him to introduce another concept: the 'plug-in'. This concept is central to the reworking of the relationship between actors and a system. What was intended before as the work of framing and contextualizing can be better done

⁹⁹Distance between the Macro and Micro perspectives is also captured in Foucault, according to Deleuze: 'Here we can see that 'local' has two very different meanings: power is local because it is never global, but it is not local or localized because it is diffuse' (Deleuze, 2009, p 26).

with the aid of the ‘plug-in’. The questions that the use of the notion concretely addresses are: why do humans engage in complex behaviour that is both repetitive and learned? How is it that human behaviour seems to easily fit a set of defined rules in certain places and situations? And, why is stray behaviour so easily spotted and individuals so promptly marginalized? The plug-in is a notion that will help an analysis to qualify competence and adherence of an individual within larger pre-existing systems:

What is so telling in this metaphor of the plug-in is that competence doesn’t come in bulk any longer but literally in bits and bytes. You don’t have to imagine a “wholesale” human having intentionality, making rational calculations, feeling responsible for his sins, or agonizing over his mortal soul. [...] A supermarket, for instance, has preformatted you to be a consumer, but only a generic one. To transform yourself into an active and understanding consumer, you also need to be equipped with an ability to calculate and to choose. In the sociology of the social there were only two sources for such a competence: either you were born with it as a human—as if Darwinian evolution had, from the dawn of time, prepared men and women to be supermarket calculators and optimal maximizers—or you were molded into becoming a clever consumer by the powerful grip of some economic infrastructure. But with this new topography that we are sketching, another source of competence might be located at your fingertips: there are plug-ins circulating to which you can subscribe, and that you can download on the spot to become locally and provisionally competent’ [...] ‘The crucial point is that you are sustaining this mental and cognitive competence as long as you subscribe to this equipment. You don’t carry it with you; it is not your own property. You might have internalized it somewhat, but even for that feat of internalization you need to download another plug-in! (Latour, 2005, pp 207, 210)

For anyone who has used a computer a plug-in, this is an easily identifiable notion. One must constantly download and install new plug-ins in order for old programs to be able to properly transform new forms of data or in order to deliver advanced or modified outputs to third parties. The usage of the word in

ANT stays surprisingly close to this well-known notion, making its usage less prone to confusion.

Human ability to engage in a myriad of complex behaviours, which is constantly so problematic for theoretical purposes, becomes manageable and traceable through the use of plug-ins. Human actors will no longer have to be analyzed following a false disjunction (either natural or learned). Human actors become malleable, changing entities: highly specific agents whose differing abilities explain rather than obtrude explanations regarding group affiliation and diverging individual choices. Therefore, system and individual do not relate by any sort of imposition or automatism, but communicate through the existence of a language that will allow the individual to be part of (to work from within) a system:

If you treat what comes from the outside as mediators offering an occasion to the next agent to behave as a mediator, the whole scene of the inside and outside might be modified for good. The puppeteer still holds many strings in her hands, but each of her fingers is itching to move in a way the marionette indicates. The more strings the marionettes are allowed to have, the more articulated they become' [...] It was impossible before to connect an actor to what made it act, without being accused of 'dominating', 'limiting', or 'enslaving' it. This is no longer the case. The more attachments it has, the more it exists. And the more mediators there are the better.

(Latour, 2005, pp 216 & 217)

In line with the conceptual framework deployed by ANT, the plug-in allows networks to become more robust as heuristic tools. The more connections an actor is able to make, the more he or she will exist—that is ANT's main contention.

How ANT works in addressing political art

I argue that ANT is a valuable tool when trying to understand the political relevance of Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics in two specific ways. On the one hand, ANT's starting point of not being one of stable and established connections, quickly relates to the implied differences of a dissensual community. Distancing from *sensus communis* will mean distancing from a view that sees identification as the necessary point of departure behind any notion of collection or aggregation. Were one to say that both artist and spectator belong to a community in one sense or another, and hence, may have vested interests in encouraging political change, would imply a hovering perspective that will not answer the questions raised above. I have argued so far, along with Rancière and Lyotard on this point, that what characterizes the main challenge for political art is the lack of identification between artist and spectator. Such identification, if intended to go beyond mere idiosyncrasy and idolatry, results impossible to trace, because it assumes that the artist and spectator belong to a common political body, which would be established on the basis of principle and not of actual connections. I have rejected this view and accepted the challenge of a community, which is sustained neither by immanent politico-economic conditions (Marx), nor by natural or pre-existing socio-political functions (Plato). With Rancière I have accepted the need for art's political relevance to go beyond the identification of common principles and, thus, to go beyond reasserting the universality of art's function as solely denunciatory or as the only emancipated social sphere that stands against the institutionalized identities of modern life. Identifications, as I follow Latour, will only be possible through voluntary or involuntary subjection: subjects will have no choice but to follow social rules or will be born into them and accept them as part of their social makeup. Given that identification under this modern paradigm can only take place under either of these two modes, my use of ANT will, in addition, allow me to focus on modes of identification that will occur only when actors enter alliances and incur, in turn, concrete transformations. Identification is in ANT performative and mediamatic, not rational and ideological.

On the other hand, ANT's ability to focus on the traceability of concrete connections in limited and scaled networks, will allow for empirically assessed connections to be recognized and for effective transformations to occur, which preserve the dignity of both artist and spectator. The possibility to see specific roles in the association between actors, other than that of master and servant, will allow for the singularity of events to serve an analytical purpose. It allows me to break into the Artist-Network-Spectator machinery and dismantle it, showing that if there is a machine, it must be able to encompass the many networks that will produce alliances and associations between the actors mentioned, and also with others. It will also allow me to distance myself completely from viewing artists, artworks, and spectators as subjectivities whose reality can only be maintained for as long as one is willing to isolate them from social reality at large.

Making a network, however, cannot be reduced to an exercise of collection¹⁰⁰. The main element that makes a network a more complex task is the prevalence of mediators. Articulations of power become the main way to understand the complexity of the connections between actors within a network:

I would define a good account as one that traces a network. I mean by this word a string of actions where each participant is treated as a full-blown mediator. To put it very simply: A good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there. Instead of simply transporting effects without transforming them, each of the points in the text may become a bifurcation, an event, or the origin of a new translation. As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators, they render the movement of the social visible to the reader. Thus, through many textual inventions, the social may become again a circulating entity that is no longer composed of the stale assemblage of what passed earlier as being part of society. (Latour, 2005, p 128)

¹⁰⁰ Latour argues that ANT actually implies working at a higher level of abstraction (Latour, 2005, p 30).

Following Latour, my use of ANT is aimed at rendering the connections between artists, artworks and spectators visible. These connections will, in consequence, result in effective ways in which art can and is already affecting social life beyond museums, galleries, art faculties, and private studios. The networks traced, to be sure, will not gain validity because of either their denotative accuracy or their rhetorical appeal. They will be constructions meant to display how existing connections between the actors that were said to sustain the world of art and the ones that were presumed to be outside it, actually create greater networks; how these networks can be expected to function in the future, and what political goals they can be said to attain both now and later.

Finally, my analysis is not meant, primarily, as an exemplary piece of ANT, but wants above all to provide answers to the raised issues about aesthetic experience. My use of ANT is certainly not casual, but it is also not intended to display an exhaustive use of ANT's terminology and concepts; something that would go way beyond my focus on Latour's own work. Still, I believe that my different ambitions will not in the least affect the way in which ANT will be used or networks traced. All in all, I will aim at delivering robust networks that are innovative, creative, but most of all useful, that is, fully traceable; meeting these conditions, it turns out, would be sufficient for Latour's own exigencies.

There exists no good word anyway [referring to a network], only sensible usage; in addition, the original material metaphor still retains the three important features I wish to induce with this expression: a) a point-to-point connection is being established which is physically traceable and thus can be recorded empirically; b) such a connection leaves empty most of what is not connected, as any fisherman knows when throwing his net in the sea; c) this connection is not made for free, it requires effort as any fisherman knows when repairing it on the deck. (Latour, 2005, p 132)

My use of the notion of network will abstain from claiming that it has a denotative function and will, thus, be consistent with the usage it has with Latour¹⁰¹. It will be used, mainly, as a heuristic tool¹⁰² that will deliver an explanation that is able to disclose a social world inhabited by both humans and non-humans, next to an understanding of phenomena that mustn't be reduced to it being 'socially' or 'philosophically' inclined, as a way to claim its validity within a certain camp, while inevitably accepting its loss in others.

How ANT helps to qualify the political relevance of Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics

I will begin by outlining the reason why ANT has been chosen as the determinant in order to answer the question about art's political relevance. Following Latour:

'While in the old paradigm you had to have a zero-sum game—everything lost by the work of art was gained by the social, everything lost by the social had to be gained by the 'inner quality' of the work of art—in the new paradigm you are allowed a win/win situation: the more attachments the better' (Latour, 2005, p 237).

In my analysis of Rancière, his understanding of art's political relevance was unable to put forward an argument that could satisfactorily deal with a series of crucial issues: with a weaker form of sensus communis that would be appropriate to the dissensual community presupposed, a form of agency that indeed would have the power to act without being stigmatized for doing so, and artworks which would play an active role and, therefore, would not be reduced to acting as passive mediation tools between

¹⁰¹ 'So, network is an expression to check how much energy, movement, and specificity our own reports are able to capture. Network is a concept, not a thing out there' (Latour, 2005, p 130).

¹⁰² I believe my claim that networks are heuristic tools (a concept) rather than anything else, is also found in Latour when, for instance, in a colourful conversation between a student (interested in using ANT) and a teacher (a supporter of ANT) he tell us: 'S[student]: Do you mean to say that once I have shown that my actors are related in the shape of a network, I have not yet done an ANT study? P[professor]: That's exactly what I mean: ANT is more like the name of a pencil or a brush than the name of a specific shape to be drawn or painted' (Latour, 2005, p 143).

two ‘real’ actors. The AWS triad that Rancière insists on explaining is left unopened and, for this reason, soon becomes a circular argument that remains stuck as a little more than a power game between artist and spectator; a game which, furthermore, is framed within a set of socio-political forces that render them both inoperative. Artist and spectator, in my point of view, are left with resistance as their only available weapon against identity politics and against socio-economic injustices. The role of modernity can be introduced here as a set of forces that would insist on a project based on communitarian values and institutionalized identities, where actors could be said to lose their autonomy in order to become gears within a totalizing regime of control (Foucault, Hard & Negri).

Opening the A-W-S machine is, in fact, a reconstructive task inasmuch as the questioning of the implied roles of the elements involved, would mean casting the machine’s function itself into doubt: artists would not affect spectators in a causal way (and they would be aware of it), artworks are not lifeless passive objects, and a spectator’s action is neither the product nor the effect of an imposing rationale based on awareness:

It is counterintuitive to try and distinguish ‘what comes from viewers’ and ‘what comes from the object’ when the obvious response is to ‘go with the flow’. Object and subject might exist, but everything interesting happens upstream and downstream. Just follow the flow. Yes, follow the actors themselves or rather that which makes them act, namely the circulating entities. (Latour, 2005, p 237)

Following the actants (or actors¹⁰³) themselves will necessarily lead the research made into rekindling subjectivity itself and to the discovery of new actants whose role has been neglected. The political question, which so far, has been assumed to begin with the establishment of *sensus communis*, is now taken as the face value ability of actors to associate, and to affect the political bodies and the social relationships they have formed. It is important to note that the question is now addressed from a different

¹⁰³ From now on, I will use the words ‘actor’ and ‘Aactant’ interchangeably.

perspective. Given that I must begin with a base of dissensus, any conceptualization of 'the social' will, for the most part, be left behind. Instead of 'the social' ANT leads one to identify networks and concrete groupings, without any reduction to ideology or empiricism (idealism or realism). Networks will, hence, allow me to follow the actors themselves (the artist and spectator to begin with) and to explore their ability to associate in modes that will have nothing to do with any form of causality, of awareness, or of an achieved consensus with reference to a common political project. Associations will be political inasmuch as they entail a change in the way social relationships are understood and in the way they function. Common projects will be taken as networks for as long as their aims are limited and accountable, rather than ethereal and unachievable in practice, in other words, if they are put forward in a utopian manner.

This will mean that I will follow two paths, or two flows. On the one hand, I will follow a seemingly economic driven path, in order to concentrate on the social relationships that exist between consumers, workers, offerings and technologies, where a mediated reality can be identified as a common theme. My intention with this will be to explore the way in which technologies have already modified these relationships, and how such changes have made of economic offerings objects which demand the existence of a sophisticated consumer who will use them as powerful allies and not as mere objects of pleasure; this path can be said to focus on specific actors (consumers, offerings, new media and communication technologies), next to the study of networks that trigger economic growth and networks of production in what will be called the Creative Economy.

On the other hand, my intention is to explore the networks that connect artists, spectators, and artworks of Intermedial and/or Relational Aesthetics. This will, in turn, imply that such networks must include the role played by hardware, software, Internet technologies, social media, robotics, and a myriad of other common objects that frequently appear as central to the production of such forms of art, as well as in the way that spectators can associate with them.

I will advance, moreover, that aesthetic experience, with its power to effectuate deterritorializations, will be seen mainly as having the power to open black boxes, in ANT's use of the term. Black boxes that will, in turn, relate to consumers, who use plug-ins to open and deal with them in less determinate ways. This means that consumption has become an experience rather than an activity based on exhaustion. Aesthetic experience, I will argue, is the sort of event that allows for social ties to be put in parenthesis, subjectivities to be deconstructed, and new associations between humans and non-humans to be imagined. All in all, such an event can be said to produce the kind of set-up for experiments that a laboratory creates: a controlled environment in which variables are tested one by one, in a way that allows for their own reality as functional elements to be qualified and explained through the process of experimentation itself. The goal of experimenting may be said to be anything but fully defined, in the sense of it referring to a technical operation, yet there is no intention to argue against the laboratory's ability to generate scientifically sound explanations, which can be ratified by either replication or implementation in other areas and by other disciplines. The main argument behind the image of the laboratory is that objects studied there become rearranged throughout the networks that once held them; that is, after their study has redefined their internal and external relationships with other (quasi) objects.

The product of such a process will always be the constitution of new networks, new associations, new alliances, which will in a smaller or greater degree affect the way humans understand their political commitments, that is, their commitments to specific alliances and their role within distinct networks. These commitments are political and not merely the product of a sociological analysis using ANT (and politics is not the same as sociology): questions concerning the associations produced by actors, which willingly pull together, are not merely answered, but are expected to be conducive to something in politics.

I contend that assemblages of objects meant for artistic display are in general terms the set up of an experimental environment in which human/non-human associations are challenged. The challenge is not

only a matter of making traditional forms of representation defunct, but in opening (quasi) objects (and relationships) and presenting them as lines of flight—as essentially relational entities that have not yet found their connections, or their reterritorializations. The goal is to create open events, rather than defined products, characterized for their deterritorializing effects. The viewer is, therefore, challenged to experiment in a way that is dissimilar from the scientific lab, because it includes taking part in an experiment with their own sense of self. Spectators are called upon to rethink the alliances they are committed to (with both humans and non-humans) in the consecution of their shared or individual goals—there would be, strictly speaking, no individual goals. However, what they face is presented within a relatively structured environment, where the crisis of identity, the creation of subjectivity, the role of objects as mediators, as articulators, and as support can be assumed in a seemingly controlled manner, which appears as non-threatening. In a sense this is a downscaled sublime experience. For Latour, rethinking the commitments to our allies is a matter of what he calls political epistemology¹⁰⁴, inasmuch as one has patent interest in seeing ‘how the assemblages, thus gathered, can renew our sense of being in the same collective’ (Latour, 2005, p 149).

In addition, sensation and reflection become equally important moments of aesthetic experience. Sensation is crucial for the human body to feel, see, hear, taste and smell differently. Sensation is a key aspect of a social critique that is not exhausted in awareness, and which is part of an aesthetic experience that is not subsumed under ideological considerations. Kant acknowledged that enthusiasm—being sensitized at a distance, as a modality of a Nietzschean *action in distans*—is a collective non-pathological affect.

¹⁰⁴ See Latour, 2005, pp 249-253.



Illustration 15: Dan Graham. *Three Linked Cubes*. 1995 (remake)

New sensations have allowed, for instance, an artist like Dan Graham to challenge, in works such as *Three linked cubes* (1986), the roles ascribed to artist and spectator, by inviting the audience to be both viewer and performer (Rush, 2005, p 64). The invitation is not primarily an invitation to reflect upon these roles, which would actually disengage the spectator from the work in hand, but is instead, an invitation to use the installations of video and the manipulation of spaces, through mirrors and glasses, in order to experiment (Rush, 2005, p 64). Such experiment is certainly solely reflective inasmuch as it challenges its own prejudices, but its main effect is to reshuffle the networks that sustained those same prejudices, those opinionated views about an object's function, and about their presumed relationships with objects, spaces, and other humans alike; this requires one to be able to experience and act upon things in a different way, not just to think them in a different way¹⁰⁵. The role of reflection comes about as the deterritorialization proposed stays with the spectator, or as she reflects on the possibilities for new associations to emerge and new alliances to be made, in order to advance in the consecution of their goals—goals which are political, both micro and macro, because one must keep in mind that alliances are always the product of negotiation.

In a word, sensation/reflection next to deterritorialization/reterritorialization, are all axes of an aesthetic experience characterized by its unfolding as becoming. This Deleuzian notion, which I have used earlier,

¹⁰⁵ This statement can be turned around in order to affirm that we cannot think things in a truly different manner unless we are made to experience them in a truly different way.

when discussing the views of Zepke, Lazzarato and O'Sullivan, presents a challenge of its own to ANT.

Can one safely say that ANT's networks are in constant becoming?

ANT and becoming: Latour and the issue of unstable existences

There is a coherence issue at stake if one wants to create a plausible connecting line between a Deleuzian conceptual framework and Latour's ANT. The latter may seem, for the most part, disassociated with the former. The main contention has to do with the role that the concept of becoming has played so far in my analysis: it has explained the functional role of the deterritorialization-reterritorialization continuum, and it has also important ontological implications, when conceptualizing a non-modern form of subjectivity.

The issue arises when dealing with Latour's intention of wanting to continue with the modern gradient that leads from the instability of entities (as they appear having temporal existence) to stable essences (Latour, 1993, p 134). Harman argues that becoming for Deleuze, is an aspect that actors find themselves immersed in, something that must be presupposed by them. It is a concept that would be taken by Latour in an opposite direction: 'becoming is produced by actors, not presupposed by them' (Harman, 2009, p 145). This would stay in line with the implication of time being a negotiation among entities and not what makes such negotiation possible (Harman, 2009, p 30). For Deleuze, insists Harman, becoming cannot be but the pre-existing state of beings. Becoming makes all actors passive agents whose malleability is an essential attribute of their being and, thus, whose existence is not only temporary, but also which leads towards determinable states. He maintains that, Latour and ANT, would firmly stand against 'any philosophy in which disembodied becoming trumps individual actors' (Harman, 2009, p 101), thus he appears irreconcilable with the Deleuzian term and its implications.

Harman, additionally, says that Latour makes an effort not to endorse a substance-based metaphysics, and uses the example of how for Latour, the White House is not the same today, as it was in the time of

Eisenhower. The reason for it not to be so, however, is unrelated to the changes that birds and the environment have made (Harman, 2009, p 104), which is said, in order to avoid from the start, any metaphysics of accidents or any form of empiricism. The meaningful changes for Latour would be, continues Harman, related to the relevant networks at stake, that is, to the changes in the White House's footing as an actor. To get to know these changes, one would have to ask concrete questions such as: how has the relation between the building and the rest of the Washington skyline changed? Is the White House still considered as an exemplary construction in relation to other presidential buildings? Has Hollywood's reification of the presidency as an institution strengthened the role of the White House as a symbol of America's moral virtue, as a place of decision-making with worldwide implications? And so forth.

As I follow Hartman, using the term becoming, in the hope of properly assessing the changes, would imply the presumption of an entity that changes, not in accordance with consequential actions originated by actors, but in accordance with a destination already written in its essence as a fleeting, yet predestined subjectivity. Contrary to Harman, I believe that becoming is precisely helpful to grasp the fragility of the networks that are relevant to an actor. In other words, becoming allows one to grasp the changes that are always set in motion, when actors are presumed to be autonomous and networks unstable by principle: the metaphorical image of the network as a fisher's net, if taken to its conclusion, would show an object that actually avoids change and, if so, would become a structure (an immense one indeed, and one with intricate connections), but still an object that immobilizes a set of relations between entities, one that, when analyzed, tightens its nodes rather than loosens them.

Harman says that there must always be an actor connecting two other actors in order for the connection implied by a network to gain validity, to be recognized as such, and the term becoming would neglect this fact (Harman, 2009, p 105). I propose instead, that becoming is more a matter of relating to unconnected moments and not of accepting the existential orientation through time of an initial entity

(the White House as an the example) (Harman, 2009, p 105). Becoming, for Harman, is taken, on the one hand, as a notion that is sustained by the ontological presumption of time as an absolute category that implies motion, dynamism, etc., and which would be explained by Deleuze's close relation to Bergson. For Harman the problem here is purely one of speculative metaphysics: actors are not thrust forward because of their temporal existence, but on the contrary, actors produce time. I believe that both these starting points, these metaphysical principles, can lead us in the same direction: towards an analysis of fragile networks and actors whose footing is in constant flux. To some extent, I think Harman's point here has little effect on the practical use of ANT and may result in a crucial point of consideration only within metaphysical speculation. Given my more pragmatic approach, I believe I can safely dismiss this roadblock, without any harm regarding the rigorous use of ANT.

Yet, on the other hand, Harman does take the notion of becoming as if signalling the constant change of a pre-existing entity (The White House), but this is precisely what becoming is not. There are two instants that must be differentiated, the world as becoming and the explanation of such becoming. The modern gradient that Latour wishes to follow (which uses a language of representation) cannot but talk of entities, relations, and networks that are concrete (substantial, structural), that are stable at a specific moment and may remain so for longer periods of time (time always arbitrarily measured of course). Relations, however, are always fragile; networks can always collapse, and agencies can change their commitment to certain alliances in exchange for others. It is this fragility, this presumed instability, this impossibility for networks to endure as such that reminds us that these same networks are not structures¹⁰⁶, which they are in constant flux, that is, in constant becoming. Becoming cannot be taken as a final cause, as a necessary transformation suffered by everything in the world, in order to arrive to a particular destination without defeating the whole purpose of the concept's use in the first place. Becoming, henceforth, is by no means a concept that would argue in favour of entities having a

¹⁰⁶ Harman even points out this same problem out as a flaw of relationalist metaphysics (Harman, 2009, p 129, 130).

substance-like form that would endure the passage of time, but is instead a notion that allows an analysis to capture the dynamism of entities, without losing sight of what is under discussion, and without having to assume the substantiation of entities at one point or another. An actor's footing in reality is, for both Deleuze and Latour, constantly challenged and cannot be reduced to any form of representation or essence (whether in a modern or pre-modern sense of the term). The term becoming is not intended here as a Heideggerian existential, a Kantian category, or as an ontological foundation of time. It will simply help, firstly, to clearly grasp the fragility and constant reassembling of networks and actors. Secondly, it will allow for experience to be conceptualized as a process of the form deterritorialization-reterritorialization and, in turn, authorize a view of subjectivity as the dynamics of self-creation. This understanding of becoming as change, which is spoken of always in reference to fleeting matter, to a relative form assessed that contextualizes content, and works out as a specific mediatized expression. In other words, the fourfold of expression that Deleuze and Guattari thematize in *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 43), is all in all, an understanding that stays in line with the basics of ANT's networks.

Concluding remarks on ANT

The aim of this methodological digression was to introduce ANT and Latour's ideas in order to provide the conceptual tools that will allow me to rekindle the issue of political art, the issue of how, in fact, political art can be relevant or politically effective today. Leaving behind any modern notion of political art and, in general, any notion that would place the question of relevance within the limits of the presumed A-W-S triad is an endeavour that necessarily pushed me to search answers beyond those prefigured limits. More than persuasive rhetoric, concerning the ways in which art touches upon life, I wish to trace the possibilities that, in a clear and concrete fashion, are given to the spectator in aesthetic

experience. The aesthetic experience conceptualized thus far will, in turn, propose an artwork that ceases to be a receptacle or transmitter, in order to become an ally, to become another actor—an actant—within a network. The artist becomes, thus, an actor whose role is to create objects, which propose deterritorializations, that is, objects that invite the spectator to experiment with her identity—an identity that is primarily built upon relations. The spectator should be able to see in the artwork a mediator whose status is defined neither by the inner qualities of an artist who escaped social grasp, nor by its virulent criticism of the overwhelming social forces that forever have entrapped us.

The political relevance of current forms of art must, therefore, be rephrased in a way, which leaves behind a modern language, as well as any form of identity politics. It must equally depart from a reduction of its relevance to its ability to destroy institutions, traditional identities, and modes of production. In a word, asking art to effectively change the world means giving it an impossible task.¹⁰⁷

Yet, expecting art to be nothing more than a reified expression of social critique is to expect nothing from it. The only sensible way, therefore, to qualify the political relevance of (Intermedial and relational) art will be to leave behind *sensus communis*, to open up the closed AWS triad, and to embrace, rather than reject, the connections between the inner world (art) and the outer world (life) which can no longer remain apart.

The general gesture of critique that I embarked on, through my reading of Rancière, has raised all anchors. A move towards deterritorialization in itself, this analysis must now begin to propose a destiny and a landing spot. In what follows I will attempt to do both. I will begin by cutting transversally through the layers of a social reality, which is porous and sustained by a myriad of networks, but one which also allows for the concrete networks I am looking for to be traced.

¹⁰⁷ This explains Oosterling's remarks in 'Ecoliteracy in between Politics, Philosophy and Art. The shared Interests of Rotterdam Skillcity' in *Yes, Naturally. How Art saves the World*, concerning the role of eco-art in changing the world. See: Oosterling 2013, p. 100. This question is ambiguously raised as to the role of ecodesign (See: Oosterling 2009a).

Finally, given my use of ANT, I will try to avoid all concepts aiming to denote social wholes. If they briefly appear, then their sole purpose will be simply to summarize or rephrase, although never in a way that reduces complex networks, alliances, or actors into any set of pre-existing social forces or to any idea regarding an enclosed and patently structural social order.

PART 3

Tracing the political Intermedial: *Beyond capitalism, class theory and the global*

Introduction

Art, politics, and everyday life need to be interwoven, in order to open perspectives on each other's subjectivation processes. Artists, spectators and artistic objects were one to stay limited within the triad proposed by Rancière, must still all be actors who survive only as parts of intricate networks. None can be explained by itself; none is self sufficient in any sense of the word. There is no art production that can last without selling. No spectator has art as her only investment, and no artwork dealing with the virtual world can exist without the telecommunications company that supplies its Internet connection. The empirical, the pragmatic, and the contingent can no longer be explained away as irrelevant to the underlying social forces.

These statements, these *factishes* if you will, are not intended as the recognition of self-defeat, or as a sign of the bleak state of affairs, which we must face today. Instead, I propose to see them as constituting events that have surpassed all social theory that remains focused on delivering an understanding of society as a self fulfilled prophecy, where immobility and necessity proliferates while the empirical vanishes. Moving beyond the AWS triad demands exploring the intricacies of these phenomena, which can only be achieved by diving into the networks where our actors move.

Free and ever growing financial markets, expanding commerce, strong and weak emerging economies, large transnational corporations, and high-tech booming markets, are just some of the frequently mentioned protagonists of today's (global or post-historic) capitalism. It is in this world that all quarrels and understandings regarding art's political relevance must take place, and actually does take place on a daily basis. It is in this world that artists, artworks, and spectators meet each other, and where aesthetic experience must produce its effects.

I attempt here to glance through a maze of events that claim a significant role within the global economy. My aim is to make use of empirical analyses as gateways that will lead towards traceable networks, where all questions regarding identity, self-creation, sense of community, and dissensus, are

captured as concrete associations and sustainable alliances. The importance of putting these concrete events, where networks are sustained, into perspective is, in part, what I will try to unravel. Leaving behind the analytical aid of a ‘social’ (of social forces) that would give measure and stability to all relationships is both the aim and justification of using ANT in this analysis. Yet, stating that ‘the social’ is constructed at every turn is merely a starting point. The goal is to deliver an explanation that can be traceable, that will be relevant to the central questions concerning art’s political footing, and that will not end up reducing a dissensual community into an ideologically stable form of *sensus communis*. Therefore, my aim is to elaborate on the associations and the actors whose alliances have a political say; networks, which must be checked, recalibrated, and revised every step of the way.

Next to this, I believe it is by no means clear that a study (even if brief) of concrete politico-economic phenomena, which are in principle distant from the AWS triad, is indeed needed or can even be valuable to answer the questions raised about political art. I will work, therefore, towards the consolidation of an approach to networks that, if it is to create a coherent understanding, must traverse various disciplines: geopolitics, economics, political economy, experiential marketing and philosophy. In other words, talk about the production of subjectivities, of social relationships, and of common projects, must today deal with a reality that must be reduced to its global implications, but in doing so it cannot but ignore the patent gaps and discontinuities which, I believe, cannot be apprehended through a single theoretical grasp.

I will claim, moreover, that the way I will explore ‘social’ phenomena is intended to deliver a theoretical underpinning and will be phrased in a language that ceases to adhere to the presumption of a totalizing social reality, which would reduce the dimension of all associations between humans and objects into a single level explanation—which would be present in the use of concepts such as Global Capitalism. Given my intention of tracing and assembling, rather than presuming the social ties that are important to answer questions on art, I must deal with the empirical conditions that sustain the presumed forms of

agency that are present in the artist-work-spectator triad. Only when a clear set of associations and alliances has been established, will I be able to secure the role of subjectivities within the networks that sustain Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics; forms of art that, I dare say from the start, are politically relevant.

Indeed, the appearance of customized products and services, of experiential offerings, of a non-collar workplace, of sustainable development projects, and the emergence of working environments that harvest creativity, pose serious obstacles for any understanding of political art that strives for simplification and easily drawn lines of separation between cultural spaces of social (re)production, between class divides, or between forms of creative and non-creative labour. In addition, the receding normative strength of traditional, institutional forms of subjectivity acts as a further catalyst in the production of subjectivities that escape modern paradigms¹⁰⁸. To name a case in point, the classic Marxist generalizations concerning the relationships between the (subdued to the logic of profit) capitalist and the (alienated) worker or the (passive) consumer and the (fetish) object of consumption are hardly relevant in today's political debate (if they ever were). In addition, from a theoretical or academic point of view, their stark oversimplification delivers little more than caricatures of a reality that cannot but ignore the concrete and pragmatic consequences of the long list of phenomena noted above. Hence, theoretical hastiness for totalizing and closed explanation, risk making the question about art's political relevance an impossible task, where aesthetic experience and artistic creation would seemingly occur on a level where sustainable consumption, social media, rising sea levels, profit margins, high tech industries, etc., would remain ideally, as separate or inoperative entities.

Finally, my analysis in Part 3 begins with a sparing exploration of the critical ideas and diagnostics of Global Capitalism in David Korten and David Harvey. Their aims and methods are certainly dissimilar,

¹⁰⁸ Hardt and Negri, for instance, talk about the demise of a modern understanding of subjectivity and the prevalence of fully functioning 'postmodern' subjectivities: 'We might say that postmodernism is what you have when the modern theory of social constructivism is taken to its extreme and all subjectivity is recognized as artificial.. [...] The imperial social institutions might be seen, then, in a fluid process of the generation and corruption of subjectivity' (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp 196, 197).

yet both allow for a seemingly coherent proposal on the current trends of the global economy to be nicely diagrammatized. Following these authors, I will then focus on Richard Florida's ideas on the Creative Economy in conjunction with the ideas of Joseph Pine and James Gilmore regarding the Experience Economy. The latter authors will allow me to swiftly change my focus towards the (allow me to say for a last time) micropolitical phenomena that accompany the production of 'experiential offerings', the production of targeted consumptions, and that will allow the analysis to move towards the important role that mediated forms of interaction play in today's economic networks¹⁰⁹.

It is in this last part that the questions about art will begin to clearly appear once more, as I will try to trace and highlight: 1) the important role of the Intermedial and the alliances that sustain it, when talking about self-creation and the deployment of subjectivities and 2) the heuristic use of ANT's concepts as powerful notions that help to understand experiences of consumption; only then can a concrete answer to the questions about the political relevance of art be delivered.

Uneven development and the crisis of modern capitalism

I begin with some general figures that will help to qualify the scope and the time frame to be considered here. Global growth numbers and trends are the economist's (and many a politician's) favourite rhetorical device. Economic growth is in general seen as a necessarily positive and desirable goal, and as one through which the performance of the global economy as a whole can be straightforwardly judged. Global growth has followed a decreasing trend for the past forty to fifty years. This trend has gone from 3.5% during the 1960s, to 2.4% during the 1970s, to 1.4% during the 1980s followed by 1.1% during 1990s, and even lower since 2000 (Harvey, 2006, p 42). This decline in global growth, however, has

¹⁰⁹ This does not mean that economic implications are the only ones involved or that the relationships between humans, tools of production, and objects of consumption, can be reduced to economic calculation.

occurred in parallel to expanding financial markets and recurrent financial crises¹¹⁰. The turn to financialization, says Harvey, took strength in the 1970's as monetarist views pushed for less regulation and higher interest rates elsewhere, next to lower inflation rates at home (Harvey, 2006, p 32)¹¹¹. This expansion of financial markets accelerated during the 1990s with higher levels of wealth concentration and thus greater inequality (Harvey, 2006, pp 32, 45).

The liberalization of markets has become an established economic truth today, and supranational organizations like the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO have been set in place as guardians of the free market, of small government, and of less regulation, which are taken as the necessary elements for the global economy to grow. Parallel to these organizations, corporations have surged as the most powerful economic actors of the global economy¹¹². The aggregate sales of the world's ten largest corporations in 1991 exceeded the aggregate GNP of the world's hundred smallest countries (Korten, 2001, p 210). Governments had to respond, in turn, with a an arsenal of attractive policies, consisting of low corporate taxes and looser labour laws, in order to retain a favourable view by these corporate giants (Bakan, 2003, p 25).

Given their sheer size and impact, it is not surprising that corporations have faced 250 shareholder class action suits per year since 1995 (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, p 23), or that Plus, Enron, Tyco, BP, Ford (with its going green speech in 2003), to name just a few, have become symbols of corporate greed, corruption, inefficiency and extravagance (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, p 24). We have also been witnessing,

¹¹⁰ The Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s, the stock crash of 1987, the Asian crisis in the late 1990s, Argentina's default, and the most recent financial and debt crises would all attest to this fact. However it is worth noting the lack of singularity of this recurrence, which is argued for by Stiglitz as he follows historian Charles Kindleberger in this respect. The latter argues that, before WWII, financial crises were recurrent every 10 years for the last 400, which would make of the 25-year period after the war, an exception rather than a rule of capitalism's history (Stiglitz, 2009, p 240).

¹¹¹ The 1970s witnessed a crisis of the Keynesian policies that had sustained growth thus far, with a rise in unemployment and inflation soon after the 1973 oil crisis. The response of most western governments to this crisis paved the way for the market liberalization, which would receive the name of neoliberalism (Bakan, 2003, p 24).

¹¹² The surge is anything but spontaneous. Joseph Stiglitz, for instance, has named the last 25 years of economic policy as *Corporate Welfare*: the recent bailouts were the continuation of a 25-year-old policy of government protecting corporations. Another recent example is the increase in agricultural subsidies given by Bush to cotton farmers in 2006 for 2.4 billion dollars (Stiglitz, 2009, p 199).

with the present economic crisis, the rise of the so-called ‘too big to fail’ phenomenon, which has made of banks and financial organisations a different type of market actor, which must play according to special rules that protect them from the bad consequences of their decisions (Stiglitz, 2009, pp 49, 50).

The concentration of wealth and market influence, furthermore, is not delimited to the financial markets, but regards, among others, the concentration of land. This trend is exemplified by the US, where from 1935 to 1989 the number of small farms declined from 6.8 million to under 2.1 million (while the population roughly doubled) (Korten, 2001, p 208). One quickly realizes that the proclivity for concentration has much deeper effects, for it is not only the tenure of money as such that remains in fewer hands¹¹³. For instance, in the year 2000 the 100 largest corporations in America paid for 75% of commercial television time and 50% of public television time (Korten, 2001, p 154). Yet, the power to control outlet channels of communication is overshadowed today by the mind-boggling effects that economic activities have over ecosystems and inhabited areas throughout the globe. Korten repeatedly notes these predatory effects on the environment, next to our continuous production of garbage:

Over a twenty-year period, assuming current levels of recycling, the typical American household “consumes” the equivalent of roughly 100 trees in the form of newsprint. Sixty to 65 percent of that newsprint is devoted to advertisements. Even though we may never read and have no interest in the ads, we are not given the option of subscribing to a paper without them. (Korten, 2001, p 259)

For Korten, this bleak picture poses no real mystery to unravel, and one does not need sophisticated economic theories to understand its workings, its destination, or its effects. For him, the corporation, as a historical legal form of capitalist organization, with its limited liability and its sometimes fantastic

¹¹³ Korten stresses this point from the start: ‘The point of departure of *When Corporations Rule the World* is the evidence that we are experiencing accelerating social and environmental disintegration in nearly every country in the world—as revealed by a rise in poverty, unemployment, inequality, violent crime, failing families, and environmental deterioration’ (Korten, 2001, p 21).

financial muscle is the primary source of the problem—with our consumption habits playing a strong supporting role. For him, the noted effects are not the expected results of an inherently exploitative economic regime, but the product of ambivalent responsibility, lack of regulation, and abuse of power. Still, one must refrain from viewing corporations as a sort of new Leviathan claiming authority over its domains. Corporations do not function as a unit. The complexity of their governance is testified by Edward Liddy, an insider, after the US government take-over of AIG in 2008, in an article for the Washington Post published in the spring of 2009 (Stiglitz, 2009, p 115). This unreliable governance contributes in diluting the possibility for quick responses against environmental depredation, financial irresponsibility or even any sort of accountability (as was the case with much of the banking sector before and after they were bailed out). For Korten, the greater problems that are faced today cannot be understood by the conceptual figure of universal exploitation, but are instead problems that take very concrete forms, and which occur in specific areas around the globe.

Even in the information age, each person living in a high-income country consumes on average from 45 to 85 tons of natural resources annually, including their total share of soil erosion, mining wastes, and other ancillary materials. Industrial economies require about 300 kilograms of natural resources to generate each US \$100 in income. (Korten, 2001, p 300)

Besides the environmental catastrophes, which can reach global proportions, it is the rather small, localized, destruction of ecosystems and the abuses perpetrated against local populations, although in large areas of the globe, to be sure, that characterize the problems of our global capitalist society. This also means that the practical approach he takes is not fortuitous, but entirely determined by the specific circumstances on the ground. For Korten, there is little to learn from strong analytical division or narratives that smell of *complot*. There is no structural overdetermination of class interests and hidden exploitation at a world scale. There are, notwithstanding, powerful actors who have amassed enough wealth, enough lobbying power, and robust enough transnational organizations, to have the ability to

impact entire populations as well as large geographical extensions. Concentration of wealth would be, hence, an intentional occurrence to some extent, although without this implying the existence of a gravitational centre. Liberal or libertarian views, in turn, would serve as the public speech that helps to justify the ambitions of the powerful corporate elite (Korten, 2001, p 72).

Korten chooses a pragmatic approach, in the weak sense of the term, where concrete problems are highlighted and earthly solutions proposed. The point of departure for his diagnosis is, in brief: 'A globalized economic system delinked from place has an inherent bias in favour of the large, the global, the competitive, the resource-extractive, the short-term, and the wants of those with money' (Korten, 2001, p 241). From this initial statement the main problems that follow are:

1) The growing dependence of people and localities on global corporations and financial markets. The consequence of this dependence is to pit people and localities against one another in a self-destructive competition for economic survival, yielding ever more power to the center. (Korten, 2001, p 241)

2) Those who call for expanding the economic pie as the answer to poverty overlook an important reality. Whether or not a person has access to the resources required for survival depends less on absolute income than on relative income. In a free-market economy, each individual is in competition for access to the limited environmental space, and the person with the most money invariably wins. (Korten, 2001, pp 53, 54)

And, 3) It is a fundamental paradox of our time that in the name of market competition we have created a system that unifies corporations while dividing people and forcing them to compete for corporate favor. (Korten, 2001, p 242)

The responsibility of corporations, to repeat, is undeniable for Korten. Their motivation originates in an (libertarian) ideological credo that is fixed in keeping the current flows of money undisturbed. Global

libertarians' dreams, says Korten (2001, p133), can be summed up in a forthright picture of what the world should look like for them:

The world's money, technology, and markets are controlled and managed by gigantic global corporations;

A common consumer culture unifies all people in a shared quest for material gratification;

There is perfect global competition among workers and localities to offer their services to investors at the most advantageous terms;

Corporations are free to act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to national or local consequences;

Relationships, both individual and corporate, are defined entirely by the market; and

There are no loyalties to place and community.

Lastly, his diagnosis can be finalized with the sombre image of what these corporate beliefs entail:

Perhaps one day, if allowed sufficient freedom to follow its own unrestrained tendencies, a global corporation will achieve the ultimate in productive efficiency, an entity made up solely of productive computers and machines busily engaged in the replication of money. We might call it the perfectly efficient corporation. Although this is surely not what anyone intends, we are acting as though this is the world we seek to create. (Korten, 2001, p 223)

Addressing this troublesome state of affairs requires all-encompassing solutions, supported in the global and local institutions, and in line with the goal of creating a sustainable economic system. All of these objectives, to repeat, must begin with the realization that 'the human purpose is better served by a system that divides corporations and forces them to compete for the favour of people, in the true spirit of competitive market' (Korten, 2001, pp 242), and that 'incremental changes within individual

corporations or political institutions cannot provide an adequate solution. The whole system of institutional power must be transformed' (Korten, 2001, p 248).

Thus, two specific tenets should guide economic production:

1. Bring human uses of the environment into balance with the regenerative capacities of the ecosystem; and
2. Give priority in the allocation of available natural capital to ensuring that all people have the opportunity to fulfill the physical needs adequately and to pursue their full social, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual development. (Korten, 2001, p 56)

With these conditions established, the way to ensure that corporations will act responsibly is achieved through strict legal obligations regarding the internalization of costs¹¹⁴ and a strong government that maintains fair conditions of competition and sustainability¹¹⁵.

Korten's diagram and practical solutions can be said to follow a well known vein of Anglo-American pragmatism, which is not interested in the demise of the market economy, but rather on securing its proper functioning, its beneficial character even. However, his reappraisal of the market is not intended as an apologetics of the markets qua markets, but runs along lines that appeal to a higher moral stance, in order to stop seeing greed as the necessary motivation for markets to work (Korten, 2001, p 239)¹¹⁶.

Korten sees in the existence of unregulated translational investment the origin of a clear phenomenon

¹¹⁴ 'Market theory also specifies that for a market to allocate efficiently, the full costs of each product must be borne by the producer and be included in the selling price. Economists call it cost internalization. Externalizing some part of the product's cost to others not a party to the transaction is a form of subsidy that encourages excessive production and use of the product at the expense from others' (Korten, 2001, p 82).

¹¹⁵ According to Korten, the role of government can be summarized in the following five principles (Korten, 2001, pp 96, 97):

- Conditions for Fair competition—(just distribution-redistribution)
- Moral foundation (trust)
- Public goods supply
- Full cost-pricing (control externalization of environmental and social costs)
- Ecological sustainability

¹¹⁶ 'Whereas our pursuit of material abundance has created material scarcity, our pursuit of life may bring a new sense of social, spiritual, and even material abundance' (Korten, 2001, p 239).

that has two concrete ingredients: a complete disregard for the local (the ecosystems, the inhabitants, where production takes place) and a complete focus on short-term gains. His proposals encompass not only regulation, but also the rejection of materialism (taken in its everyday usage rather than in the philosophical sense) in favour of a more spiritual future. A spiritualism that has guises of inclusiveness, diversity, and strong communitarian bonds, which he evidently see as springing naturally from localities, but also a pragmatic appeal for sustainable economic development¹¹⁷. For him a community is a surely powerful entity, where a certain air of social harmony and consensus can be expected. In his words:

Our challenge is to create a locally rooted planetary system biased towards the small, the local, the cooperative, the resource-conserving, the long-term, and the needs of everyone—a system that empowers all people to create a good living in balance with nature. The goal is not to wall each community off from the world but rather to create zones of local accountability and responsibility within which people can reclaim the power that is rightly theirs to manage their economies in the common interest. (Korten, 2001, pp 241, 242)

Korten's stance, whether one labels it pragmatic, utopian, or eclectic, has, nonetheless, interesting aspects. One may disagree with the lack of theoretical sophistication behind his idea of community, but one can hardly doubt the depth of his accumulated knowledge regarding economic development. I take his vaporous understanding of community as a theoretically weak, yet rather common approach towards socio-economic problems—a metaphysics about a politics that return us to nature, to a harmonious state of affairs. I see in his pragmatic attitude, on the contrary, a conscious methodological choice that springs from a recognized impossibility of giving theoretical unity to capitalism as a common whole; the label of 'global economy' is better read as figurative rather than scientific speech.

¹¹⁷ In Korten's words, 'In the world of the ecological age, people will be unified not by the mutual insecurity of global competition, but by a global consciousness that we share the same planet and common destiny' (Korten, 2001, p 242).

The apparent impossibility to reconcile community and market economy is as old as capitalism itself¹¹⁸. It poses a disjunction, which inevitably forces one to choose between the two. The inclination to see the expansion of capitalism, with its deterritorializing implications on traditional values and customs, as the main root of its evils makes way for all sorts of reactionary and utopian responses to follow. Korten's idea of a small, self-governing, community that is responsible and attuned with its environment seems too close to a romanticized image of the indigenous tribe living in harmony with its environment, while remaining entirely respectful of its neighbours—a somewhat watered down version of Rousseau, or a return to de las Casas¹¹⁹. However, if the actual role of the appealed community remains ambivalent and abstract, this is because Korten has no intention of rejecting modernity or capitalism as such. This makes his calls for spirituality and community little more than a rhetorical recourse to pathos. Yet, his pretension to rekindle the market economy, by returning to the communitarian bonds, reveals, by the same token, the crisis of progress as an essential part of all modern narratives. Progress, even for those who are still rooting for the modern, is no longer precisely what it claims to be: a progression and a destiny. Instead, progress is already in Korten nothing more than a remote possibility for those who remain at the margins, and in constant need of reformulation (downwards) for those who strive to achieve it, or maintain it¹²⁰. However, given the nature of the problems discussed by Korten (poverty, abuse of power, accumulation, etc.) and the little attention he pays to the actors involved, the way they connect to each other, and the established means needed for money flows to occur, it can still be questioned whether a more theoretically cohesive approach can explain the geopolitical problems in a better fashion.

¹¹⁸ The early socialists who saw capitalism as a threat to social bonds are but one example of this. Adam Smith's view of an atomized society, exemplary of all Robinsonian economics, serves to dismiss the question by posing social relationships as following from economic relationships.

¹¹⁹ In line with this conclusion, one can include Timothy Morton's assertion that environmental romanticism wants to denounce the evils of globalization by claiming that it has undermined any coherent sense of place (Morton, 2007, p 84).

¹²⁰ The hard austerity measures in Western Europe, especially in the last countries to have reached the 'developed' economy label (Spain, Greece), the crisis of the neo-liberal star European country of the nineties (Ireland), would seem to point in this same direction: a reformulation (downwards) of the welfare state and a revisit to the idea of achieving rapid advances in well-being.

Having surfed through Korten's diagnosis and, in order to consider a more theoretically compact approach, I turn now to neo-Marxist geographer David Harvey. From Harvey, a different diagnosis can be expected, even if both he and Korten agree on the empirical picture that was delineated above.

Harvey's analysis decidedly follows stringent Marxist lines that will inevitably enclose him in a dichotomic conceptual framework. Through Harvey's analysis my main interest is to explore how such a framework struggles to explain, through a coherent theoretical deployment, conditions on the ground, which are extremely complex, where the economical, the political, the cultural, the social, etc., form a dense fog; where direct systemic relations are difficult to establish.

As with any Marxist perspective class lines must be set in place, a system dynamic identified, and a structurally necessary outcome established. To get started then:

The first lesson we must learn, therefore, is that if it looks like class struggle and acts like class struggle then we have to name it for what it is. The mass of the population has either to resign itself to the historical and geographical trajectory defined by these overwhelming class power or respond to it in class terms (Harvey, 2006, p 65).

If one does not wish to resign, then one must be able to gain consciousness of the system's dynamic, in other words, to have a clear view of the trajectory that bourgeois class interests have imposed on the rest. This trajectory is, plainly, the path of capital accumulation. For Harvey, capital accumulation follows seven strict tenets. Three of those seven tenets are of particular interest¹²¹: '1) activity is expansionary and growth is accepted as inevitable and good', '4) technological change (or "progress") is inevitable and accepted as a good in itself' and '5) the system is contradictory and inherently unstable. (Harvey, 2006, p 95)

¹²¹ The rest are as follows: '2) Growth is sustained through the exploitation of living labor; 3) class struggle is endemic but not threatening; 6) crises are inevitable and are characterized by over accumulation; 7) if the surpluses cannot be somehow absorbed then they will be devalued' (Harvey, 2006, p 97).

The engine that moves the system, as with Marx himself, is competition: competition between capitalists creates a tendency for accumulation and monopoly, and competition between workers creates a tendency to lower wages and increased unemployment. Competition, in its more practical appearance, works as an engine for technological and organizational development, as companies work in search for greater efficiency and lower costs. From the dynamics of competition, says Harvey:

we derive the inevitability of technological and organisational dynamism within capitalism.

Production functions constantly change and the geographical landscape of capitalism becomes unstable. Capitalists occupying superior locations likewise gain excess profits. This advantage is likely to be temporary. (Harvey, 2006, p 97)

For Harvey, competition, the engine of capitalist dynamism, explains not only accumulation as an unqualified whole. In fact, what makes it a valuable scientific tool is that it explains the trends in accumulation that relate to geographical change and geographical uneven development—the so called developing versus developed socio-economic differences. It would seem, if one follows Harvey's reasoning, that in order to change the balance of power between classes, then the current structure, through which flows of money pass, must be reshuffled in order for the current trends in accumulation to cease. If that cannot be done, then the whole structure must be taken down. The first option would point towards a rational predetermination of the flows of money, with authoritarian guises lurking as five-year plans are established. However, if one does not want to revive the USSR, then there is actually little or no space for reform (a common Marxist gesture), thus, making the demise of capitalism the only way out of the 'coercive laws of competition' (Harvey, 2006, p 98).

Harvey's gesture of making competition the triggering aspect behind the systems' short term instability (and long term inevitability) is, curiously enough, the argument of preference of those who see in that same dynamics of competition the needed flexibility that makes capitalism the most successful (and

desirable) economic system. Their argument states simply that because capitalism is inherently unstable then it cannot be said to concentrate wealth (concrete flows of money). On the contrary, its short-term relative instability makes it impossible to foresee the long-term beneficiaries of the accumulated capital¹²². In other words, because capitalism is flexible, and production advantages only temporary, then flows of money are not rigid and cannot be said to enrich a particular sector of the population. However, in neither form of the argument is it relevant to have a clear picture of the concrete actors involved in the process. By making flows of money go from one abstract pole (labour) to another (capital), not only does Harvey lose the concrete individuals and companies, but also basically, any form of the existing localities (regions, cities, neighbourhoods, etc.) will remain unexplained (although open to being deduced).

On the other side of the aisle, say in libertarian hands, the argument simply flows in a different direction. Competition becomes the main ingredient for capitalism to be able to work appropriately, that is, as a system that enables economic growth by opening markets and economic opportunities, in general, for those who did not have them, but without having a clear idea of whom those fortunate ones are either. For market enthusiasts instability can easily become a mark of freedom, and of fair game, because it levels the field and assures that pre-existing political power cannot determine the outcome of market interaction in the first place; this is the calyx of neo-liberalism as one follows Hayek or Friedman¹²³.

It is easy to see that the way in which the short- and the long-term are established cannot be anything but arbitrary, at least to some extent, and the same goes for establishing the winners and the losers who have no face or abode. However, there lies a true obstacle at the base, for there is so much that can be

¹²² Short-term stability, the temporary advantage of a firm or a country over its peers, would support the same conclusion: long-term zones of investment and accumulation of capital cannot be foreseen beyond the identification of very general patterns.

¹²³ Hayek's unforeseeable consequences, arising from any rational decision, exemplify this view. This notion is used to argue against central planning in economics, and in favor of allowing individuals (and legally a corporation has the rights of an individual) to interact in a scenario that is less restrictive (less regulated) and thus more determined by the interacting parties. Friedman's co-authored *Free to Choose* (1980) justifies free market economy by constantly challenging economic decisions motivated (he argues) by solely political factors: free trade, unions, employment policies, maintaining a strong currency, etc., are all policies that have no economic rationale and are all in the long run doomed to fail.

predicted, in terms of concrete capital accumulation, based solely on a current state of affairs, that there is simply no empirical base on which to confirm or negate the argument at large, no matter which ideological front puts it forward.

Harvey's tenets are not simply methodological presuppositions playing a minor role, but are the supporting base of his arguments. As such, they remain immobile and are not up for discussion. The main pillar is undoubtedly class division, which allows him to pose two distinct and irreconcilable interests. The standard Marxist framework cannot confront the specificities of global capitalism today, which, says Korten, has to do with the role of corporations and the particular economic interests of a very small minority. One must bear in mind, however, that the engine behind exploitation is for both Korten and Harvey, competition. The difference would be that for Korten, competition is not the same type of phenomenon across the board, but is actually harmful only when the relative power (economic and political) of some of the actors involved exceeds the combined power of the many—a clear-cut line is not drawn by Korten, making it, again, more of something to be decided on a case-to-case basis than levelled with a theoretical sickle. Harvey himself is not indifferent to the entanglements of the concrete panorama. He is quite aware that neo-liberalism is a complex machine: an actual set of economic policies and institutions, a dominant scientific discourse, an array of existing economic agents on the ground, as well as an ideology in the most traditional sense. In Harvey's words:

The visible hand (as Chandler calls it), of multinational corporations has consequently been of considerable if not greater importance in the uneven geographical development of capitalism relative to the hidden hand of the market. (Harvey, 2006, p 100)

And:

But, clearly, neo-liberalism is an unstable and evolving regime of accumulation rather than a fixed and harmoniously functional configuration of political economic power. This paves the

way for looking at conservatism as a potential response to its inherent contradictions. (Harvey, 2006, p 29)

[W]e are not confronting any simple “export” of neo-liberalism from some hegemonic center. The development of neo-liberalism must be regarded as a decentered and unstable evolutionary process characterized by uneven geographical developments and strong competitive pressures between a variety of dynamic centers of political-economic power. (Harvey, 2006, p 41)

An entirely different light shines through Harvey’s last passage in particular. It recognizes the articulations of power, which would point towards a somewhat Foucaultian analysis, and away from the Marxist dichotomies. In the end it is the class divide, which Harvey simply urges us to recognize, that which seems to swallow every form of concrete power struggles. The conceptual porosity of neo-liberalism is what makes establishing class lines a Herculean task, in the best of cases, and an anachronism in the worst. Corporations and their vested interests, their lobbies and their influence, are not constitutive of a total bourgeoisie. Their effects on so many people’s well-being are patent, persistent, and traceable, but not because they are the result of a coherent class politics, which would mask the exploitation at the bottom. These effects obey much earthlier reasons, which are related to an irrational use of resources; including its accumulation and expenditure. It remains true that ecological destruction does not sum up all the problems of an economic system, yet an abstract proposition such as the extreme focus on short-term gains (a euphemism for selfishness) may not do a better job either. There is still the ever-present impossibility of the Marxian framework to deal with any of the concrete actors, objects, means, etc., which, in turn, explains the gravest of lacks in this theoretical perspective. For instance, Harvey says neoconservative movements in the US act in a coherent way (consciously or unconsciously) affecting a mass, which remains quantitatively undetermined but which one can only presume is a majority. He then divides in twos, in classic Marxist fashion, with the effects of exploitation

and dispossession following as one class overpowers the other. How neo-liberalism, as a set of conditions on the ground throughout the global economy, articulates these, in principle, nationally bounded movements among each other is unclear. One can try to move forward with Harvey by assuring that neoconservative movements help to push a neo-liberal agenda, aiming, thus, to reconcile the internal contradictions of the system—giving some temporal stability. But the issue becomes problematic when one attempts to keep the coherence of the identities established by simply asking: how does a purely deterritorializing economic system allow for consistent exploitation across global class lines, while closely allied with reactionary responses, which are based among nationalist, religious, ethnic, or other geographically written forms of communitarian bonding? An answer maintaining class divides is not easy to see at any rate. Along these lines, how are rival CEOs able to sit at Davos, while supposedly having only the will for individual profit in common? In this case, either the ideological and idiosyncratic—the identification with local interests at home—is superficial or the apparent air of high corporate agreements is flawed. If predatory competition is in fact the driving engine, then all appearance of agreement (or collusion) is absurd¹²⁴. If on the contrary, it is actually the will to avoid competition that which motivates the meetings, then Korten's diagnosis regarding corporations would be right on the spot.

Quite clearly, for both, Harvey and Korten, the enemy is, at least in principle, neo-liberalism. Yet, as this latter is neither a stringent structure nor a class, the Marxist analysis would still seem inadequate for the task. Korten and Harvey agree on the role that neo-liberalism and corporations play in establishing and maintaining relations of production that result in inequality, on the one hand, and in unsustainable economic production, on the other. Harvey does not propose, as can be expected, clear-cut modes of action, which would sound as conciliatory approaches. Korten does propose modes of action, which are

¹²⁴ The meetings could naturally be said to constitute various forms of price setting, collusion or cartel behaviour, but if this is the case then policies and laws aiming to preserve conditions of competition and not the elimination of competition would be the common sense way to go.

undoubtedly geopolitical in nature and entirely modern in their political expectations. In conclusion, for both, the constitution of community as a starting as well as an ending point is the most difficult element to secure by any means other than theoretical presupposition. Their views dismiss questions regarding the actual relationships that exist between companies, workers, products, and consumers. Korten's solutions, in particular, seem to assume that the proper legal framework will take care of the existing problems; the bigger or more urgent ones, at least.

I believe that, in order to approach these issues, a different road must be taken: one which allows the micropolitical phenomena, the traceable networks, to shine through, and so for questions regarding subjectivity, *sensus communis*, immaterial labour, consumption and the like, to be properly answered. For this task I turn to Florida, and to Pine and Gilmore, the former because he introduces creativity on an economic level—the Creative Class and the creative economy—and the latter because they use an artistic metaphor—theatre and stage—to characterize current economic transactions. Art related concepts are inserted into economic interactions.

Tracing the networks: the Intermedial in the Creative Class and the Experience Economy

Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* is an empirically based analysis aimed at giving a coherent picture about the role of innovation, creativity, technology and venture capital within the economic global picture. My main interest in Florida, however, relates to his study concerning the many concrete factors that he argues allow for innovation, creativity, and autonomy to become pivotal to any productive sector. These factors relate basically to the established working conditions in the broadest of senses: machines, tools, working hours, attires, etc., as well as to the existing 'spaces' of culture and leisure that would be needed to support this avant-garde sector of economic activity, which he calls the 'creative class'. Contrary to an attempt to simplify or reduce working conditions to a power game, to a

stream of cash, to a vision of institutionalized subjugation, or to the existence of an ever greater market choice, his attention to concrete factors and situations make his findings especially interesting for the type of analysis I wish to develop. While somewhat relaxing all presumptions about firms as machines of efficiency and profit maximization, Florida is still able to maintain a purely pragmatic scope, where profit and costs do have a place, but among many other actors within the networks of the Creative Economy. These two approaches constitute in my view his major strengths: they allow him to tell a coherently persuasive story without being reduced to theoretical frameworks that would immobilize the quality and value of all constructed relationships between humans as well as objects (non-humans).

In short, the Creative Economy is for Florida, the most dynamic trend in global capitalism. It is dynamic in terms of growth, and also in that it has changed the conditions under which a growing number of goods (services and experiences) are produced. The Creative Economy is not a label through which Florida pretends to characterize the whole economic structure: global capitalism. It is neither an essential aspect of today's global economy nor the necessary outcome of an ongoing evolution of historical capitalist production. It is better to portray it as a significant trend¹²⁵ in today's global economy, which has found its conditions of possibility in a virtually omnipresent and always deterritorializing capitalism.

Florida's Creative Economy confronts us with the reality of a socio-economic regime that can't be sheltered under the umbrella of a modern—and totalizing—understanding of capitalism: where clear spheres of production, distribution, consumption (with their presumed subjective forms) are drawn, whether through liberal or Marxist lenses. Instead, the current state of capitalism will be understood as an intricate economic network that remains mainly undetermined in its localized effects, when theorized from bird's eye view approach.

So, what is the Creative Economy?

¹²⁵ Significant in its economic magnitude, but also in its encouragement of modes of production that function in accordance with postmodern, porous and unstable, modes of subjectivity, and which by the same token challenge the divide between (spheres of) production/consumption (activity/passivity).

Creativity [...] is now the decisive source of competitive advantage. In virtually every industry, from automobiles to fashion, food products, and information technology itself, the winners in the long run are those who can create and keep creating. [...] In today's economy creativity is pervasive and ongoing: We constantly revise and enhance every product, process and activity imaginable, and fit them together in new ways. Moreover, technological and economic creativity are nurtured by and interact with artistic and cultural creativity. (Florida, 2004, p 5)

A few clarifications are in place. Firstly, Florida's notion of creativity cannot be equated with immaterial labour, whether in its Marxist or neo-Marxist forms¹²⁶. For Florida, creative work produces 'better products': products that have enhanced functionality, products that sell better, products that are more appealing to the senses. For Florida there is a continuum, between what is produced, and how it is produced. Yet, creative work is not exclusive to any productive sector in particular. Opposite to this, 'Creativity is multidimensional and experiential' (Florida, 2004, p 33), and henceforth, cannot be seen as an airtight economy within the economy, or as a marginal system of production—as in Amish villages or Amazonian tribes¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ The kind of concept intended by Florida is better described by Lazzarato when he says: 'In contemporary capitalism, the 'profession' of the artist is more determined by 'action' than by 'production'. This does not signify the disappearance of handwork or physical labour, but the constitution of another assemblage in which manual labour and intellectual labour, 'material' labour and 'immaterial' labour, are caught up in a 'machinic' process, which can be found not only in the 'actions' of the broader 'public', but also in artistic institutions, the states, business, local collectives, criticism and the media' (Lazzarato, 2010, p 102). This surely departs from the view where immaterial labour produces immaterial products: 'The service sectors of the economy present a richer model of productive communication. Most services indeed are based on the continual exchange of information and knowledge. Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we define the labour involved in this production as immaterial labor—that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 290).

¹²⁷ A few examples of this trend can help to give a body to the abstract and equivocal notion of creativity. Today Americans consume an average of four meals per week away from home (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, p 10). This means, for instance, that food consumption cannot be reduced to a physiological necessity, nor consumers' behaviour understood in purely functional terms. It also means that food production has escaped the farm and the factory as its places of production. Another example comes from another staggering figure: economies of all virtual worlds add up to over a billion dollars a year (in 2005) (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, p 18), and certainly keep growing. If one takes into account that virtual worlds make up a minuscule fraction of the existing places that produce virtual relationships then one can already see the magnitude of the production forces involved (and this particular case is merely a fraction of the Creative Economy). The main point is simply that the Creative Economy moves substantial amount of economic resources and produces offerings that can touch almost any aspect of our daily lives.

The creative sector is already fairly large: including scientific research and development, high-tech industries, new media communications, advertisement, traditional bohemian circles, etc., to name but a few concrete examples. Still, one must notice, Florida sees creative work as a trend that affects ‘virtually every industry’¹²⁸.

Secondly, creative value, for Florida, cannot be reduced to a single factor; capital, computers, software, tools, office space, etc., all of them will matter, making of creativity a notion that immediately departs from any view that would reduce created value, either to the factors of production or to the worker—including immaterial labour, which is produced immanently, as if from a brain in a vat. Creative people, says Florida, are hired and fired, but creativity cannot be bought and sold inasmuch as it stays with the creative worker herself (Florida, 2004, p 5). For Florida, the upper hand of creativity lies on the side of the workers, who, however, cannot be reduced in their life as economic actors, to a set of generalized inherent abilities, or to an equally general set of consumption needs. The tools, the computers and the software running on it, will release their potential for alliance only when in proper hands—and these hands are not given to humans as a biological attribute, but are the product of an acquired skill, which is medium-specific.

The skills that can give rise to creativity will, thus, lie inside a worker as a plug-in lies inside my Internet browser or my word processor—ANT’s notion being here particularly illuminating. Acting creatively would be matter of being able to mobilize a set of objects in a particular way. Education and experience play a role, inasmuch as they provide the worker the gateways needed, in order to proficiently use these computer tools and software, but also in order to reflect on dissimilar theories, to rekindle practical problems, and so forth. Hence, the ability to produce creative labour will not be present in the worker as a latent force ready to use, but rather as a temporal plug-in which will be useful for certain tasks (it will

¹²⁸ Florida states that around 40 million people in the US belong to the Creative Class, this constitutes roughly 30% of the working force there. According to his analysis, the Creative Class has experienced a threefold expansion since the turn of the twentieth century (Florida, 2004, p 74).

relate to a code and translate it into another one), but which will have to be updated. Florida's contention that creativity stays with the worker can be understood, for example, the ability to design website templates using HTML and CSS, stays with the workers, because they have acquired proficiency in a language that few speak fluently, if at all. The firm can have all the software, hardware, and even have a dictionary for all relevant terms, yet those objects will remain inoperative without a human that is able to make allies of them, and use them to mobilize interfaces, texts, videos and a myriad of other components needed, in order to reach the desired complex result: a finished website, for example.

Florida's argument, nonetheless, does not merely end in a reversal of roles: empowering the worker with respect to the capitalist, by giving the former a central role in the creation of value. Florida's analysis unravels in a way that circumvents, in an interesting manner, the typical questions of power that are said to exist behind economic relations. It does so, firstly, by seeing in the will to be creative, on behalf of the workers, an important idiosyncratic aspect: 'Creativity is largely driven by intrinsic rewards' (Florida, 2004, p 34), thus, not primarily or exclusively by monetary rewards. The reference to intrinsic rewards, undoubtedly, leaves too many gaps to fill and is surely anything but crystal clear if taken as denotative, or as descriptive.

Given the important role of associations that are conducive to creative results, associations between workers and machines, machines and machines (software and hardware, different internet servers, disk drives, etc.), between humans and physical objects and spaces (meeting rooms, desks, chairs, leisure areas, think tank spaces, etc.), and between organized workers, one must abstain from taking Florida's hint of reducing creativity to the worker's will. I would argue, rather, that what he means with intrinsic rewards intends nothing more than to maintain an understanding that finishes and ends in the perspective of the worker, but which would still include the internalization of a myriad of external factors. The worker alone cannot produce creativity at will: the website may well be a product of his imagination, but his will to imagine does not make up the entirety or the essence of creative value.

One must acknowledge the mutual need that both humans and non-humans have for each other, when producing creative work which, in turn, must result in functional, appealing, interesting, and sometimes even life-changing products. Creativity is the result of a functional association, an assemblage of humans and non-humans, where the human worker does play a pivotal role: the human sees the possibilities of gathering different objects, of creating particular associations, and of making machines an extension of her own will: the web-designer as exemplar, carries the upper hand only inasmuch as he negotiates, although perhaps from a vantage point of view, with the machines that will allow him to create the website he envisions.

However, it is worth noticing that Florida's description of the worker's central role, if true, immediately affects the ability that capital has to appropriate the workers' creative skills, whether to normalize them or to marginalize them. Florida, once more, prefers to stay within the psychological mindset of the worker alone, where more money would not make the latter, ipso facto, more creative; even if it is taken for granted that more money does make the workers more productive—more able to complete an activity in a speedier fashion. The argument, I believe, were it to end there, seems not as forward thinking as it actually is. It is more illuminating, when one grasps it from the perspective of the capitalist: the capitalist's willingness to surrender more money to the worker will come along, naturally, with the pressure for the former to deliver greater productivity.

Following this logic, it is not difficult to imagine that a creative person can be actually rendered less creative, given the impositions that come along with money: discipline, competition with colleagues, and the need to be more productive¹²⁹. Other aspects underscored by Florida are equally important, such as the toll that their work takes on family life, on their sense of autonomy, and even on the environment (e.g. depredation), among many other related factors. Thus, capitalists who make an effort to avoid those

¹²⁹ Sociologist Richard Sennett sees in this situation an exacerbation of competition that has harmful effects on creativity. For Sennett competition for rewards hinders the sharing of information, decreases cooperation, and has a damaging effect on the relation between problem finding and problem solving that, for him, characterizes successful cooperative modern ventures, such as, for instance, the Linux operating system (Sennett, 2008, p 33).

impositions: to grant creative licence, to establish an open office floor, flexible working hours, among many other things, will do so without deviating from an economic rationale that minimizes risk and, in consequence, betters their chances of actually achieving a greater profit. The question begged at this point would be: does this not simply tell us that capitalism's spirit of profiteering has finally absorbed creative production from head to toe?

I think the point goes much further, because making an ideological justification to the contrary (capitalism has fallen prey of its own invention) can be easily done. Whether for profit or goodwill, regardless of the idiosyncrasy that motivates the capitalist's interest in creative labour, there still would be an important concession to be acknowledged: building and maintaining a creative workforce can only be done by giving up—at least to a certain extent—the managerial ability to account for all the elements that are traditionally said to produce value, and by the same token this would imply giving up too, on the managerial assurance of having constant returns, in a way that would be based solely on efficiency and cost control. As it turns out, following Florida, it may actually be a greater economic danger, for companies or industries at large, were they to resist change, by making an effort to control creativity or creative labour; a reactionary response that is surely expected from business consultancies' calls for a return to older organizational forms based on low costs and efficiency, but also seen in populist outcries for more blue-collar jobs by bringing the factories, and the assembly lines back, etc.

It begins to surface as one follows Florida, that if the Creative Economy is the most dynamic sector in the global economy, then the greater question would be whether those working within the Creative Economy would challenge capitalist modes of production, given that traditional modes of representation seem to fail in grasping the many ingredients that would be needed to deliver offerings which are the product of creative work. The question, in turn, obliges one to enquire in depth about those working in the Creative Economy. So, who are the creative workers? What do they want? And, what is their political agenda if they have one?

I define the core of the Creative Class to include people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content. [...] In addition, all members of the Creative Class—whether they are artists or engineers, musicians or computer scientists, writers or entrepreneurs—share a common creative ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference and merit. For members of the Creative Class every aspect, and every manifestation of creativity—technological, cultural, and economic—is interlinked and inseparable. (Florida, 2004, p 8)

Members of the Creative Class resist characterization as alternative or bohemian. They are not outside or against the prevailing culture, but participate fully, working and living inside it. The label of class sounds actually stronger than what Florida intends it to be, for it is not only excluded from referring to a form of political identity (in stringent modern fashion)¹³⁰, but also its emphasis on ‘individuality’ suggests that it lacks the main ingredient that would factually constitute it as a class: class consciousness (Florida, 2004, p 315). This immediately implies that one cannot expect the appearance of a creative workers party, a union of creative workers, or a creative revolutionary army.

The Creative Class’s disinterest, or patent refusal, in being regarded as marginal members of society (as bohemian, says Florida) does not entail the arrival of political indifference, of subjugation, or of the necessary reduction of creative work to mere social reproduction. Such disinterest in identity politics, nonetheless, will point us in the direction of a political agenda that does not aim towards the (re)appropriation of the social means of production; an agenda that will not develop along an inside/outside perspective, and, thus, an agenda rooted in immanence—which may still imply

¹³⁰ Although this doesn’t stop Florida from describing the Creative Class as biased towards what he calls the three T’s: talent, technology, tolerance (Florida, 2004, Chapter 14). It could be easily argued, notwithstanding, that this is nothing more than a weak political body at most, in terms of a cohesive identification with clear political goals, given the many ways in which the three T’s can be interpreted.

inescapable servitude for some¹³¹. A political agenda that is not derived from a common and shared understanding of social roles is one that cannot but fail to be informed by any form of *sensus communis*. Yet, the Creative Class, despite its lack of ideological unity and conscience of class, is still a micropolitical force to be reckoned with. Their vested interest: to ensure that creative labour maintains its footing in the global economy and to ensure that it can expand, so as to make of this same creative labour the predominant form behind the production of highly valued offerings—these are actually the goals that motivate Florida from the start.

The effort then of cultivating and maintaining the Creative Class, is not the product of an agenda, thought through and based on identity politics, or even fixed on restorative policies alone. Florida's intentions, I must recognize, remain for the most part distant from political analysis, and he is far from showing interest in direct political engagement. Despite this fact, Florida does have a clear interest in assuring the continuous development and growth of the Creative Class. He is interested in the conditions that would favour creative enterprises to flourish, rather than any other forms of economic activity. Florida's thesis, in short:

[R]egional economic growth is powered by creative people, who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas. Diversity increases the odds that a place will attract different types of creative people with different skill sets and ideas. Places with diverse mixes of creative people are more likely to generate new combinations. Furthermore, diversity and concentration work together to speed the flow of knowledge. Greater and more diverse concentrations of creative capital in turn lead to higher rates of innovation, high-technology business formation, job generation and economic growth. (Florida, 2004, p 249)

Florida, in addition, relates these places of diversity and innovation with the current urban picture in many western and non-western cities, where strong communitarian bonds are no longer active:

¹³¹ I see Negri and Hardt as taking this view, among others, but would, for instance, also include Lyotard's latter thought.

In virtually every aspect of life, weak ties have replaced the stronger bonds that once gave structure to society. Rather than live in a town for decades, we now move about. Instead of communities defined by close associations and deep commitments to family, friends and organizations, we seek places where we can make friends and acquaintances easily and live quasi-anonymous lives. The decline in the strength of our ties to people and institutions is a product of the increasing number of ties we have. (Florida, 2004, p 7)

The most important aspect for social cohesion becomes rooted in the geographical locality itself. For Florida, the Creative Class wants a space that allows them to produce creatively, and, in consequence, social bonds that allow them to have the freedom needed to do so.

Strong communities, not any institutions within them, are the key to social cohesion. As group attachments break down [Rotary Clubs and bowling leagues], the community itself must be the social matrix that hold us together [...] With everything else in flux—companies, careers, even families—our communities are often the only real constants in the social equation. Being geographically rooted, they are social units that persist. (Florida, 2004, p 324)

Florida calls the urban conglomerates that can sustain a Creative Economy, ‘creative centres’: ‘Creative centres provide the integrated eco-system or habitat where all forms of creativity—artistic, cultural, technological and economic—can take root and flourish’ (Florida, 2004, p 218).

In spite of his emphasis on the individual and his will, creativity, I argued earlier, is not seen by Florida as an individual trait. Florida abstains from any naturalist reduction—from conferring on his readers the idea that he is talking about some form of physiological, or neurological, origin for creativity—albeit falling short of conceptualizing as an in-between as the former has done. Florida opens up, on the contrary, towards a socially rooted understanding of creativity, through which, by the same token, he is able to conceptualize diverse modes of expression for creative work, while still maintaining the need for

commonly shared non-human actors that enable associations, aimed at producing creativity, to emerge and possibly to endure:

Thus, the varied forms of creativity that we typically see as different from one another—technological creativity (or, invention), economic creativity (entrepreneurship) and artistic and cultural creativity among others—are in fact deeply interrelated'. [...] And so through history practitioners of the different forms of creativity have tended to congregate and feed off one another in teeming, multifaceted creative centers. (Florida, 2004, p 33)

The kind of melting pots where one can expect such creative centres to develop, Florida says, are places that possess a thick labour market (Florida, 2004, p 224), a lively atmosphere of round the clock activities (Florida, 2004, p 225), a patent diversity of conventional and non-conventional¹³² people (Florida, 2004, p 226), and enough tolerance to offer the possibility to everyone of express their sense of self-identity (Florida, 2004, p 230, 231).

All of these conditions can be said to be crucial in understanding creative labour as sustained by or within a network. If Florida's statistics are enlightening in some way, it is precisely in that they open the expected black boxes of creativity (the mind, the brain, the firm, culture and human capital). Elements that would have usually claimed for themselves the full credit in the production of creative work seem instead to lead one into a network of associations, where it would be possible to identify actors or nodes: the trained worker, the latest software, the technologically advanced computers, the flexible managers that encourage and support the creative process, the city that provides places of leisure and culture where creative workers can meet and share ideas, and the list surely goes on, but it's neither all inclusive nor

¹³² Conventional and non-conventional are naturally relative concepts. The combination of conventional customs and expected behaviours with those that are not is what Florida encourages. These combinations can take place at many levels, and cannot say that some have precedence or relevance over others without oversimplification. Something as seemingly superficial as the existence of different foods and related customs can entail a variety of effects: from the straightforward appearance of market choice, to the introduction of new ways of producing food for restaurants, or to the greater appreciation of foreign design and decoration ideas, and can even allow for foreign words to become part of the common lexicon.

indefinite. The network, one must note, by no means places the actor's involved under a single will, which they would inevitably follow. Each actor, on the contrary, would still have a differentiated but concrete and effective role to play—it would have associations to propose.

Creative work and the Creative Economy at large, in addition, are also not explained by the success of single actors who may have somehow been able to exert their control over vast or key resources.

Therefore, the ideas behind the Creative Economy are not aimed at merely explaining the success of some few adventurous entrepreneurs (the Jobs, the Zuckerbergs, or the Pages) or of some exemplary companies (Google, Twitter, Apple, etc.)¹³³. If Florida's convergence of patently different elements is enlightening, then these companies are neither the essence nor the cause of Creative Economy, but are simply the product of successful alliances. Alliances that entail a series of associations, which not only have allowed specific companies to gain economic footing, but which connect them between each other through the existence of creative centres, rather than through economized business to business relationships. These alliances go beyond any imposition or one-sided economic relationships, because they primarily have effects that go beyond market positioning. The pragmatic question, as it turns out, wouldn't be so much whether we need the existing creative firms to do well financially, in order to secure the future of the Creative Class as a whole, but instead whether the greater associations that Florida identifies will remain unchanged or will be expanded if they are successful, and whether similar alliances can be replicated and up to what point they can. These greater associations will certainly not occur in a vacuum. The associations put forward by the Creative Economy, as one follows Florida, are limited by location, which means that creative centres are not networks as the internet is a network (where the variable weight of a knot is irrelevant, in principle), for the former need strong alliances that are supported by elements which are geographically bounded. The geographical limits of the creative

¹³³ I must note however that the success of these companies cannot be underestimated, for they do mark a triumph of the Creative Class. Yet, Richard Sennett goes as far as to say that 'Western capitalism has sometimes claimed that individual competition rather than collaboration most effectively motivates people to work well, but in the high-tech realm, it is firms that enable cooperation who have achieved high-quality results' (Sennett, 2008, p 52). Cooperation, i.e. economically relating, is the issue, not the individual's will.

centres are, for Florida, the cities. The reason for creative centres to emerge in cities, follows from the city's capacity to offer not only the human and non-human actors that are present in the mentioned networks, but also the proximity and the resources for a sizable creative workforce and allured venture capital to converge.

The obstacles that must be taken into account, by those cities that wish to offer the appropriate environment, where a local Creative Class can flourish, are namely:

- 1) 'Institutional sclerosis' or the curse of being too economically successful: cities that were economically very dynamic in the past have ended up relating their success to a particular institutional layout. This has created social and economic immobility, or stagnation, and has thrown these cities into a persisting decline (Florida, 2004, p 303). The formulas that triggered their initial success became institutionalized and too heavy a burden as they immobilized the productive structure.
- 2) Urban renewals¹³⁴ that are centred on traffic relief, mega malls, and stadiums are misguided (Florida, 2004, p 304). Florida states, moreover, the impending need to stop seeing cultural production in terms of class lines, or of bohemian versus bourgeois amenities (Florida, 2004, p 304–314). This divide is the product of the presupposed disjunction that one arrives at, when urban developments are planned in accordance to a population that is said to have fixed habits and consumer preferences (e.g. department stores, museums, and small film theatres for a more bohemian audience, and mega malls, amusement parks, and fast-food courts for a broader public). These presumed tastes and behaviours are, additionally, often predetermined by what are so-called 'social factors' such as education, age, family structure, and religion. It is easy to see then that urban development that relies too heavily on presumptions of this sort would have serious effects on the kind of alliances that would flourish and on the kind of associations that could be proposed.

¹³⁴ Florida uses Pittsburg as an example.

In a similar fashion to Korten, Florida's attention to the concrete problems faced by the Creative Class follows first pragmatic and then theoretical or methodological concerns. Beyond their common pragmatism, Florida's analysis abstains from delineating specific goals in terms of the law, the state, or the institutional framework at large. The latter's viewpoint is hardly focused on what the existing deliberative bodies must do in order to preserve or encourage the Creative Economy as a whole. One can, no doubt, find many spaces where governments and policies could positively intervene. In those circumstances where such intervention may be desirable, for example when deliberating about the rules of urban development, it will remain true that their interventions will neither assure nor take over the actual expansion of the creative. For Florida, assuring the future well-being and expansion of the Creative Class needs for a series of complex issues, which may or may not be affected by policymakers, to be taken into account. The Creative Class, he argues, has three fundamental matters to attend:

(1) investing on creativity to ensure long-run economic growth, (2) overcoming the class divides that weaken our social fabric and threaten economic well-being, and (3) building new forms of social cohesion in a world defined by increasing diversity and beset by growing fragmentation. We can meet them only by ensuring that the creativity of the many is tapped and that the benefits of the Creative Age are extended to everyone (p 318)—Above all to make a class that is not a “Class”: not pretending to divide along strict lines, but to engross its ranks (from members of all kinds) (Florida, 2004, p 321).

The main political goal of the Creative Class, in a word, would be to take over the entire global economy. This means, therefore, transforming all production processes into processes that harvest and cultivate creative labour¹³⁵. Furthermore, an economy sustained by autonomous creative workers, inspiring places of leisure, a population with different interests and origins that ensures the existence of

¹³⁵ Florida offers both leadership positions as well as a conciliatory role for the expansion of the Creative Class: ‘The Creative Class can start by offering those in the other classes a tangible vision of ways to improve their own positions, either by becoming part of the Creative Economy or by coexisting with it’ (Florida, 2004, p 321).

melting pots, and the production of consumer goods that are appealing, engaging, and challenging and so forth.. The Creative Economy, as it turns out, is a fragile arrangement. It is by no means an unstoppable force, or a force to be slowed down only by the limits of the capital that it is able to mobilize or accumulate. Florida abstains from hinting in this direction, even if he is overly optimistic with regard to the creative work's ability to sustainably deliver high margin profits.

Florida's goals, one can conclude, are surely ambitious. His belief that the Creative Class is an undoubtedly new economic force that is characterized for creatively using a vast amount of human and non-human resources is certainly captivating. For my interests here, Florida's empirical interpretation of the Creative Economy (based on statistics and interviews) sheds light on a vast array of smaller networks that are intertwined. Given my aim of addressing questions related to the type of subjectivities involved in the construction of aesthetic experience, Florida's ideas have allowed me to start opening the entrenched AWS machine. They have done so by giving me an entry point, into the world of economic production, which does not rely solely on quantitative economic analysis or on a sociology derived from the relation between workers and capitalists. Florida's networks have begun to unravel the associations that sustain creative work and which produce creative offerings. It would still be a hasty move to plug artistic work into this network, although I doubt it would be the case for Florida.

In order to further open the AWS, it is still necessary to dive deeper into the alliances and associations that take place between artwork and spectator. To do so, I propose a slight change of analytical perspective, in order to focus on another seemingly closed machine, which is present in the Creative Economy: the consumer-object of the consumption machine, which would not be an entirely new sort of arrangement, given that artworks are, in fact, marketable goods. Yet, uncontestably, a different vantage point is needed in order to open that second closed-up set of relationships. To reach this point I turn now to the ideas of Pine & Gilmore, as I follow them through their ingeniously titled book *The Experience Economy: work is theatre and every business a stage*. I intend to show that through an examination of

the experience economy, the horizon of Florida's creative networks will be better qualified; making them more traceable or accountable. Later, the ideas discussed will allow me, in turn, to have a more complete understanding of the networks that sustain Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics. The ideas explored will allow me to rekindle and expand on the questions surrounding the political relevance of art today.

Creative networks: the leisure-work continuum and the economy of experiences

Today's process of consumption appears to have no fixed abode, no secluded sphere in which the satisfaction of private needs would take place in isolation. One still consumes alone, but also with others (as in a bar, a paintball field, or in online games), and through others (as the parents who enjoys taking their children to Disneyland or to a karate lesson). Work and leisure, in addition, have equally contaminated each other; Florida's arguments seem to confirm a growing working class whose relation to their work cannot be thought of as being opposite to leisure, and free time as dissimilar from their work. The working place is said to have become fun, engaging, creative, and fulfilling, making untenable an analytical division between working subject and consumer self.

Companies and advertisers speak now of consumer, customer, client, buyer, prospect, user, regular, and so forth. More than mere euphemisms, these labels denote a serious conceptual challenge around the deployment of individuals as they traverse the social field. The introduction of innovative concepts that help to diagrammatize subjectivities characterized by change, malleability, porosity, etc., is not yet a complete task. The profound changes on our self-conception, on our relation with objects and machines, which a wholly dynamic capitalism effectuates, remain a present theoretical challenge. From a global economic panorama marked by uneven development, liability and the need for innovation, I now turn to

the concrete networks that surround consumers in most developed markets¹³⁶. With Florida my focus already began to shift towards the concrete networks that allow for creative economies to emerge and expand. With that still fresh in mind, I will follow these same networks into the phenomenal field of consumption. My change of perspective, nonetheless, does not follow on from an analytical intention to purify again, work and leisure, or to subsume them both under the guise of a greater network of power games and subjugated wills. My intention is, on the contrary, to use the work of people like Florida, who develop explanations without attention to such analytical concerns, in order to tackle the problems of subjectivity, community, and Intermedial relationships that, in themselves, demand an analysis to develop without presuppositions about their object(s) of study.

My approach, finally, will depart too from a perspective that refuses to see anything beyond the exacerbation of ‘old forms of exploitation’¹³⁷. My engagement will assess and try to analyze the production of subjectivities (the relationships and the alliances) that an essentially deterritorializing economic regime¹³⁸ brings forward. My approach will also analyze the ideas about the production of immaterial offerings, or experiences, collected by Pine and Gilmore in their *Experience Economy* (2000) and *Authenticity* (2007) texts, which will serve as a point of entry into the world of advertisement, marketing, and consumer goods in our (post)postmodern times.

Briefly, Pine and Gilmore’s *Experience Economy* presents itself as a guide, written for entrepreneurs and businessmen, regarding the changes in consumption habits, and in the traditional (economical) image of the consumer as an agent that performs constant calculations and is in a constant search for pleasure. For the authors, business owners must come to terms with the fact that cost-effective processes of production

¹³⁶ And also many who can afford it in the emerging ones.

¹³⁷ Such perspective relates to Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* where for instance he states: ‘In the advanced regions, social space is invaded by a continuous superimposition of geological layers of commodities. At this point in the “second industrial revolution,” alienated consumption becomes for the masses a duty supplementary to alienated production. It is all the sold labour of a society, which globally becomes the total commodity for which the cycle must be continued. For this to be done, the total commodity has to return as a fragment to the fragmented individual, absolutely separated from the productive forces operating as a whole’ (Debord, 1977, sec 42). Here there is simply no room for further considerations to make depending on the concrete forms of consumption, of work, or of worker-consumer relationship.

¹³⁸ I use the term in accordance with its Deleuzian signification. See Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, chapter 9.

will no longer assure them a prosperous economic future. Reducing costs to the minimum, putting the main focus of management on the efficient use of resources available, is simply not the way to go (anymore). Their point is simple: either companies, firms, factories, and so forth, change their view on what they produce and how they produce it or they will become commoditized: where their product is no longer perceived as different from that of the competition and, hence, for the customer only a single attribute will guide his purchase: price¹³⁹. Their aim, therefore, is twofold: convince producers to change their ways of conducting business; an aim, which is accomplished by speaking the language of profit. And, secondly, they want to adhere to this new business model a character of innovation and creativity that, as I see it, is surprisingly subversive of this same profit-based understanding of business economics. In order to explain the intricacies and implications involved a brief digression is necessary.

Neo-classical economics' focus on utility characterizes the marketable object as an array of practical attributes¹⁴⁰. The object may possess certain intrinsic properties, which either enhance the efficiency of a work at hand, thus creating its identity purely on the basis of its usefulness, or it may help to make an everyday activity more pleasurable: eating lunch would for instance be more enjoyable if accompanied by a bottle of Coca-Cola, Simply Fruit Punch, or Heineken beer than a glass of tap water. Following this train of thought, products must be marketed with the objective of informing consumers about their particular characteristics and advantages: Colgate toothpaste prevents cavities, whitens your teeth, and gives a fresh taste that prolongs for hours in the mouth, to name a case in point. The consumer would, in turn, analyze the information provided and make an educated decision before finalizing her purchase. This type of marketing is called 'traditional marketing by marketing guru, Bernd Schmitt, and which

¹³⁹ 'No company wants that word [commoditization] applied to its goods and services. Merely mentioning, commoditization sends shivers down the spines of executives and entrepreneurs alike. Differentiation disappears, margins fall to the floor, and customers buy solely on the basis of price, price, price' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 1).

¹⁴⁰ For the reader who is unfamiliar with economic theory and practice an introductory text may come in handy at this point. Fortunately, many basic texts such as Gregory Mankiw's *Principles of Economics* (2009) or Hal R. Varian's *Intermediate Microeconomics* (2010) would more than clarify the questions that may arise in this section.

may be understood as a euphemism for ‘old-fashioned’ or outdated marketing¹⁴¹. As it happens with much of neo-classical analysis, Schmitt believes that consumers are poorly characterized by reducing them to rational decision makers, and that producers lose their time spending their advertisement money by marketing their products with the sole aim of informing the customer about their useful properties¹⁴². Schmitt’s proposal is to create marketing campaigns based on four basic tenets: a) understanding the customer’s experience of consumption, b) understanding that consumers are both rational and emotional, c) to start seeing consumption as a holistic experience, and d) ceasing to rely solely on quantitative methodologies, in order to understand consumer behaviour and instead, be ready to be eclectic¹⁴³.

Now I don’t intend to expand on Schmitt’s ideas on marketing theory. My purpose here is twofold. On the one hand, I wish to assert that this understanding of consumption and the consumer helps to explain and support the idea of an economic regime that is characterized by its ever increasing, but uneven, expansion, in terms of what is and can be marketable, and in terms of its conquest of the space-time continuum (Lyotard). On the other hand, I will analyze how this economic regime produces forms of subjectivity that are part of functional arrangements or associations, which can be consciously deployed within a world that is presumed to be fully deterritorialized.

My aim with this twofold approach is to trace how the global scenario of uneven development, environmental depredation, and decreased quality of life, can be understood as connected to the reality of localized networks of different extensions and constitutions. The market may well be the institution of a global economy par excellence, but as Korten has insisted, actors within a market will crucially affect its function and its effect on the human and non-human agents involved directly, and also indirectly. In

¹⁴¹ The whole discussion may be found in detail in Schmitt, 1999. *Experiential Marketing*, NY: The Free Press..

¹⁴² This same conclusion is closely allied to Foucault’s argument regarding the use of *homo economicus* by neo-liberal academics and politics: ‘To what extent is it legitimate, and to what extent is it fruitful, to apply the grid, the schema, and the model of homo economicus, to not only every economic actor in general inasmuch as he or she gets married, for example, or commits a crime, or raises children, gives affection and spends time with the kids’ (Foucault, 2008, p 268). Foucault’s critical insight lies on the side of the consequence of such policies and scholarship in order to understand human behaviour, while remaining somewhat convinced about its pragmatic value. I believe that authors like Schmidt allows one precisely to become critical of that presumed pragmatic value, which as I read them simply does not exist.

¹⁴³ These four categories are explained in detail in part I, chapter 1, of Schmitt’s *Experiential Marketing*.

addition, concrete consumers, products, and services, will be discussed, in order to trace networks where issues regarding the modes of production of false subjectivity (e.g. the ‘alienated’ worker, the ‘alienated’ consumer) emerge and can be contrasted with theories inspired by both Marxist and (neo) liberal thought. Following Schmitt as well as Pine and Gilmore, I will show that consumption cannot be reduced to a subjective experience of alienating pleasure, in the first place, because there is simply no cohesive form of identity, which could be ascribed to all consumers, or which would be produced in all spaces of consumption. This means that agencies are not self-contained, and that their effects on reality cannot be properly explained if one insists in defining them as cohesive identities or substances. An understanding of consumption based on commoditization is what leads one to believe that one is dealing with a subject understood along modern lines, and which sustains a patent dichotomy: an entirely autonomous being striving to maintain a fit body and sound mind. Consumption, one would be led to conclude, is nothing beyond a rationalized behaviour meant to satisfy an individual’s needs or wants, where all choices made would revolve around the individual as a centre of power. So, in simpler terms: Peter buys toothpaste, because it’s the best choice to keep his teeth clean; he buys certain food to keep his body healthy, and lives in a particular neighbourhood, because it’s close to his work and because it is safe and other similar reasons. All in all, choices obey singular, yet normalized needs and wants, which overall would help Peter to create and maintain his publicly perceived sense of self, by keeping his body and mind attuned¹⁴⁴. What I wish to note here is the lack of pertinence that the purchased concrete products have in all Peter’s various decisions as a consumer. The products play no active role whatsoever, and their particularities or specificities are quickly passed over, because consumer choice is reduced to a calculation between wants and scarce resources¹⁴⁵. In other words, Peter the consumer goes

¹⁴⁴ Singular choices must still reflect a normalization of taste in order to take place inside markets. The whole notion of free choice, as it is based on a ‘modern’ *subject*, must be churned and placed under a structure of taste, which may have positive or negative connotations, in order to make of it a useful mode of representation of consumers.

¹⁴⁵ The now traditional economic analysis was well seen already by Foucault who identifies both its main explanatory core as well as its easy generalization given its abstract nature: ‘On the horizon of this analysis we see instead the image, the idea, or theme-program of a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules

about his life buying products that serve an expected function satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily (it's a binary world for consumers), and consumption as such would be nothing but the ad nauseam repetition of this process (Debord¹⁴⁶). One, thus, can only wonder: is there really a difference for Peter, between, for instance, eating a steak at a steakhouse rather than eating at his dining table? If one is ready to answer this question based entirely on functionality or price, then one misses the point entirely, for it would be to insist that the service-experience at the restaurant plays no role in producing consumers. It would be to insist that consumption is a sheer instrumental, medium-specific experience, and that objects of consumption are nothing but channels through which the consumer must pass in order to maintain his qualities as a subject. Here Intermediality, i.e. the crossbreeding of man (needs), medium (food) and context (experience), is a non-issue.

This same question can be rephrased, simply by asking whether all economic products are destined to compete within markets established based on needs (or rationalized wants) or not. If they are not this will mean that there are at least two things that directly challenge the basis of neo-classical consumer choice: 1) the value perceived by a customer is not derived in its entirety from the value invested in producing the specific product (the value of the steak in the steakhouse is simply not the price of the steak, and objects cannot be summed up according to their monetary value nor according to notions of utility), and 2) markets are not established after needs, but they rather create or enable particular experiences of consumption (Disneyland is not a product derived from the 'need' for entertainment, but is rather a particular experience that can't even be reduced to entertainment as a sort of universal). In other words, experience produces needs, or better: preferences.

of the game rather than on the players and finally in which there is an environment type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals' (Foucault, 2008, pp 259, 260). 'The most important stake is no doubt the problem of the identification of the object of economic analysis with any conduct whatsoever entailing an optimal allocation of scarce resources to alternative ends' (2008, p 269).

¹⁴⁶ This Nietzschean characterization is overly stated in Debord who straightforwardly says: 'What is constantly new in the process of production of things is not found in consumption, which remains the expanded repetition of the same' (Debord, 1977, sec 156).

Does this mean that the consumer is no longer (or never has been) disempowered? Or is an abundant economy, where the commodity has taken charge of the worker's 'leisure and humanity', the clear sign of the arrival of the bleak future that Debord has foreseen: where the worker would find 'himself every day, outside of production and in the guise of a consumer, seemingly treated as an adult, with zealous politeness' (Debord, 1977, sec. 43)?

Experience and Authenticity: undoing machinic consumption in postmodern times

It is surely no news that markets are plagued with imperfections, that marketing campaigns are made with specific targets in mind, and that many of the highly regarded goods exchanged have very limited use or value (i.e. designer goods, artworks, decorative appliances, etc.). Furthermore, corporations today are not attempting to provide the most universal of needs, nor fighting for a share in the largest markets—Schmitt's message has been heard. These markets certainly exist¹⁴⁷, but even as they do, they tend to be monopolized, heavily regulated, or exhausted by competition. This undisguised state of affairs, as it turns out, remains paradoxically unexplained by, both, the free market sceptics, who unapologetically fill their explanations with negative connotations (passivity, ignorance, lavishness, and excess), as well as by those enthusiasts who talk about 'free choice', autonomy, etc.¹⁴⁸.

Both parallel negative and positive images of consumers arise and work under the assumption that a consumer can be reduced to a form of agency that is made to be cohesive enough through its reference to some other beyond it that explains and determines it: autonomous consumer behaviour is dismissed and rendered dependant on utilitarian or socialized conceptualizations of taste, a bundle of biological needs,

¹⁴⁷ Public basic services (electricity, water, phone, internet, health, etc.) are typical examples, but I would also mention the whole range of food markets, from raw foods at a supermarkets to fast foods, which compete among themselves as substitutable products.

¹⁴⁸ The liberal conception of autonomous individual, which is frequently translated into text book economics as *rational agent* (along with its many modifications, i.e. agent with constraint rationality) does not explain, but rather marginalizes behaviour that does not adhere to this narrow understanding of the consumer: as an agent that makes autonomous, time-coherent, decisions—an idea which is a close descendant of the 18th and 19th-century *Robinsonades*.

rational calculations based on the monetary resources available, or a mixture of more than one of these hovering structures. In any case, reconciling any such form of agency with the changes in the way societies produce goods, and the kind of offerings that are produced, remains a fundamentally serious problem. Questions, for instance, on how the shifts from a factory economy to a service based economy (and to a Creative Economy) affect the consumer's rationale that is claimed to inform her decisions will stay unanswered, because all offerings gain their value always in relation to a deterministic way of choosing (e.g. rational choice) and a defined set of needs (either social or natural in origin). All in all, this means that the consumer cannot but play a passive role, where she consumes what society or physiology orders her to, and where decisions follow a rule of thumb that is repeated indefinitely through time.

Due to my interest in mobilizing a consumer that has an active role when taking decisions, such 'socially determined subjects' need to be passed over, in order to answer the raised questions. Given that I want to explore the relationships of an actor, who is aware of the strategic standpoint that different decisions will provide her, that is, the humans and non-humans that she can mobilize, assuming a monad-like agent will not do, because it denies such agency any real interest in pursuing alliances, either by rendering the latter ineffective or by presupposing them in advance.

Besides the lack of answers to questions about agency that arise, one must also deal with the double clamp of the nature/culture divide. If an actor is explained using the nature/culture divide; to argue that consumption empowers or affects the agent's ability to move other humans (and non-humans) becomes itself an impossible task. This is the case, because of the conceptual shape that the actor assumes.

Viewing consumers as monads of sorts, as essentially constituted beings (either by nature or by culture), will always imply that consumer choices (goods, services, or experiences) add nothing to the constitutive reality of the actor involved, and will, thus, remain essentially superfluous. I take for granted that biological needs can hardly be used to justify or explain consumption beyond triviality. However,

reducing consumption to the bodily functions of a monad-like agency, still remains at the basis of both, libertarian and Marxist explanations. It is with reference to an entity that is essentially enclosed upon itself that consumption is said to be, either an expression of freedom (because it doesn't obey needs, so it is, thus, a choice), or a manifestation of subjection (because it is doesn't obey needs, so it is, thus, superfluous). In both cases, the object of consumption adds nothing to the effective power that the presumed agency has to affect its world (our world). Objects will remain equally passive and disconnected from others and, hence, cannot be said to affect other entities, whether human or non-human beyond casualty.

So, to rephrase, if the CEO of a company drives a Porsche, and this occurrence is believed to have no effect whatsoever on her ability to affect the board of directors, the workers on the factory floor, her husband, or the teenager eyes that follow her with envy, then one would be upholding some form of reductionism, which would determine an agency's footing in reality according to the predetermined constitution of its body as a subject of needs and a cup holder of attributes¹⁴⁹. If, however, one wishes to pursue a solution that departs from an empirical reduction of 'the real', by attempting to identify a symbolic plane of reality, whose validity, in turn, would depend on the existence of a culturally (and historically) determined set of rules regarding taste, then this would inevitably end up too being sustained by the modern divide (nature/culture, essential/accidental), and the consequent manoeuvring of dichotomies, which Latour frequently denounced. Both approaches, I am arguing, will inevitably fall short of explaining the complexities of consumption in a world where design is as important as function, where experiences are bought and sold, where being sustainable can push up sales' margins, and where consumers often spend more energy during their leisure time than during their working hours (think for

¹⁴⁹ The purely empirical reduction is surely not the problem per se, for a similar but opposite form of reduction could be done, that is, one in which the determination of 'the real' is derived not from the material attributes of an entity but from its determination by the existing social forces, which would be immaterial in essence. My analysis is not an attempt to follow this type of reduction either.

example of extreme sports, but also think of someone who writes a PhD during his free time, while writing advertisement ads for a living).

Briefly, dealing with subjectivities that can affect their world by means other than wilful power (manipulation), arbitrary political power (status and hierarchy), or naturally endowed powers (intelligence) remains an underlying issue—cooperation is neither purely altruistic nor cynically selfish. Humans, as I will try to show, are neither duped nor empowered by consumption in any automatic manner. Objects themselves do not provide their owner with special or enhanced attributes; an issue that would become harder to explain, when discussing services or experiential offerings. My aim, thus, is to study what Latour calls transformations¹⁵⁰, as they are effectuated by the agency involved in consumption. Using ANT as a horizon I will construct subjectivities whose reality will be based on their ability to mobilize objects (and humans), to enable associations, and to create alliances meant to enhance their field of action. The object of study, more than the consumer, is the network that brings worker-consumer-and object of consumption together: a network where the workers of Florida's Creative Economy can connect to those who buy their offerings. Furthermore, when I refer to consumers, workers, and objects of consumption, I am certainly not referring to institutional forms of identity, which would inform all those involved in the market economy. Once again, the importance of producing an analysis that stays in-between diverse levels of abstraction is crucial to the questions at stake: I am proposing to mobilize subjectivities that must retain an ability to adapt, to be malleable, in order to fulfil a myriad of many different porous identities; subjectivities that are produced by assemblages in which actors operate, who must know about Smartphones and the importance of broadband, about the functionality of apps and the latest advances in computer technology, if, for instance, they are to make an ally out of, an iPhone—actors must know how it works, and why it is cool, smart, cheap or convenient to have one.

¹⁵⁰ Or power articulation in Foucault.

To better grasp this postmodern economic scenario, where subjectivities are constantly being assembled, expanded and exhausted, I deem Pine & Gilmore necessary. For them the concept of experience, with its procedural, sensorial, and even spiritual connotations, has become essential to economic activity; ‘experiential offerings’ have revolutionized economic activities to the point in which companies that neglect its importance are more likely to disappear from the market rather than survive based on low prices and vast sales.

So, without further digressions, I will dive into the case in point: what exactly are Pine & Gilmore referring to with the term ‘experience’? I have been using this term mostly in combination with ‘aesthetic’: aesthetic experience, where its performative character has been elaborated. Pine & Gilmore disclose a new perspective by using this notion in an economic context:

The newly identified offering of experiences occurs whenever a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage an individual. [...] Each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual’s prior state of mind and being. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, pp 11, 12)

Furthermore:

[E]ntertainment is only one aspect of an experience. Rather, companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way. Many dining experiences have less to do with the entertainment motif or celebrity of the financial backers than with the merging of dining with comedy, art, architecture, history, or nature, as happens at such restaurants such as Pomp Duck. (1999, p 3)

For Pine & Gilmore, the time of cheap, mass products is long gone:

customers now want experiences. But to what end? Experiences can offer enjoyment, knowledge, diversion, and beauty, but more than the desire for such memorable qualities drives the Experience Economy. For not all experiences are fun, enlightening, distracting, or breathtaking. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 163)

Qualifying these experiences can be done using Pine & Gilmore's other title-giving name: authenticity. Authenticity is a concept that regards the way the consumer perceives an offering as either authentic or inauthentic (2007, p 5), and as the way in which the offering is rendered authentically to the consumer (2007, p 3). In terms of Intermedial Aesthetics: Authenticity is a reception-aesthetic, not an ontological category:

[A]ll human enterprise is ontologically fake—that is, in its very being it is inauthentic—and yet, output from that enterprise can be phenomenologically real—that is, it is perceived as authentic by the individuals who buy it. (2007, p 89)

For Pine and Gilmore authenticity operates beyond the Platonic dichotomy real-fake. In addition, it is a concept that allows one to address not only experiential offerings, but also the whole matrix of economic production: commodities, goods, services, and experiences¹⁵¹.

Authenticity—as perceived by consumers—is not a uniform operation, which would be valid for all goods, but depends entirely on the type of offering produced. Common ways of rendering authenticity are: appeals to the natural (or untouched) for traditional commodities, original design or display for goods, exceptional treatment for services, inspirational, fantastic and memorable for experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, pp 49, 50). Creating the perception of authenticity, however, is not merely a matter of communication or advertisement: '[t]he very act of saying some thing is authentic immediately leads

¹⁵¹ Pine and Gilmore construct this matrix based on their own assumptions, but with it are still able to cover the whole spectrum of economic productions (2007, pp 49, 50). I leave the category of transformations without explicit mention, for I take it as a specific kind of experiential offering rather than an entirely different category.

consumers to doubt said authenticity' (2007, 43). Advertising a product in a way that differs from how it is experienced in consumption quickly leads to phoniness and losing customers (2007, p 148).

Authenticity, hence, is not a matter of fooling a simpleton consumer; the latter cannot be presumed stupid, to be sure. If a company wishes to falsely advertise a product, then this may lead to short-term gains, but will, in the longer term, function only as an effective mechanism for repelling consumers. For Pine & Gilmore the immense world trade of fakes and replicas¹⁵² is exemplary of how false advertisement can quickly fail to produce new consumption. Consumers buying the fakes, they argue, are usually thought of as those who couldn't afford the real thing. Pine and Gilmore tell us, instead, that this is partially explanatory at most: 'Consumers will pay a premium for authenticity, but there comes a point (which differs, depending on the individual) when they trade off the real for a more available, cheaper substitute with sufficient quality' (2007, p 7). This means then, that the market for fakes includes those consumers who have passed judgment on a product's appeal to uniqueness, and have found it lacking or inauthentic, although remaining aware of the status that the brand name can convey. This same perception of the inauthentic, they continue, is found in those venues which have attempted to create an innovative or, to continue, authentic experience for the consumers, but have failed to do so: 'Theming easily becomes too silly or unbelievable—as in the Grand Canyon Experience in Las Vegas—or too over-the-top or in-your-face (as with most theme restaurants)' (2007, p 71).

Moreover, Pine and Gilmore want us to notice the explosive use of seals of authenticity, originality, health, social responsibility and so forth, as an increasingly important aspect behind authentic-driven brand differentiation. These seals, which include actual certifications regarding the use of chemicals or the environmental damage incurred in their economic production, among others, aid in rendering

¹⁵² The worldwide trade of fakes represented a \$512 billion in lost revenue during 2004 (2007, p 7).

authenticity tangible, and are the expression of a tendency in the consumers' needs for explicit differentiation¹⁵³.

How the 'real authentic' can be conveyed, therefore, is a matter that goes beyond advertisement or branding, in other words, beyond persuasive rhetoric, and into an actual understanding of what it is that the consumer wants and is willing to pay for. Now, because wants (or needs), and the willingness to pay, are all things that demand knowing and not simply presuming who the consumers are, this will imply, Pine & Gilmore argue, that producing authentic offerings will mean that companies must unavoidably reconcile what they offer with what people want (2007, p 12). This involves understanding the relation between consumption and self-image (2007, pp 13, 21). This statement, however, is not meant to emphasize the relation between consumption and vanity, but actually between consumption, as a process, and the constitution of self, during the same process. Arguing for the latter is, in short, their theoretical horizon and the practical lesson for firms to learn. It is all about subjectification.

Pine and Gilmore's theoretical and practical aims, in turn, include a series of important aspects that must be present if an offering is to be authentic: 1) Allowing consumers to share their ideas about the product, thus, allowing consumers to produce their own experience (production of consumption) (2007, pp 13, 19), 2) understanding the prevalence of a mediated reality (2007, p 17), and 3) understanding the relation between consumer production and the perspective of authenticity (2007, p 20).

Phrased in a less market oriented language, Pine and Gilmore invite businesses to reassess the importance of their *raison d'être*, via a reflection on their history and heritage, the nature of what they offer, their values as a company, their sense of purpose, etc. (2007, pp 115-147). They also argue—following business authors Bo Burlingham, Seth Godin, Michael Shuman, and Bill McKibbin—that:

¹⁵³ The counterpart is, of course, the existence of so many labels that say nothing to the consumer, and many which are intentionally used to fake the quality of the production methods, of trading prices, etc.

Many of today's anticorporate activists advise finding altogether different employment, specifically in ventures that lack, minimize, or at least downplay the profit motive in favour of changing the world. It is not a question of an either/or situation, however. We simply advise changing one's view of capitalism. (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, p 91)

Pine & Gilmore's most important lesson for businessmen is for them to think of business in terms other than minimizing costs, or at least not to see cost as the primary goal of doing business.

Now, one must keep in mind that Pine & Gilmore's research is first and foremost a business book, which means that the proposals they advance are intended to help companies perform better; there is no anti-capitalist sentiment to be found in their book. Yet, their appeals for a business change certainly do not stem from an intrinsic naiveté nor are they barely aimed at procuring better synergy either. It is true that downplaying the profit motif can surely sound idealistic, in the most popular and cynical sense that accompanies the word's usage. It is easy to reflect, along Harvey's Marxist lines, that if the individual businessman has only the power of his class as a capitalist, then one will soon come to the conclusion that as soon as he stops spinning the wheel of the economic machine—stops thinking low-cost/high-profit—then he will unavoidably stop being a business man—he will go bankrupt. Even more cynically, one could say that businessmen and their consumer representatives would use their knowledge of what consumers want in order to pose and to fake authenticity so as to capture the consumer's attention; that is, to gain a competitive advantage from which to easily crush their competitors. Nevertheless, the point is that such critical affirmations will always appear as a matter of necessity, an inevitable result, produced by the economic forces that have undoubtedly surpassed human intelligence and control, if one adheres to the image of the capitalist as the member of a class, which forcefully or not directs her behaviour. If one does not believe in mystical forces, then Pine & Gilmore's authenticity and experiential talk may still have something to teach us about the more tangible economic forces at play and how fake and real are intertwined in non-rational preferences. This 'artificiality' is part of the game

that we all play and the stage for Pine & Gilmore today, is business. How to perform on that stage touches upon the micropolitical affect of art practices nowadays.

To sum up, I have showed that Pine & Gilmore's call on businessmen, to reflect upon the importance of the production of experiences in delivering authentic offerings, derived from the emergence of a consumer that does not simply demand satisfaction to preconceived needs. Understanding how to best analyze and explain this new consumer is not a task without its difficulties, given the many actors and articulations at stake. However, one must realize that the difficulties in conceptualizing this new consumer (who wants experiences and authenticity), has to do with the impossibility of simplifying this more complex, because of its active rather than passive nature, form of agency: a complexity that is at odds with the idea of a consumer that is presumed to have a single identity, which would inform her role as agent as she moves throughout the social field—which would be primarily an economic field if capitalism is a totalizing regime.

Now, two important questions must be formulated before continuing with Pine and Gilmore: first, to what extent do they see the need to innovatively conceptualize the consumer (to rekindle the consumer's relation with objects and humans)? And, secondly, to what extent is this innovative notion of the consumer useful/functional/profitable for doing business in an economy of experiences?

The first question is answered in a way that explains 'the authentic' along the all too familiar nature/culture opposition to which they add: 'Nothing offered by any business is authentic; it's all artificial and utterly fake' (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, pp 87, 88)¹⁵². I believe the authors are not entirely interested in the ontological nightmare that follows from taking such affirmation to its ultimate consequences. Instead, they merely wish to take this dichotomic thinking as a presupposition underlying most people's way of thinking, which to some extent is not entirely off target, even if disparate with my intention of a non-modern ontology. Their presupposition is simple, because it is intended as a point of

departure from which businesses must find a way forward in which to rethink their economic offerings.

For Pine & Gilmore, as I argued above, this way forward is best found in a phenomenological interpretation of economic goods. This means that rather than displacing the modern ontological base that sees in the consumer an expression of the subject's autonomy, their attempt is instead to reassess the base; as with Husserl, intentionality is set as an ontological condition of the subject's relation to a world.

Despite this turn of events, Pine and Gilmore's refuge in phenomenological explanations is not necessary; the lesson to be learned needs no metaphysical baggage of the sort. The authentic offering is surely an authentically perceived offering, but this will not mean that defining 'authentic' has lesser difficulties if subsumed under the subjective objectivity of the consumer's phenomenological experience. Pine & Gilmore give up the idea of having the 'authentic' as a quality of an objective 'real', and turn towards establishing it in the subjective experience, which would be determined with the use of phenomenology. This manoeuvring is an unfortunate one and an all-too-modern epistemological reflection that is superfluous and does little to clarify their ideas about authenticity. Furthermore, the practical question of how businesses can change their perspective, in order to produce the authentic is badly conceived by focusing on the experience of consumption as being framed by a human ontology based on a pre-given form of intentionality. This odd move by Pine & Gilmore has to do with their attempt to escape an empirical analysis that would focus on the material aspect of offerings (the commodity broadly), which for them, would be problematic in an economy driven by experiential offerings. When they say that 'all that business offers is fake', what they do is precisely to highlight the soft ontological ground on which economic goods stand. Their phenomenological preference suggests that a suitable ontological foundation for economic offerings cannot be made based on the exterior reality of objects, given that economic goods are, at large, artificial. Thus, it becomes clear that, not only is there a form of the nature/culture divide present in their thought, but also that their metaphysical

commitment would follow a modern reversal, a reminder of Kant and Husserl, which explains their method of choice: not dialectics—Hegel and Marx—but phenomenology.

The economic offering, I will argue in a direction that differs from Pine & Gilmore, is actually not a special kind of entity, qualified by its singular footing in reality (either fake or real). Instead, as with any other object, it is explained by the network of relationships that it per-forms in connecting all the elements, and which, in turn, will define its footing or ‘reality status’; its use, its comparison with similar objects in terms of money, of quality or performance, as well as the workers, tools and technologies that brought it to life; next to its carbon footprint, the reputation of its producer, are among the things that define it as a real entity and as an actant. If we take, for example, a Smartphone, it will have a series of material attributes that will testify to a process of production, that will link the object to workers, machines, and to a geographical location (minerals, oil, etc.) among others. As I noted above, attempting to analyze the economic offering in itself will neglect almost everything that would be relevant, when asking about its authenticity and its relation to consumers. There is little use in painstakingly analyzing an iPhone ‘in itself’ with the hope of explaining its footing in reality or among economic offerings, for it would also have to take into account those Mac enthusiasts, Blackberry users, screenagers, and all those other actors that come to everyone’s mind when talking about Smartphones (to everyone, with the exception perhaps, of philosophers).

Authenticity is all but a mystery to be uncovered within the commodity. In order to qualify an iPhone one may not know about economic categories, but definitely must know about Smartphones at large, about the importance of broadband, the functionality of apps and the latest advances in computer technology, if one is expected to say anything worthwhile about it. This knowledge is needed, furthermore, to understand how authenticity can affect the demand and preference for certain offerings over others. As I follow Pine & Gilmore; authenticity’s crossover effects on the demand of other offerings, will depend, in the case of the iPhone, not only on knowing with certainty how it works, but

also why it's labelled 'smart', whether it is cheap or convenient, or if it is advantageous for people working in the creative, manufacturing, or service industries; whether it will indeed enlarge the staged performance of everyone¹⁵⁴.

The key issue concerning authenticity is to realize that qualifying the authenticity of an offering will not depend on a specific characteristic, which could be replicated throughout. Instead, authenticity should be related to an assemblage of elements that are mobilized by the assemblage. Staying in line with Pine & Gilmore one could say, using my example above, that a Smartphone is perceived as authentic if it delivers to the customer an original design, an equally original display, and an innovative performance. The first two, original design and display are, for the authors, the material key aspects that authentic goods must possess (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, pp 49, 50), but the experience surpasses this materiality. Now, those characteristics that will determine whether or not the offering has an original design and display are solely for the business on its own to find out, most probably based on market research and other empirical input, and do not depend on the existence of a commonly agreed taste settled by a philosopher—Pine & Gilmore do not follow Bentham or Kant that far. On the contrary, the authors decidedly depart from any attempt at making Authenticity a common principle, because, for them, what one finds in consumers today is precisely the unwillingness to identify with any agreed or shared idea of taste—again a dissensual community is brought forward. For Pine & Gilmore consumers perceive negatively (as repetitive, reproductive, a copy, vulgar, etc.) that which is common, that which has been agreed upon and settled.

¹⁵⁴ Modern economics, following the 'utilitarian' vein, concocted what is known as the social welfare function. This mathematical function is based on the assumption that individual utility (the economic term for well-being) is cardinal, that is, quantifiable and comparable. Along these lines, the sum of the utilities of all the members of a social group would deliver the total utility of a social group. This summed utility would of course imply that increases in the utility of some members of that social group could increase the utility of whole group, even if the utility of some would actually diminish. Many economists today do not believe that utilities are cardinal or even that they can be an actual measure of well-being (Kenneth Arrow was probably the first to set an example in this respect with his Impossibility Theorem (See Arrow, K. 1951. *Social Choice and Individual Values*, New York: Wiley).

I believe, thus, that making authenticity an assemblage based on concrete material (and immaterial) conditions (or associations), stages a more compelling explanation of the consumer's behaviour than the one Pine and Gilmore want to put across, and from which their recommendation for businesses derives. It is easy to see that by focusing on the offering as a given whole, one quickly misses the networks of objects that the consumer mobilizes and in which she is mobilized, in order to make it authentic and/or experiential¹⁵⁵.

Making this set of associations, this network, explicit is my intention in what follows. To do so I will focus exclusively on Pine & Gilmore's Experience Economy, where I believe such networks are easier to recognize. In addition, attention to the network of experiential and authentic consumption will allow for the issue of producing the authentic, the issue of labour and its relation to Florida's Creative Class, to be equally tackled.

Finally, I wish to note that this epistemological wondering motivated by asking about how to best understand objects of consumption, however, should not distract one from the initial challenge that Pine & Gilmore pose for businesses, and which remains valid beyond their phenomenological adventure. The challenge, therefore, is to recognize the impossibility of setting up an accountability of all the material elements that would automatically render an experience authentic for the consumer, even though that would be the kind of thing a businessman, wanting to minimize risk, might want to hear. The issue at stake is simply that businesses must give up the wish of maintaining a complete accountability over their offerings, if they are to render them authentic. Their challenge is such, because it asks businesses to change the way in which they translate a business plan into a real business project: keeping processes efficient, costs under control, and profit margins in accordance to what the customer is willing to pay or according to what the competitors charge. The challenge, nonetheless, is never intended as a

¹⁵⁵ The consumer will surely understand and value all offerings having a myriad of information as a reference. However, I want to keep safe distance from making of the consumer a structural category. Consumption is a fragile machine, which may share elements across consumers, but which remains concrete at all times.

philosophical tirade, but an actual business model. How should this work? This is a question that must also be tackled, to some extent—I'm not an entrepreneur—in the following section.

Networks of consumption and the production of subjectivity

Consumers, Pine and Gilmore argue, do not spend their money on a particular object of consumption (the steak at the steakhouse), but on an experience of consumption. This gesture is equally shared by Florida and, as I have shown, puts all three authors at a safe distance from a rationalized perspective of educated decisions based on usefulness¹⁵⁶. If consumption cannot be reduced to the exhaustion of the particular object, nor to its practical attributions, then, it becomes clear that whatever value gained or lost cannot be reduced to the physical limits of the object of consumption; the experience of eating the steak at a place like Medieval Times is not reduced, nor even necessarily dependant on the quality of the meat, but rather functions as a whole assemblage of tangible goods, services, and atmosphere, from which an experience that involves fantasy and entertainment (among other things) is produced¹⁵⁷. This begs the question, what exactly are people paying for then?

In the full-fledged Experience Economy, instead of relying purely on our own wherewithal to experience the new and wondrous—as has been done for ages—we will increasingly pay companies to stage experiences for us, just as we now pay companies for services we once delivered ourselves, goods we once made ourselves, and commodities we once extracted ourselves. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 67)

¹⁵⁶ Florida asserts that, 'Experiences are replacing goods and services because they stimulate our creative faculties and enhance our creative capabilities. This active, experiential lifestyle is spreading and becoming more prevalent in society as the structures and institutions of the Creative Economy spread' (2004, p 168).

¹⁵⁷ For Pine & Gilmore, in addition, one must refrain from the confusion between services and experiences: 'When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages—as in theatrical play—to engage him in a personal way' (1999, p 2).

For consumers, therefore, consumption has become an abode for having experiences. Experiences that may be new, innovative, sense-driven, but which are also interesting and reflective, that is, experiences which involve but cannot be reduced to new sensations. And it is precisely in the ‘sensational’ that Pine & Gilmore’s understanding of experience, emphasizing the multifarious perspectives that lie behind the stimuli of the senses, is—and let me formulate this in a double negation in order to disclose a perspective from which both can be compared—*not entirely dissimilar* to a Deleuzian understanding of aesthetic experience. The irreduction to the senses mentioned is clearly stated by Deleuze and Guattari when they say:

[I]n principle at least, sensation is not the same thing as the material, which constitutes only the de facto condition, but, insofar as this condition is satisfied (that is, the canvas, color, or stone does not crumble into dust), it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself. [...] So long as the material lasts, the sensation enjoys an eternity in those very moments. Sensation is not realized in the material without the material passing completely into the sensation, into the percept or affect. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp 166, 167)

The fundamental ingredients of an experiential offering: active engagement on behalf of the consumer and emphasis on the customer-orientated deployment of context, of ‘ambiance’ to use Morton’s notion, on behalf of the producer, are what allow Pine & Gilmore to state that an experience cannot be reduced to mere entertainment—entertainment being another form of reductionism towards sensations.

Experiential offerings relate, thus straightforwardly, to an understanding of aesthetic experience as the one I have tried to develop. Both forms of experimentation put in place a set of material conditions that are intended to be engaging by means of distinctive stimuli (of one or various senses, of reflection, of space or duration, etc.), but which are arranged in such a way that the outcome for the consumer can only be foreseen or rehearsed to a certain extent. In other words, experiential offerings function in a way

in which the consumer's engagement will be determinant of the outcome of the experience, as it is in performance art wherein the public and the spectators are co-constitutive for the work of art. This makes, in turn, the deployment of context (the set-up made by the business) a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to determine an offerings authenticity—its mark-up value to the consumer as characterized by Pine & Gilmore. It is precisely the transformation of uncertainty into a positive element¹⁵⁸ and the consumer's movement along a process of deterritorialization-territorialization, which will connect consumer experience to aesthetic experience¹⁵⁹.

Simply put, knowing what the experience is about is not the same as having the experience and, thus, the set-up does not work alone but in association with the consumer. It is the experienced outcome of this arrangement that will determine whether the consumer returns or not—experiential consumption presupposes (human) actors that are neither fooled nor manipulated into consuming. This is why Pine & Gilmore will affirm that 'When you [the business owner] customize an experience to make it just right for an individual—providing exactly what he or she needs right now—you cannot help changing that individual' (1999, p 165). Yet, couldn't one retort that Pine & Gilmore ask businessmen to focus on consumer perception of authenticity and not on the authenticity of the experienced outcome itself? Isn't the consumer's demand forever more vulgar forms of entertainment not explained by their (distorted) perception of the offering?

¹⁵⁸ It should be clear by now that for both rational consumers and rational firms, uncertainty cannot be but a negative condition for an economic transaction. If a rational consumer cannot foresee in full the value he will get from an offering then his decision will be regarded as suboptimal. For the firm an equal logic will make of its inability to capture in full the consumer's perceived value a negative element, because profits cannot be maximized without this knowledge.

¹⁵⁹ The point relates to Rancière's concerns about political art, to be sure, inasmuch as the association between experiences begins to answer the issue of how Intermedial Art may have a point of identification with an, in principle, completely separate area of the social field. The spectator, as it may turn out, will not be theorized as a subjectivity that constitutes itself as dissimilar or even opposite from a consumerist form of subjectivity, which breathes a new air into the role of lines of flight and self-creation that is proposed through aesthetic experience.

In Pine and Gilmore's earlier book it remains an open question whether or not the experiential offerings could be decidedly different from cheap forms of entertainment¹⁶⁰—hence, the importance of their notion of authenticity. Authenticity, thus, is actually a marker for businesses to take into account when creating or directly producing an offering, which must not be confused with a category derived from an idealist understanding of perception, which strangely enough, is how it seems to appear in Pine & Gilmore. I say strangely enough, because, on the one hand, Pine & Gilmore's main audience are businessmen and, hence, their intention is to be practical first, theoretical second. On the other hand, it is strange, because their thought leads one repeatedly to come to terms with the fact that the consumer plays a determining role in the constitution of authenticity, but never as something that would go beyond the offering itself—there is actually no such thing as an economic offering 'in itself'.

Taking a step back, to the issue of consumers as a form of agency, it becomes more and more clear, that in order to grasp its role a structural understanding of consumption will not suffice, because in thematizing the rational choices of the consumer, it will inevitably neglect both, the process of consumption and the objects mobilized by the consumer, in order to judge an offering as authentic.

Going beyond an understanding of subjectivity based on the adherence to an institutionalized identity—a rational and emancipated citizen—is deemed as necessary as moving away from the reduction of the subject to a monad calculator of sorts. The consumer of authentic offerings ceases to be an identity—even if a complex one—which marketing would have to define and target. Human incursion into practices of consumption must, in turn, be related to the construction of mediatized forms of subjectivity: a subjectivity that is involved through and through within a milieu, through and through within a

¹⁶⁰ This statement follows from a Platonic presupposition that sees in mass commodities nothing but a cheap version of once crafted goods that had some unqualified value beyond functionality. Beyond this view, economies of scale cannot be said to condition the quality of the offering, or the quality of the working environment. The only thing they will condition is the greater efficiency of the process of production. Pine & Gilmore published earlier, a book entitled *Mass Customization*, which relates to this same point, from a business economics point of view. The title wants to play with the terms mass consumption or mass consumer. The idea is to challenge the whole notion of mass production and economies of scale, in order to propose the production of offerings that target individual customers, but do so without either fooling the consumer or elevating costs in a dramatic way, which would be how such an endeavour would be envisaged at a first glance.

network of associations, and through and through mediation by ‘black boxes’. Pine and Gilmore’s experiential offerings can indeed make the point easier to grasp¹⁶¹. Take, for example, the experience of a child visiting Disney World, which, I argue, cannot be reduced to an ambivalent categorization like amusement or entertainment. It cannot without the risk of passing over the concrete assemblages that would produce such amusement. The experience must, on the contrary, be associated with feelings of enchantment, fantasy, and delirium, all of which come about as the result of the dynamic encounter of the child with an overwhelming milieu, with an overwhelming proposal of associations. The Disneyland milieu, (an assemblage composed by a myriad of machines, and an almost impossible number of associations between humans and non-humans) provides the child with the possibility of becoming an experiential consumer¹⁶²: a consumer which will keep a memorable experience, a willingness to return, and who will most likely bring his or her own children in the future so they can realize a similar experience: ‘However, while the work of the experience stager perishes upon its performance [precisely the right word], the value of the experience lingers in the memory of any individual who was engaged by the event’ (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, pp 12, 13). Here Pine & Gilmore highlight the performative in exactly the same manner as Latour does: with the aim of capturing both, the fact that Disneyworld must be sustained as a memorable experience over and over again, and the critical role of an agency that actively creates associations from which alliances emerge. The created memory as something positive and desirable constitutes an alliance. The experience is an ally, because of the positive effects that come, when bringing a cherished memory to mind, without this implying that it is an emotional palliative. The memory that lasts will be the memory of the child that was able to strengthened the footing of his objects of fantasy, of his heroes’ qualities, of his ability to imagine, in general terms, a world that is different

¹⁶¹ They explicitly argue about the importance of the developing relationships between the staged experience and the customer: ‘Remember that staging experiences is not about entertaining customers, it’s about *engaging* them’ (1999, p 30).

¹⁶² This is explicitly stated by Pine & Gilmore at the beginning of their book: ‘Each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual’s prior state of mind and being’ (1999, p 12).

from the ‘adult world’ that he’s beginning to know—an adult world characterized by bourgeois preoccupations.

For Pine and Gilmore encouraging the consumer’s imagination is anything but restricted to children, and is an important and frequent ingredient of experiential offerings at large (1999, p 50)¹⁶³. Furthermore, lasting memory plays an important part in making the offering a black box, an intermediary. The more the consumer is able to rely on the offering, the more he or she will be interested in having awareness of its immanent possibilities. If we take, for instance, an adventure typical of the booming ecotourism industry the experiential offering (an assemblage of natural objects, local guides, and stimulating sensations) cannot but become a black box for the returning customer. The latter is the consumer who has learned to trust the local guide’s advice, who trusts the equipment used, and who actively searches for the adrenaline and the exhilarating sensations. Just imagine the case of the consumer who has been dragged away on such a trip by a friend or relative: the consumer who fears being away from the conveniences of urban life, who has no love for wildlife, or passion for extreme activities. This hesitant consumer will be the one challenging the offering’s footing as a black box: the possibility that the equipment might fail, the dangers of kayaking or rafting, the carefree attitude of the free-spirited guide, and the list, naturally, could go on. It may be true that even such consumer may end up returning, but this will only happen once the offering has become a black box, once he or she consolidates a strong enough alliance with all the objects that make it up.

Children are, thus, by no means the only beneficiaries of an experience economy. Pine and Gilmore tell us that:

People often purchase their personal or lifetime transformations from outside experts and enterprises that commercialize reality [...] The word real and authentic populates all sorts of

¹⁶³ ‘Creating a reality other than everyday—for doing, learning, staying, and being—underlies any successful theme and is at the heart of establishing a sense of place’ (1999, p 50).

goods and services today, from basic manufactured goods to TV, education, and sports, which means that competition in the realm of the real is fully in motion (2007, pp 36, 37).

Moreover, one need not stop at experiential offerings, to be taken as a clearly limited set of experiences. If experiential offerings give a valuable lesson, it is one in highlighting the possibilities that the consumers have in establishing relationships with ‘workers’ and ‘commodities’, which respectively, go way beyond a money exchange or exhaustion through use. Pine & Gilmore’s talking about authenticity, highlights precisely the many ways in which consumers relate to offerings that are made to deliver an experience of consumption. Think, for instance, in the way an iPod has also provided a useful service: that of being able to conveniently carry a library of music around. The iPod’s convenience cannot be reduced to its ability to store music files. The iPod is innovative in its design and capabilities: it is able to organize a full library in a way which is quickly accessible to the user; it is able to play the music stored without losing sound quality (contrary to the experience with Walkman cassettes); it is able to play music for longer than is possible with devices working with disposable batteries, and it is also very light, slim, and fully portable, with an appealing design that comes in different colours and a varied look depending on the storage capacity. The list can naturally be expanded, but I am able to write this list without any more knowledge than the average consumer. Reducing the list to a quantifiable variable makes little sense, for it should be clear by now that the consumer passes judgment upon the offering’s authenticity in a highly sophisticated way. The consumer of an iPod, moreover, by the fact of being able to carry at all times a library of music, will affect the way he or she experiences other activities: from running in the park and driving to work, to mountain climbing¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶⁴ One can easily find on the Internet various forums dedicated to actually discussing this topic. See for example <http://kottke.org/plus/50-ways-ipod/>.

Networks of creativity and the experience economy

The extension of the experience economy is not fully delimited in advance by Pine & Gilmore. For them the question is never a matter of identifying specific economic industries or markets, because their aim is precisely to persuade businessmen in general to transform their offerings into a memorable experience for the customer. Their book *Authenticity* is aimed at making their ideas regarding the role of experiences even more palpable for businesses dealing with the production of goods and common services. Making consumption an experience remains, nonetheless, the main lesson for becoming a successful business in today's economy: to bring in new customers, retain the old, and beat the competition. One can surely argue that the transition towards producing experiences may not be an easy one for many traditional businesses, yet this will not imply that producing authentic offerings has a different goal from that of delivering experiences. Already in their first book Pine & Gilmore recognized the transformation when advising companies to 'create a brand image emphasizing the experience customers can have surrounding the purchase, use, or ownership of a good. Nike's ability to turn \$20 sneakers into \$100 cross-training tools is a prime example' (1999, p 17). *Authenticity*, henceforth, was a study that dug deeper into the experience of consumption. The message from the start has been the same: consumers want experiences (which imply the recognition of consumption as an experience), the offering cannot be defined without its associations, and businesses must be willing to change the way in which they produce offerings¹⁶⁵.

This last part directly connects with Florida's ideas on unleashing creativity at the workplace. There seems to be no point in thinking about Pine & Gilmore's authenticity without regarding the creative

¹⁶⁵ This point touches upon the creation of value, which poses a patent sense of incommensurability when dealing with authentic offerings. This incommensurability is asserted by Deleuze & Guattari when they state: 'The definition of surplus value must be modified in terms of the machinic surplus value of variable capital and from the nonmeasurable nature of this aggregate of surplus value of flux. It cannot be defined by the difference between the value of labor capacity and the value created by labor capacity, but by the incommensurability between two flows that are nonetheless immanent to each other, by the disparity between the two aspects of money that express them, and by the absence of a limit exterior to their relationship—the one measuring the true economic force, the other measuring a purchasing power determined as "income". The first is the immense deterritorialized flow that constitutes the full body of capital' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p 237).

labour that lies behind it. In Florida, we must bring back to mind that creativity is not seen as an ability possessed by the worker: a sort of attribute to be identified in some singular individuals. Creative labour, I argued following Florida, is produced in networks where human capital, urban spaces dedicated to culture, a more permissible and horizontal work space, and an innovative use of technologies cross breed. While Florida provides a more general account of the networks, Pine and Gilmore allow one to concentrate on the working place as an assemblage of humans and non-humans, whose purpose is to engage the consumer and allow her to leave with a lasting memory.

Pine and Gilmore use the theatre as a metaphor with which they communicate the change of perspective that is needed for businesses to produce experiences. In Latourian terms, an intricate exercise of translation takes place in order to use theatrical concepts effectively. Passing over the details: drama = strategy; script = processes; theatre = work; performance = offering (1999, p 109). By this translation they decidedly transform the working place into a theatre stage:

Successful acting, as opposed to pretending, never creates a noticeable gap between the characterization of the role and the actual person playing the role. That is, the character conforms with self—who the worker really is—drawing on the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual uniqueness of the individual playing the role. (1999, p 112)

And:

The power of characterization lies in the characterization of every worker's role in an organized whole. Whether a troupe, a more formal acting company, a production company, or a collection of street performers, this [ensemble = organisation] gives individual performers freedom to create their own characters, with the proviso that their characterization contribute positively to the total effect. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 141)

Just like in theatre, a good personal performance will not be based on the actor's ability to actualize an ideal characterization. It will not, because there is simply no ideal characterization of Macbeth, of Agamemnon, or of Leopold Bloom¹⁶⁶. On the contrary, it is the actor's particular performance that brings to life the character, in a way which follows ethereal guidelines, but which most certainly will highlight the singularity of the performance, rather than the actor's ability to identify with a universal literary persona. Using American sociologist Erving Goffman's terminology and method, Pine & Gilmore explicitly recognize the importance of role-playing behind experiential offerings; role-playing understood as, both, adhering to a role and delivering a unique performance. It is the actor's commitment that will be able to accomplish both.

For the American sociologist, the actor's commitment is essential for the role-playing to be convincing¹⁶⁷. Yet, it is the nature of the commitment what makes of the acting metaphor in Pine & Gilmore a dramatic change of perspective in comparison to the verticality of the employer-employee relationship. For Goffman a performer is always balancing between adhering to a role, and distancing from it. The distance itself plays an important part in qualifying the authenticity of the performance. In other words, the performer that makes use of the distance mentioned will convey a performance, which by not simply reproducing a broadly agreed upon characterization will, in turn, be perceived by the audience as more authentic.

The term authentic stays in line with Pine & Gilmore's usage and its role here positively highlights the effects of giving workers the freedom to appropriate an activity rather than merely reproducing it (acquiring technical mastery over it). Appropriation, nonetheless, is not reduced by Pine & Gilmore to a

¹⁶⁶ Passing judgment on an experiential offering, which depends on the performance, would, in turn, press one to go beyond a spectrum of consumer (dis)satisfaction: 'Rather than merely meeting expectations (by providing satisfaction) or setting new ones (by reducing sacrifice), companies deliberately attempt to transcend expectations, to go off in new (and unexpected) directions entirely. This doesn't mean trying to "exceed" expectations, for that would suggest an improvement along a known axis of competition, nor does it mean uncovering new dimensions on which to compete; those are the domains of satisfaction and sacrifice, respectively. Rather, it means staging the unexpected. [...] Go beyond "how we did" and even "what you want" to "what you remember"' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 96).

¹⁶⁷ An unwilling performer will deliver a performance that is 'styled to show that one is somewhat out of place' (Lemert & Branaman, 1997, p 38).

one sided perspective. Therefore, appropriation is not meant as a force that simply runs contrary to the adherence to a role. The term role distance in Goffman's analysis, is to be sure, a purely negative one. Distance certainly plays a part in qualifying the quality of the performance¹⁶⁸, but does so, because the actor uses it to reaffirm his or her ability to dis-identify from the (expected) character or, plainly put, to sabotage the performance. Goffman's usage assumes the stringency of the referent, the impossibility of the performance to gain anything from being unique. Appropriation in Pine & Gilmore is, on the contrary, a positive notion. It refers to the actor's (the worker's) ability to make of a non-stringent character a unique performance. Keep in mind that an authentic performance is not the one that best identifies with an agreed-upon characterization (as with Goffman), but the one that is able to make of a loosely conceived character a unique, singular performance; being creative becomes immediately a positive asset inasmuch as the worker will need to mobilize an array of objects in a way that will indeed be distinct, but which must also be appealing and convincing.

There are several practical implications to be noticed. First, from a Latourian perspective, the worker must become a black box. This will mean that the how of the way in which the worker is able to create an authentic performance does not have to be fully understood, without this affecting the expectations about the high quality of the output. The worker as a black box idea means also that the former must have freedom enough to make the necessary alliances that he or she will need in order to deliver the expected output. This does not imply that it is the worker, as a physical or institutionalized body that becomes *pari passu* a black box in the working place. The worker's body is a mediator itself, although a powerful one, because it articulates the connections made, and the associations needed, to produce a quality performance. The internal relations of the black box, including the worker's body as a mediator, will constitute itself as a network and, in turn, will function as a machine: the brain plugs in to the

¹⁶⁸ The term role distance tells us that the performer 'organizes his expressive situational behavior in relation to situated activity roles' and 'in doing so he uses whatever means are at hand to introduce a margin of freedom and manoeuvrability, of pointed disidentification, between himself and the self virtually available for him in the situation' (Lemert & Branaman, 1997, p 39).

computer via a mouse, a screen, and an interface; the performance of the waiter depends on how the worker uses the costume, the props, but also the smiles, the handshakes, the complementary drinks, the background pianist, etc. All in all, Pine & Gilmore summon complex networks in the production of authenticity, although with a specific focus on experiential offerings, which more readily adapt to their theatrical concepts.

The objects of the offerings themselves gain footing precisely because of their place within a network. The process of production, as it turns out, rather than being a linear process of transformation of raw materials into goods, has become the process of transformation of disconnected intermediaries (black boxes) into mediators (translators) with strong alliances. The worker plays a crucial role in making the offering a mediator that creates surplus value in a customized experience: in creating the necessary connections that will give it strong enough alliances. These will be alliances produced through creative work and which will make the experiences memorable and the offerings authentic. Pine and Gilmore, to rephrase, invite businesses to recognize that authentic offerings are the product of complex work and that the best way to produce them is by allowing workers to appropriate their role, to determine how they use their tools, to associate with others, and to become black boxes.

It is not merely a matter of wishful thinking, but of being business savvy. Once again, one must keep in mind that Pine and Gilmore are not writing a political pamphlet, but a business book: their aim is to help businesses make money in an economy where profitable margins are shifting from goods and services towards experiences. Giving the worker a greater or even an absolute margin to manoeuvre as she pleases is aimed at making experiences more authentic, at producing offerings that have a higher value for consumers. The greater margin of freedom must be equally related to Florida's conclusions regarding workers' preference for flexibility (Florida, 2004, pp 120–122), greater responsibilities, and stimulating working conditions (2004, pp 117–120). This is particularly interesting because according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (cited by Florida) the Creative Class works the longest hours (2004, p 122). I

take this to be a sign of the growing importance, in terms of GDP, of the Creative Economy, and also of the effect that greater freedom has on the involvement that workers have in their work. In other words, people want to work more if freedom means having greater responsibilities, ability to make decisions, to conduct their own research and projects, etc.

Pine & Gilmore's focus on humans, however, makes the role of non-humans easy to ignore. The actor's props, which in theatre help to convey a sense of reality to the story, may not provide a clear enough analogy with the assemblages of the experience economy and even less so with technologies used by creative labour as conceived by Florida¹⁶⁹. Technologies (machines, software, social media and internet applications, etc.) become powerful allies that give the worker, for example, the ability to deliver highly creative outputs that can overrun years of technical training: think of what a graphic designer is able to do with sophisticated software, in terms of achieving technical precision that would take artists years to master. Being able to proficiently use software means being able to mobilize technical expertise, mathematical certainty, innumerable ways in which to combine and transform data, etc., in order to produce outputs which, again, are by nature complex.

The use of technology is certainly not something new in economic analysis or consumer theory. Technology, however, is far from being simply a matter of automation, efficiency or of an accelerated accumulation of capital. Technology is neither an external variable that has effects on efficiency, nor one that would allow for greater economies of scale to be achieved or greater volumes to be produced. Pine & Gilmore see the impact of technology as more substantial and akin to their calls for new ways of conceiving the workplace:

¹⁶⁹ Giving a worker greater freedom will mean giving him or her freedom to decide how to use the resources at his or her disposal. One must be clear in that this does not include a scenario of sabotage or stalling. Both Florida and Pine & Gilmore are interested in constructing a scenario in which workers can make best use of their ability to work, which surely implies certain working conditions (as stated by Florida), but which also implies the existence of a wilful agreement to work on behalf of the employee.

For too many years companies used information technologies merely to automate existing business processes, when every new technology possesses characteristics with which companies could script entirely new means of performing work. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 149)

In short, offerings that are authentic will be so by making of the goods, services or experiences a powerful mediator. The worker(s), the working place, the machines, the tools, and so forth will become a network, in which the worker will serve as a crucial mediator as he or she explores and creates new associations and, if successful, strong alliances as a worker; as a result of which, he can turn into a black box, an intermediary. The essential role of experiential offerings gives a different perspective on the same mediator (the offering), by having its emphasis on the consumer: the consumer is invited to explore with an offering that may be ‘diluted’ (like the ecotourism offer) or which may be clearly demarcated as an object (like the iPod), but whose demarcation as an object does not define its value for the consumer. The consumer perspective serves to highlight the networks that are created as anyone takes part in an experiential offering. The focus on authenticity helps one to understand the networks that must be created in order to produce offerings that can challenge the consumer’s way of experiencing common activities.

Nonetheless, Pine and Gilmore’s claims that businesses must produce experiences or perish, and Florida’s argument about the Creative Economy having changed the working place, begs the question as to whether such changes will have an effect on the market economy, or on the market as the place of exchange in our globalized economy?

Pine and Gilmore’s experience economy does not depart in the least from the workings of a market economy, which is, of course, not surprising. A company that is part of the experience economy will, henceforth, have to deal and succeed against the basic forces of a market economy (competition and demand) as well as against the less economical, but equally present, forces that Korten warned against

(lobbying, a costly market entrance, lack of competition, externalities, etc.). The tendency to introduce a personal/premium polarity (Pine & Gilmore, 2007, pp 232-235) would testify to the interest of certain companies, which have indeed recognized the business possibilities of experiential offerings, but which have the market power to do so in a way that targets only a higher segment of the downward sloping demand curve. Introducing this polarity creates a hierarchy of consumers: one that, unfortunately, forces the low-end consumers (the vast majority) to adapt their expectations downwards. The trend is not new and traverses the field of goods and services (especially the latter) in its entirety (think of airlines, casinos, hotels, banks, restaurants, etc.)¹⁷⁰. The companies more attuned to such ways of dealing with consumers are, however, companies unable, or unwilling, to provide personal service to all its customers—mainly because of their size, and what the costs of this would represent—but who remain aware of the importance it has for these same consumers. Their efforts transform consumer's wants for personalization into a mechanism for making a greater profit, while the backlash is completely assumed by those who are not premium customers.

A consumer, I have argued, is rarely a one-time visitor for a company and, thus, the question that follows is: Why would these non-premium customers return? The answer: Simply because they are unable to find a better offer from the competition, or even worse, competition does not exist. This answer would seemingly take one back to Korten and his calls for less corporate power driven markets and more locally driven competition. The role of competition would thus appear as a desirable feature that would be equally endorsed by Pine and Gilmore, which makes the preference for competitive markets a meeting point in all four authors (Korten, Florida, Pine and Gilmore).

¹⁷⁰ Yet this trend is yet not characterized simply by the divergence between cost and price. It is the hierarchization of consumers and not the profit margins that makes it a trend, which survives only there where competition does not exist. The cost of goods will not translate into price within the Experience Economy, but it does so not by the exertion of market power, but by the intangible, yet high, valuation of a memorable experience: This means, for instance, that 'a Rolling Stones concert goer will pay a large premium for an official T-shirt emblazoned with the date and city of the concert he attended. That's because the price point functions less as an indicator of the cost of goods than of the value that the buyer attaches to remembering the experience' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p 57).

We know by now, following Pine and Gilmore, that the mass-made, the copy, the cheap, the all-too-common, become bad words for business in the experience economy. We also know that this doesn't mean that goods are not consumed by great numbers of people, through minimizing cost processes, open markets, and so forth. The question, again, would be about those forces that would allow the authentic offerings to gain a place within a market or to create new markets. The answer, the meeting point, is undoubtedly the basic framework of market forces in competition: non-coerced and free-will demand, on the one hand, and non-cooperative, non-monopolistic supply, on the other. This means that authentic offerings need for markets to work ideally. As with Korten, ideal markets mean non-coerced (free) competition and, therefore, it would be pervading 'unfair' conditions of competition, which would harm the creative tendency of the economy towards more authenticity, and more experiential offerings.

The issue of a returning consumer is a major concern only where competition exists. No competitors (now and in the future) in an already established market—where there exists already an established exchange of money for goods—means that a stream of foreseeable future outcomes can be secured in the present, and consequently, that lowering the costs of production or ensuring an exceedingly priced offering would be the only thing that a business has to worry about. One should conclude then, that competitive market forces can in fact play an important role in enlarging the Creative Economy, as Pine and Gilmore argue, to help consumers enjoy more interesting, more significant, offerings. The existence of a competitive environment seems to be a characteristic, whose sole purpose would be to allow companies to actually compete—the presupposed essential element of capitalism for Marx cannot be taken for granted within a capitalist economy. Foucault had certainly envisioned a society where policy makers would recognize this fact and would work in order to assure the existence of competition at all levels of society¹⁷¹. However, the issue seems to go in an entirely different direction as one follows

¹⁷¹ This is argued already in Foucault's *Biopolitics*. For him the goal of capitalist policy makers especially after the war has been to intervene society in order to assure the existence of competition at all levels: 'The art of government programmed by the ordoliberalists of the 1930's, and which has now become the program of most governments in capitalist countries, absolutely

Korten, who would argue that policy makers are doing precisely too little to ensure a healthy environment, where competition can be sustainable. If one says, with Foucault, that neo-liberalism would be a program whose goal is to reorganize all activities along the dynamics of competition, then such statement must be taken today at face value. It is possible that for Foucault the danger would have meant the overlapping of homo economicus onto spaces in the social field where it was not present before, and thus, the loss of social dynamics that may run contrary to competition. Yet, I believe the question today, and this rephrases Korten's argument, forces us to assume a slight change of perspective on the issue of competition. The latter, rather than an issue about colonizing remnants of society, is actually one of intervening existing spaces of exchange (markets), in order to fulfil the calls for an enduring competitive environment. It will remain true, despite the existence of competitive markets that the networks of the Creative Economy identified by Florida, will depend on things other than the abundance or lack of competition. The many elements that Florida mentions (tolerant environment, existence of divergent cultural expressions, existence of academic and research institutions, etc.) are fundamental for there to be incentives for marketing authentic offerings, and for the Creative Economy to flourish.

The Creative Economy—the economy where authenticity is produced—is hence, a branch of the market economy. However, it is not simply more of the same, because reducing all markets to their function as mediators between forces of demand and supply is an abstraction that can no longer explain the concrete networks that sustain each market. If one insists on talking about the market economy (as a common whole), then one must restrain from stating any conclusions, which imply the foggy generalization that bundles all markets according to their presumed function. My attempt so far has done precisely the

does not seek the constitution of that kind of society [mass consumer]. It involves on the contrary, obtaining a society that is not oriented towards the commodity and the uniformity of the commodity, but towards the multiplicity and differentiation of enterprises' (Foucault, 2008, p 149). 'The German ordoliberalists explained that the main objective of a social policy is certainly not to take into account all the risks that may be incurred by the global mass of population, and that a true social policy must be such that, without affecting the economic game, and consequently letting society develop as an enterprise society, mechanisms of intervention are deployed to assist those when, and only when, they need it' (2008, p 207).

opposite: I have argued that explaining the relevant networks, which have allowed for experiential consumption to emerge and for creative labour to be a sustainable mode of conducting business, can only be done by paying attention to the particularities within each market.

Once markets are seen as places of exchange where concrete networks function, then the former's ability to use the forces of competition to the advantage of the consumer, can no longer be reduced to being a matter of greater production efficiency. This won't mean that cost-efficiency disappears, to be sure. It will simply mean that efficiency cannot be taken as a process that imposes the lowest common denominator as a rule; the mass-produced process that replaces craftsmanship is an easy example, where added (artistic) value is neglected, while simple-minded consumers buy in mass.

When it comes to the Creative Economy, the main question in this respect is then: if the Creative Economy is a market economy, which must yet be recognized for its singularity, then how does one understand the corporate attempts for delivering authenticity, which may still be successful? One can think, for instance, of green washing, green marketing, and the many ways in which sales are boosted through highlighting particular efforts or limited products, which do not reflect the broader picture of a company—Shell marketing itself as a pioneer of clean energy.

In addition, one can question the other side of the coin, the green consumer, who may view her habits of consumption as values of aesthetic contemplation, i.e. of the construction of a collective eco-*Gesamtkunstwerk*. Here one can think of the enlightening yet caricature-like image of the owner of a hybrid car, who eats tofu, gives money to Greenpeace and raises online awareness about everything, from cancer to the liberation of Tibet. Despite the contempt that such politically irrelevant actions may cause, it is worthwhile asking whether experiential consumption can indeed be reduced to nothing more than a pretentious way of restructuring one's habits of consumption.

These two questions, I believe, can be analyzed by returning to the critique of Timothy Morton, whose criticism is aimed at sustainable economics, as a form of environmentalism, and at Romantic consumption, as an aestheticized way of relating to consumer goods. Going through Morton's criticism will allow me to finally dispel any of the remaining misconceptions about consumption, capitalism, and creative labour.

The Creative Economy and the fears of ecological thought

My analysis of experiential consumption has progressed along the following specific lines: 1) capitalism cannot be viewed in terms of a totality (no *Gesamtkunstwerk*), 2) consumption is not an act of exhaustion performed either by an absolutely autonomous or an invariably alienated human (no rational decision making of a disciplined citizen/consumer), and 3) creative labour is not the proof of capitalism's insatiable voracity, but of its lack of intentionality and its patents discontinuities. These three lines of thought, I argue, would disagree with Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* (2010). ANT, Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics, one must keep in mind, propose an ecological understanding, inasmuch as relations and networks put forward ecologies—studies of the relationships between entities and their environments. Despite a likewise focus on relations, I will argue that Morton's critique is still far from fully distancing itself from totalizing social theories, on the one hand, and has yet to make a greater theoretical effort, in order to avoid falling prey of much too easy simplifications, regarding its use of terms such as consumerism and capitalism, on the other hand.

Morton argues that there is a real danger in the 'warm and touchy-feely' aspect of sustainable economics and in the delirium of grandeur that it tends to promote in those consumers who indulge in sustainable products. The latter, argues Morton, would believe themselves to be better consumers: to be saving the planet, to be displaying self-control, and to develop their consumer self in an aesthetically appealing

fashion. There is surely much more to Morton than these statements, which I now mention in passing, yet I do so to outline from the start where the seemingly inevitable clash can be said to occur.

In addition, Morton is fiercely critical of notions of subjectivity that claim to go beyond or, at least, wish to depart from, dichotomic thought. There is no such thing as becoming for Morton, no Intermedial (although that was contestable when it came to the mesh), and so surely, no space for a subjectivity that is constituted by, both, humans and non-humans in a Latourian sense. Latour is absent in his texts.¹⁷² In what follows I will attempt to address the issues that arise after a reading of Morton's critical ideas, which are put forward as part of a broader discourse on what he calls 'dark ecology'. I must say, nonetheless, that there is still much that I share with Morton regarding, not only his criticism on the nature/culture dichotomies, but also his argument concerning a resurgence of the beautiful soul syndrome in current times. Hence, what follows should not be understood as a full-blown critique of Morton's dark ecology. Instead, it is a critical appreciation, which touches upon particular aspects; aspects, which inform his ideas on ecology, the free market, sustainable products, and experiential consumption.

Let me begin with a brief but relevant digression. I must remind my reader, in as clear a way as possible, that the understanding of experiential consumption, which I have put forward, is not an attempt to portray authentic consumption as something morally superior, in relation to some other process that would be called non-authentic consumption. This means that my analysis is not eager to unveil an enlightened consumer, a consumer who has now become aware of the limitations of a modern and outdated form of consumption, characterized by exhaustion, and which would be the product of a predatory industry. The weight of ideology at this point is heavy to lift, for its enemies lie at both sides of the political spectrum, which one must keep in mind is a modern and romantic invention itself. .

¹⁷² In his most recent text *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), Morton states: 'Unlike Latour, I do believe that we have "been modern", and that this had effects on human and non-human beings'(p 9) and 'that we are just learning how not to be'(p 19).

I have been at pains to show that consumption, the commodity, and labour, are no longer suitable identities (if they ever were) to understand the dynamic of an all-encompassing economic regime called capitalism. Needless to say, I am also far from wanting to present myself as an advocate of free market ideology or even of leftist libertarianism. My point about consumption and the form of subjectivity sustained by experiential consumption is a simple one: consumption cannot be reduced to ‘idiotic enjoyment’—with all its implications of course. Doing so, risks irresponsible theoretical mischief—supposing that theories were only relevant inside the classroom. Any such view contributes, furthermore, to keep theory within the classroom by rendering critical thought entirely ineffective. In my view, falling prey to the temptation of reductionist and totalizing views on capitalism will do nothing more than to keep on preaching to the choir.

I have also proposed that consumption should be seen as a process that can enable alliances whose effects are concrete. Alliances, therefore, that can positively contribute to the creation of a bearable world (and this is as Romantic as I will get). I by no means want to imply that experiential consumption is the road to freedom and spiritual conquest or that purchasing authentic offerings will ‘save the world’. I have, too, been at pains to argue that the networks of authentic offerings are as fragile as can be, and depend on the continued relation between factors that are not even strictly business related for the most part. Consumer subjectivity, furthermore, cannot be equated with the human body, and in the same way, creative labour cannot be reduced to the body of the worker. Both are forms of agency that come as a result of the alliances between humans and non-humans, and by being relational extend the reach and intentions of those same humans and non-humans. These alliances will only survive through networks, which will be sustainable only if the humans and non-humans involved can be mobilized accordingly and effectively, time and again.

The nature/culture divide has indeed played a damaging role in our understanding of consumer subjectivity, not dissimilar from the way it has affected our understanding of the presumed roles of both

the artist and the spectator in aesthetic experience. Consumers, however, cannot be theorized as *pari passu* spectators, nor creative labourers as artists who survive within a profit-driven system, in the best case, or who have surrendered to profit in the worst. Proposing such equations presents an intractability, which has little to do with matters of dignity, but merely with accountability and the tracing of relationships and intentions. Elements may be shared (by consumers and spectators, or workers and artists), with much to be gained by doing so, but that is as far as identification should go.

I will finally add that any touch point will only be fruitful, if one is able to disengage from viewing consumers/spectators (artists/creative workers) as dichotomous or complimentary pairs. Art's spectators cannot be taken to represent the other side of the coin of human interaction with objects as a matter of principle—regardless of whether it is the enlightened side or the pretentious and elitist side. Likewise, creative labour is neither the evil nor the profitable face of artistic creation. Struggling to avoid any such prejudices is a common occurrence and, to end this digression, I can only assert that, to a certain extent, Morton suffers from the theoretical limitations that these prejudices pose.

Capitalism as Totality: the inside/outside opposition is not a paradox

Morton's take on the modern narratives that accompany ecological thought is, in short, a dead on criticism of the common prejudices surrounding our modern understanding of nature as a place where non-humans are supposed to feel at home, and where capitalism is kept at bay. The concept (Nature) is undoubtedly romantic: its ideological strength deriving from its ability to outcompete modernism, both as a utopia and as a project of mastery, while resisting capitalism as a socio-economic regime of control. Tracing the many effects that are sustained by an inside/outside opposition, so prominent in Morton's analysis (criticized in my short overview of Derridean thought), takes us through a complete

deconstruction of the usage of the nature/culture divide which, the former argues, informs much of ecological thought today.

Now, before moving forward I must dwell, even if momentarily, on the concept of romanticism, which I have introduced, albeit what may be seen as a seemingly carefree manner. The concept is key to my criticism of Morton, which is why a few annotations are in place¹⁷³. Romanticism is a polysemic concept that can lead our thought in several directions. Firstly, it is possible to focus exclusively on its political implications, where ‘the self is no longer identified with the individual but with some super-personal entity’, which then imposes a particular ‘personality’ upon the world and its constituents (Berlin, 1999, p. 95). Human beings are reduced to their part within a much bigger and more impressive whole. It is in this sense that it has been said here that *sensus communis* is part of romantic ideas on aesthetics, leading directly to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Secondly, there is another direction in which creativity, but more specifically, the creative forces of nature and history come under the spotlight. This direction is one in which life, as an all-powerful creative force, is recognized and to an extent appropriated by the artist: ‘Life in a work of art is analogous with—is some kind of quality the work has in common with—what we admire in nature, namely some kind of power, force, energy, life, vitality bursting forth’ (Berlin, 1999, p. 98). This second pathway no doubt highlights an interest in exploring the temporary nature of life is no doubt present in Bergson and Deleuze, while the emphasis on life as a creative force brings us close to Foucault; it is no doubt a sort of impetus that is arguably present in this text as well¹⁷⁴.

Thirdly, there is direction in aesthetics that highlights the dark and unconscious forces that dominate human and natural life at large and which give way to ‘unbridled romanticism’ to use Berlin’s

¹⁷³ I follow Isaiah Berlin’s (1999) comprehensive work on romantic thought: *The Roots of Romanticism*.

¹⁷⁴ Berlin argues, for Schlegel, ‘to live is to do something, to do is to express your nature. To express your nature is to express your relation to the universe. Your relation to the universe is inexpressible, but you must nevertheless express it. This is the agony, this is the problem. This is the unending *Sehnsucht*, this is the yearning, this is the reason why we must go to distant countries, this is why we seek for exotic examples, this is why we travel in the East and write novels about the past, ‘this is why’ we indulge in all manner of fantasies’ (Berlin, 1999, p. 105).

language¹⁷⁵. This recognition of something beyond or below human reason—the topology can go both ways—soon turns into a nostalgia: a nostalgia that relates to the yearning (for meaning and mastery), but which in doing so becomes necessarily pessimistic, for we simply cannot know enough, we simply cannot be one with nature and we cannot understand those forces that dominate us (Berlin, 1999). There are underlying forces that are outside of our control and these may be terribly destructive; yet our hands are tied and, to a certain extent, we can only denounce and become prophets of terrible news. ‘This too is a romantic idea’, argues Berlin, ‘because once you get the notion that *there is outside us something larger*, something unseizable, something unobtainable, you either have feelings towards it of love, as Fichte wanted, or of fear; and if you have feelings of fear, the fear becomes paranoiac’ (Berlin, 1999, p. 107).

It is with this brief digression in mind that I take little issue with Morton when it comes to his criticism of an ecological thought that is heavy in romantic ideas about natural life, community, and Nature, and that are informed by the third direction of the concept just mentioned. I am tempted to share much of such criticism, but cannot help but see in his critique of capitalism the presence of that ‘unbridled’ romanticism that justifies the continuous need to make of the former a complex structure or regime that is beyond human or institutional control—to understand capitalism as an all encompassing totality, which can be criticized through the all-too-common Marxian arguments of alienation, fetishism, and lack of collective awareness¹⁷⁶. I see in Morton’s understanding, furthermore, a form of intentionality that is assumed, which arises from material conditions, and which overtly determines the capitalist’s ability to betray its own class (to escape class determinism) or the worker’s capacity to recuperate her

¹⁷⁵ ‘This is the doctrine which had a very profound influence upon German aesthetic philosophy and the philosophy of art; because if everything in nature is living, and if we ourselves are simply its most self-conscious representatives, the function of the artist is to delve within himself, and above all to delve within the dark and unconscious forces which move within him, and to bring these to consciousness by the most agonising and violent internal struggle’ (Berlin, 1999, p. 96).

¹⁷⁶ This is precisely a continuation of my commentary on Morton’s ‘unbridled’ romanticism: ‘there is something which dooms us to perpetual frustration, whether it be human beings whom we must exterminate or impersonal forces against which all effort is useless’ (Berlin, 1999, p. 108).

lost sense of autonomy. In other words, I see in the actants involved, a complete inability to will: an inability to be active in a way that would have concrete effects on the relationships they have and in the subjectivities, which they actively effectuate. In this sense, ‘unbridled’ romanticism triumphs over the creative ability of actants and in doing so rejects the second direction of romanticism presented above.

I believe that understanding capitalism along class lines may not be part of Morton’s analysis, yet ceasing to believe in class divides is not sufficient on its own to avoid describing an overtly determined ‘social’. Morton’s deconstruction of the inside/outside opposition ends up naturalizing oppositional thought; he ends up making of oppositional thought a sort of Heideggerian existential, which in short determines our human ability to think beyond/over/above or simply about anything that would be unframed by radical oppositions. I have showed earlier how Morton’s criticism of the ‘in-between’ (Morton, 2010, pp 39, 40) derives its strength from presupposing that thought cannot understand it—cannot grasp it—because it makes extraordinary demands on human reason; a reason that can only move forward through continuous disjunctions: either/or.

Yet, Derrida’s own ideas about the inside/outside opposition do not go as far as Morton’s. Derrida argues that ‘there is no natural frame. There is frame, but the frame does not exist’ (Derrida, 1987, p 81). Derrida tells us that there is a frame, that is, that there is a shared understanding, which for the most part we take for granted (a black box), because we need to move on, because a painting needs a frame and a park a fence. I believe that beyond the acceptance of a state of affairs, which must be dealt with, there is hardly any thrust in the inside/outside (or the nature/culture) divide. There is certainly no Nature, Morton would say—and I would agree—because the limit between the nature/culture divide is ungraspable: It does not exist as a kind of unified frontier between a human and a non-human realm. However, that Nature and Culture do not exist is by no means a shortcoming of thought, which has proven itself unable to grasp individually what it has created as a collective. Nature does not exist, because there has never been anything pure, anything untouched, nothing unmediated. Only recently, according to Oosterling,

have we come to realize that the human condition is radical mediocrity. Nature's foothold in reality is no different from a car's foothold in reality: all natures, like all cars, are sustained by those who design, build, distribute, sell, and buy cars and natures.

The aggregate of economic productions, called capitalism, in turn, cannot be taken as that which opposes Nature, because capitalism has produced and produces nature every day—although it has undoubtedly destroyed and destroys natural environments and ecosystems every day as well. This movement of creation and destruction is, however, neither paradoxical nor a sign of how we have all been swallowed by a logic of profit, consumerism, and depredation. We are not a society trapped inside capitalism, nor are the few remaining groups that inhabit the remotest regions of our planet outside capitalism.

Capitalism, I argue, is not a uniform entity, it is not an overpowering intentionality, and it does not dominate social groups, even if we accept that giving in, at least partially, to the logic of profit making, is part and parcel of what it means to have a place within modern society. If proposing a beyond capitalism is not one of my goals here, this is not because I believe there is no way out, but because I believe we were never trapped in the first place. It is also because I want to avoid a justification for both the need for romantic appeals of emancipation, and its postmodern contrary: the sense of despair and surrender that accompanies the recognition of the unfortunate immobility that characterizes humans as a social group.

I will argue that any understanding of capitalism will still be untenable if any of the following elements continues to inform it: 1) a collective (conscious or unconscious) intentionality whose purpose is profit, exploitation, and consumption, and which rules over a totality that escapes the grasp of any individual's ability to act, 2) an uncritical equation between corporations and capitalism, where the behaviour of corporations is taken to be exemplary, or at least, symptomatic of the whole, and 3) an identification of all of capitalism's offerings under the ideologically charged concept of 'commodity'—or its Marxian older sister Merchandise.

In Morton's view, the deconstruction of the inside/outside opposition becomes both a criticism of capitalism, and a criticism of an environmentalist ideology that presents itself as contrary to capitalism although it, in fact, feeds from capitalist production. There is no outside to Capitalism, argues Morton, and thinking otherwise is giving in to the temptation of romanticism. The inside/outside opposition is articulated within an ecological discourse that wishes to assert itself against the 'evils' of capitalism (consumerism, alienation, depredation) by affirming the possibility of an outside. An outside that is understood as the possibility of consuming without being a consumerist, of work without being alienated, of consuming natural resources without contributing to the destruction of the environment. Morton harshly criticizes a militant ecological thought that insists on the protection of empty spaces against capitalism. He sees in such views an air of nostalgia and a spiritualism of sorts (Morton, 2007, p 91). I certainly agree with him in that seeing in the remains or remnants of the global economy a utopian space (a space of escape) is a puerile gesture. Yet, I don't agree with Morton in the disqualification of the efforts that have been made and are being made to preserve concrete 'wild' areas—for their effects are tangible, even if not definitive.

Wilderness, says Morton, can only exist as a reserve withheld from capital exploitation, hence, it is an abstraction, and wilderness embodies 'freedom from determination, the bedrock of capitalist ideology' (Morton, 2007, p 113). For Morton, the appreciation of 'the wild', the untouched is based on an untenable and even immoral idea of wilderness: untenable because it would make of nature a reified object, and immoral because it would make of a consumerist attitude an aesthetic gaze, which forgets the undergoing exploitation (Morton, 2007, p 155). He continues by saying that it is such an untenable idea, such a fantasy, that people cannot actually live in this 'wilderness', which ironically would use exclusion and violence, in order to be preserved, untouched (Morton, 2007, p 113).

I have said I don't agree with his disqualification of the efforts to preserve green areas, whether from urban development or industrial expansion, because I don't equate the results of such actions with

whatever intention Morton presumes lies behind them. It may be true that a reified notion of nature may lie behind the creation of natural reserves or the construction of parks, yet this cannot mean, in turn, that having natural reserves and parks is undesirable unless we, as a collective, understand that there is no untouched wilderness, but merely marginal areas; ruins in the best case and crumbs falling from the table in the worst. Similar to Foucault—who lived a version of capitalism that differs in many ways from our own—Morton continues to see the movement of capital across the globe as the result of an expanding regime, reaching more and more towards the outposts: an imperial force in its advance and a cancer in its effects. From this point of view one is inevitably placed in the perspective of the outsider, of resistance; capitalism must be stopped in order to preserve that which has so far, remained untouched. Despite Morton's claims against the surreptitious and ideologically motivated use of the inside/outside opposition, his criticism seems to demand from us to actually believe in the opposition, if any sort of political action is to follow. Unless, of course, he is not interested in any action to follow and all there is to do after reading him is to shrug our shoulders and exhale with impotence. Whatever the case, one must keep also in mind that the issue of untouched nature is not only an issue of conservation, but it is also an issue of transformation: transformation of urban spaces into 'green' cities. This is naturally not a uniform policy around the globe, and there is much to be discussed about its effectiveness in, for instance, curbing emissions or reducing pollution-related diseases; yet the fact that there are developments being made with sustainability, health, and coexistence in mind cannot be simply criticized as being another of capital's deceptions. If one does not see a difference between the effects that follow from different capital investments, then one's understanding of capitalism is being informed by an abstraction that is as dangerous and as simplistic as the reified Nature that Morton denounces.

Furthermore, Morton uses terms such as mass-production as a way to convey a negative connotation to the production of green spaces—and why would he stop there. Lawns, which he characterizes as spaces of erased violence, he states are a 'horizontal, mass-produced version of the wilderness people visit to

find peace and quiet and a sense of abstract nature. Lawns are a type of “instant distance”—just lay down the sod and sit back contemplatively’ (Morton, 2007, p 114). His criticism leaves little doubt of the ideological weight that is put on terms like mass-production, which are by now only used in political propaganda. Yet, it is his insistence on building an argument that relies on the inside/outside opposition—only to critically dismiss it two lines later, with an anticipated sense of victory—that makes his ideas on the subject so weak. I would entirely agree that people go to these mass-produced parks and lawns with the aim of finding a peaceful place where they can sit down contemplatively, but such statements seem to have an obvious negative connotation to Morton alone, for they are in no way critical by themselves. Morton’s argument makes idols where there are none and then, with Protestant pride, triumphantly smashes them.

He tells his contradictors: so, you want utopia, a place of escape, a place outside? Well you can’t have it because there is no outside, so don’t delude yourselves. But, were one to respond that such places are not utopias, but earthly productions of capitalism, then his most probable response would be: well in that case these spaces are nothing but commodities and you are nothing but a consumerist, you have no real soul, you don’t strive for a real emancipation, for a real space outside. For Morton we must feel both like fools, for believing in idols (in outsides), and then guilty for consuming, that is, for living happily inside. There is no middle ground, no negotiation, but double binds everywhere, either/or: either stupidity or guilt.

Lawns, parks, or any capital investment whose aim may be romantic do nothing to construct a ‘real’ ecological conscience—up to this point I can hardly disagree with Morton. Still, their value as spaces for utopia is not the only one that matters—hence my disagreement. Their value as effective spaces of enjoyment, where earthly peace, earthly contemplation, earthly coexistence with non-humans, etc., is found, may be irrelevant for Morton, but is not in itself irrelevant.

Next to what I have shown is a gesture of iconoclasm. Morton gives in to the temptation of seeing in concrete cases of corporate abuse a generalized intentionality that dominates all possible forms of capitalist production. This move is another aspect with which I find myself at odds with Morton and is clearly seen, for instance, in the following passage:

The ultimate horizon of ecology goes beyond capitalism, though, capitalism will definitely pass through a green phase. In its junkie-like search for the next market high, capitalism will create a green bubble'. [...] 'Capitalism marks only the beginning of thinking the ecological thought beyond our personal backyard. Versions of ecology adapted to serve the interest of corporations are temporary distortions. (Morton, 2010, p 101)

For being so critical of romantic thought, Morton makes no effort to hide his own interest in talking about the beyond—the people to come. This, however, is not the aspect that I find myself concerned with the most. My concern begins with the reckless affirmation that links capitalism's 'junkie-like search of the next market high'—albeit a nicely phrased metaphor—with a prediction worthy of a freshman economist, and which in Morton's case, has neither a base, nor is it followed by an explanation anywhere in the text. Saying that market-highs create economic bubbles is a truism and does not constitute knowledge. Saying that the 'green economy' is a market high that would create a bubble is nothing but a rhetorical appeal to pathos, which will fail to convince even a mildly informed audience—the sophomore economist would remain unconvinced. Morton may not be interested in the economics behind the 'green investments', but his argument is so comprehensive, it touches upon so many aspects of human life that this is hardly an excuse for passing off conjectures as arguments.

Along these lines then, identifying capitalism and corporations is confusing and does not help in the least to bring the dark ecological revolution that Morton would want, which is actually unfortunate. It will, on the contrary, either reinforce the 'there is not much to do' conclusion that totalizing an understanding of

capitalism (a social regime which has invaded all—we are all consumerists) would bring along, or will help to fire up reactionary responses. Morton insists, for instance, on disqualifying sustainable economics in bulk, by affirming that the rhetoric of sustainability in the hands of corporations is a weapon (Morton, 2010, p 134), rather than an honest and disinterested approach—I would presume. This may certainly be true, but whether corporations act upon greed or altruism is to a certain extent irrelevant. The heart of the matter is whether corporations that become sustainable have a greater chance of staying in the market than those that do not, because reducing pollution in water supplies and ecosystems does matter. If the answer is that sustainability does make economic sense, as I have argued above, then the issue of their motivation to do so becomes secondary, and what becomes centre stage is the probable outcome: that is, having a sustainable economy in the future, an economy that produces without depleting all resources (including human resources) and without serious negative externalities (such as environmental destruction, air and water pollution, etc.).

Moreover, corporations are not capitalism, and capitalism is not a totalizing regime, which somehow uses the existing social forces to pressure us into a bourgeois life. The demise of corporate rule may be desirable for many reasons, but all of them will be based on one or another pragmatic set of goals—not on an unqualified agenda of subversion and the hopes of people to come. Corporations, I believe, help to give capitalism the demonic face that a purely romantic view entails: class struggle, abuse of the innocent, selfishness, exuberance and indifference of the wealthy¹⁷⁷. If, in fact, ‘Thinking cooperation widely and deeply is an obligation of the ecological thought’ (Morton, 2010, p 101), then one cannot simply erase the cooperation efforts that lie behind the production of goods, services, and for my particular interest, of experiential offerings.

¹⁷⁷ Corporate mandates certainly don’t help in changing that inherently asocial nature. Bakan points to the irremediably limited aspect of corporate social responsibility initiatives, given that in the end no matter how well intended a CEO or a board of directors may be, they are still obliged by law to be explicitly self-interested: “‘While allowing directors to give consideration to the interests of others,’” states the American Bar Association “[the law] compel[s] them to find some reasonable relationship to the long-term interests of shareholders when so doing” (Bakan, 2003, p 42).

Morton would retort that any such cooperation is negligible, because ‘capitalism ultimately can’t sort things out. It’s reactive; what we need is proactive’ (Morton, 2010, p 121). He finds a confirmation of capitalism’s reactive responses in the corporation’s short-sightedness, witnessed by the slow pace behind the production of hydrogen fuel, which is a project that cannot be undertaken by a corporation alone, because of its necessarily long-term horizon (Morton, 2010, p 121). Again, Morton uses a corporation as a representative of capitalism as a whole and his example does nothing but to push at an open door: there are only very few groups (although perhaps powerful ones), who would deny the need for governmentally backed investments.

Nonetheless, abandoning oppositional thought in philosophy shouldn’t bring us closer to an idea of immanence in which everything would somehow be connected with everything else. This is a temptation that I have tried to circumvent with the use of ANT. Challenging the opposition without ending up by declaring a synthesis of sorts (we are all inside, there is no outside) can seem somewhat untenable. The social regime, in a totalizing view, must become a blanket that not only covers us all, but that must surely connect us all, some way or another: ‘Since everything depends upon everything else we have a powerful argument for caring about things. The destruction of some things will affect other things’ (Morton, 2010, p 35).

Yet, does everything depend upon everything else in Morton’s ‘dark ecology’? I have my doubts. For Morton’s ecological thought, ironically, individual efforts seem useless— the light bulb change to save energy, to name a case in point—precisely because of the connection that these actions presuppose; where saving energy means feeding a corporation that cares only about its growing market and political power. If there seems to be nothing positive about capitalism (about the inside, the blanket that covers us all) then doesn’t this approach to Relationalism not become the perfect excuse to do nothing? For what is there to be done in a world where exchanges of money for goods disseminate through space at a rate that is impossible to track? When everything depends upon everything else, and we can’t really be certain

about the totality of effects of anyone's actions—beyond knowing that there will be effects—then the main fear of all political action become the infamously unintended consequences. The notion of unintended consequences is one of the Libertarians' favourites and is widely used to argue in favour of the work of the 'invisible hand'. Although, more broadly speaking, it is often used as an apology for abstaining from political action, because this would seriously change the state of affairs in the short, but especially in the long run, in an unforeseeable manner.

One can take the argument to its roots to see its hazardous effects. For instance, bettering the conditions of the poor within a country by raising taxes on the rich, will make investing in that country less attractive, and by implication, harming businesses and job growth, so it's better to keep things the way they are—politics is a zero sum game and only economic growth can ensure a positive outcome. The directions in which the economy will grow and the effects on the totality of people involved, we cannot know. All we know, and so the story goes, is that the economy is interconnected, so wealth will necessarily reach everyone—in the long run.

It may lack rigour to argue based on a single case, but I shall take the risk. If the financial crisis has taught us anything, it is that not everything is connected, especially when it comes to economic growth and to unprecedented political action. It is clear to anyone, by now, that the unprecedented profits of financial institutions never 'trickled down', while unprecedented political action was taken, in order to transform private costs into costs that should be borne by all; the latter, of course, with the argument that everything is connected to everything else¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁸ Banks that were deemed 'too big to fail' received bailouts not for their sake, but strangely enough, for the sake of the rest of us. The real surprise comes, however, when one hears that financial help for the families going under, due to their mortgage payments, had to be limited for everyone else's sake as well.

The evils of the Commodity: romantic consumerism and creative labour

The blanket of capitalism, it is said, covers us by putting our lives at the service of economic production: we consume and then we work to be able to consume some more. This is the concrete way in which the totality has been built and the way in which it is sustained through time. I have tried to show earlier that all distinctions between leisure and labour have become ineffective (if they ever were anywhere else than in modern economic thought). Yet, that leisure and labour are indistinguishable and can be taken as a purely negative occurrence, for couldn't it mean that people no longer have time to socialize, to regain their energies, to reflect about their lives? And, isn't it true, in turn, that our modern lives would be unthinkable without our ability to consume, or to purchase commodities?

The inside/outside opposition disseminates within many folds. One of them has been, since romantic times, the distinction between production and reproduction, between work that (re)produces commodities (ephemeral), which imprisons, and work that produces art (eternal) and which, thus, emancipates. This statement, I don't intend to hide it, is simplistic in many ways and I don't want to categorically affirm Morton's affinity with it. Taken to the last of its consequences, such statement may be said to have no place in rigorous social scientific thought and is but a mock of romanticism. True, my criticism doesn't intend to go that far. However, there is still much to be read between the lines, that is, without reducing the ideological weight of such a statement to the extreme of maintaining all its logical and necessary consequences. I believe it is precisely within the grey areas, where Morton's dark ecological thought, without having to commit itself to a romanticism that is long gone, fails to grasp the tractability of its own claims.

Morton's harsh criticism of the green economy depends, in part, on his own poor understanding of capitalist production, both, as a process and as a finished result. For him, talk about consumption is talk about commodities and talk about production is talk about massified industrial, production, which as I

have shown, is intended to have a negative connotation. I attempt here to show that much of Morton's criticism is unfounded and in many ways a caricature. However, given my interest in presenting the Creative Economy (using Florida and Pine & Gilmore) as significantly different from traditional understandings of capitalist production, and so experiential consumption as equally distant from traditional understandings of consumption, I will do so in a way that touches upon those lines of flight that would join Morton's thought on consumption with the experiential offerings proposed.

Morton's critique of ecological writing and ambiance, concretely, quickly becomes a straightforward criticism of experiential offerings. For Morton, environmental art (and much of art in general) wants nothing more but to create an atmosphere and a sense of immediacy (Morton, 2007, p 36). The ecological rhetoric implied wants to undo the distinction between nature and ourselves (Morton, 2007, p 63). Reflection is put to the side and, instead of figuring out (understanding) that we are part of the world, we are pushed to experience it (Morton, 2007, p 64). This sense of immediacy with its focus on sensations, wishes to deliver an 'impossible point of view' (Morton, 2007, p 80).

In a word, the viewer/reader/spectator is invited to accept the possibility of an immediate world that surrounds him and overwhelms him (a shared sense-filled experience). This world of immediacy circumvents thought, hence, avoiding the subject/object divide, which would tell us that what we perceive has already undergone a transformation in order to become thought. This immediate world either will make of sensations—of 'the experience'—its main core, or it will enable us to proclaim the encounter with the sublime, in a world that is prior to us and which lies beyond thought.

Morton is critical of any such attempts, because they are guilty of two specific faults: romanticism and naïveté. Romanticism, because whatever world we are invited to see as immediate cannot be 'real', for there is always an artist who writes and there is always a language that codifies. The immediate moment, thus, never existed as such—not as a poem or a painting, but neither as a video or a photograph. Here,

Derrida would tell us, there is no ideal representation, but only meanings that have been repeated and a repetition that never ends creating, in retrospect, the original. Naiveté, because the whole attempt of delivering the immediate carries a sense of irony that must make us doubt the goodness of its intention. The author and the artist, who create a sensational experience, do so when they have become themselves disengaged from it: they cannot write or paint while actually seeing, feeling, and experiencing; whether it is the fog rolling down the mountains or the sun calmly setting, there is no experience that is transparently grafted anywhere. Both gestures are equally romantic, furthermore: one for attempting to offer the impossible and, the other, for believing that some men can actually do so.

The issue that interests me is whether the production of experiential offerings suffers from the same vein of romanticism and naiveté that Morton criticizes. It suffices to say that I agree with Morton when stating that aesthetic experience cannot be reduced to a sense of immediacy. However, Morton's dichotomic language makes him see in that statement an equal affirmation of its contrary: aesthetic experience must create a sensible reflection about our place within the world. His dark ecology, one must bring back to mind, accepts no in-betweens and therefore, his rejection of romanticism, a reduction towards idealism, leaves him little space to muddle through: no immediacy means no to romanticism, while an infinite regression is equally untenable. Morton's thought then, would either have to allow for the in-between, for the rhizomatic to flourish, or must accept that aesthetic experience is as much a reproduction of the same as everything else, that is, that Art is dead.

However, even if one were to grant that some distance must be taken from Morton here, one cannot resist thinking on how advertisement has become so fond of selling us feelings and sensations to the extent that at least some of Morton's suspicion seems well deserved. For Morton, these marketing appeals to the immediate are profitable, because ultimately, we are all consumerists (Morton, 2007, p 111). As consumerists we buy into this idea of immediacy, which is as unreal for commodities as it is for art; 'To be a consumerist, you don't have to consume anything, just contemplate the idea of consuming'

(Morton, 2007, p 111). It is the idea of immediacy, of a raw sensation, that we buy into. For by doing so, we are not just consumerists, but romantics and fools.

Consumerism, Morton leaves little doubt, profoundly touches the heart of Pine & Gilmore's experiential economy. Consumerism includes the search for transformative experiences, and experimenting with new forms of subjectivity (of self) (Morton, 2007, p 111). It derives from the postmodern, a feeling of a lost sense of identity (Morton, 2007, p 112). In turn, ambiance is proposed as the way to escape this sense of lack, through the creation of an objectified subjectivity that is supposed to be environmental (Morton, 2007, p 112). Experimentation and self-creation, instead of making us aware of the place we have in this world (of our possibilities and of our responsibilities), fool us into believing that in order to understand such things one must 'feel' the world, one must let oneself be part of it; no thought, no political action, but pure sensation and selfish enjoyment. Morton exemplifies the effects of experiential consumerism, by the role that techno music, dance, and raves play in today's popular culture (Morton, 2007, p 112). Young people let their inhibitions go by giving in to a combination of music, drugs, and small talk, which would create in them the feeling that they are accomplishing something¹⁷⁹.

Morton's criticism regarding consumption is, in particular, directed against the promise made to consumers that they can establish themselves as subjects without identity, by way of giving themselves to an experience of the world that only exists for as long as they give themselves over to consumption. A fusion of identity and non-identity, he argues, is strictly impossible and little more than the effect of ideology and imposition (romanticism) (Morton, 2007, p 112).

We are all consumerists, repeats Morton (Morton, 2007, p 113). Yet, what is consumerism exactly? They are subjective states, he says, that soon become technically reproducible commodities (2007, p 113).

¹⁷⁹ 'If only we could tune in to the environment properly, then we could become more ecological—isn't this the idea' (Morton, 2007, p 130).

Environmentalists, animal rights advocates, feminists, etc., criticize and negate a way of consuming the world, but risk becoming ‘improved kinds of consumerism’ (2007, p 115). ‘Will buying organic food really save the planet?’ (2007, p 116, 117) One cannot help but to roll ones eyes when reading Morton’s question.

Nonetheless, Morton concludes, surprisingly, that romantic consumerism is not intrinsically bad (Morton, 2007, p 117). It is not bad, he repeats, it just embodies a dialectical movement of negation, with its focus on what has been negated, left out, and marginalized (Morton, 2007, p 117). In the end, Morton reveals a sense of uneasiness. He had started by confessing that chapter three, of his *Ecology Without Nature*, is not able to escape entirely this vision of the commodity as inherently bad, while at the same time seeing that which resists objectification and commercialization as good (Morton, 2007, p 25, 26). In other words, he begins confessing a prejudice that is marked from start to finish by the simplistic version of romanticism that I began by describing. However, eventually he does criticize defining consumerism as not-production, and seems to see in the rejection of the divide between work and leisure a valuable idea, for it helps undo the human/nature divide (Morton, 2007, p 181).

Earlier, when analyzing Florida’s ideas on the Creative Class, I argued against the use of the leisure/work divide, and, in general, against the use of oppositions as a matter of principle—but not of strategy. I would say then, that I agree with Morton’s interest in undoing the human/nature divide, but his final statement on the matter fails to convince me. The reason for this is his persistent use of terms like mass production, technically reproducible, and consumption as if fundamentally evil, as well as his insistence in translating all matters of identity into a discourse which is articulated by the use of oppositions as a matter of principle¹⁸⁰.

¹⁸⁰ Vera Molnar’s *Parcours* (1976) is a perfect example of how easy it can be to subvert the negative connotation of mass production and reproduction or, in other words, of how untrue it is that such notions must be necessarily degrading or demeaning of the humans involved with them. Using minimalist sensibility, she plays with computer images in a purely positive manner. The high volume repetition that can be achieved through computers is used to create slight changes (Rush,

The leisure/work divide defines consumption as no-production and selfish enjoyment. Selfish enjoyment, not only with regard to the selfish use that may be given to consumption goods, but also, because those same goods are presented to the consumer in a way that completely conceals the processes through which they became a reality. In other words, ‘Capitalist thinking, and capitalist machinery, actively “disappear” the workers who operate it’ (Morton, 2007, p 86). It disappears the workers in two ways: 1) by erasing the singularity of each worker, because all work is uniform, repetitive, and never more than a small part of the whole—the factory being the archetype that illustrates this—and 2) by using technology in order to achieve complex results without the need to abandon the same method of repetitive, atomized, yet efficient production: ‘More and more processes of production are performed directly by machines. The human being is progressively sidelined, as anyone who has operated a photocopier will affirm’ (Morton, 2007, p 87). Capitalism’s automated methods of production make it seem as if labour depended on those machines in order to create value and, for this reason, one can say that ‘Capitalism encrypts labour’ (Morton, 2007, p 88). The consumer, in turn, is left with an object of consumption that lacks uniqueness, but whose main attribute is the (false sense of) freedom that has been given to the consumer: freedom to purchase it and freedom to consume it.

According to this logic, work and leisure constitute a continuum that sustains and justifies capitalist production. However, in this continuum, one can only affirm continuity by recognizing a patent difference between both; hence, undoing the work/leisure divide is not plausible, while still wishing to make the many assertions about alienation and false freedom that I have already mentioned.

If one turns to what I have said regarding creative labour and Florida’s Creative Class, the work/leisure divide is deemed ineffective as a theoretical tool, principally, because the process of production cannot

2005, p 209). The slight changes break with the idea of factorial work as repetitive and uniform, while allowing for the hand of the artist to reappear in a much subtler way, by means of the programming needed.

be reduced to the act of producing goods from a factory line¹⁸¹. Uniformity is not the main characteristic of economic offerings today and, more importantly, because in order to produce goods within the Creative Economy, there is a network of humans and non-humans that must be sustained in ways that demand autonomy, in order to effectively work—to produce use-value. Secondly, creative work, today, cannot be productive without the aid of machines. Yet, claiming that value is reduced to those machines seems somewhat unlikely. Every person who ever wanted to build a website knows very well that even if a minimal online presence can be achieved without expert knowledge, this does not mean that the work of a web-designer is irrelevant—quite the contrary.

Machines and the application of technologies within any production process seem always to have effaced the workers who operate them, especially when one thinks of factorial work. However, in the Creative Economy, machines become strong allies for any worker who needs to gather objects and information beyond her bodily means. In addition, using technology outside of the working place is, for the most part, entirely the same as using it inside it: whether to take pictures while on holiday or to make a card for a friend, technology is equally used to produce pictures and cards for retailing purposes.

Consumption cannot be reduced to enjoyment, if one is to leave the work/leisure divide. More than enjoyment per se, however, Morton is deeply bothered by the idea that consumption allows people to experiment with their own subjectivity. Subjectivity, for Morton, is simply objectified, projected into a series of sensations, into a sense-full experience that changes nothing about who we are. Morton fears that consuming experiences become nothing more than the aesthetic form given to pleasurable enjoyment; whereas the traditional purpose of consuming an offering for its use value, would be simply replaced with the idea of consuming for no purpose at all; to consume properly would be to consume in a purposefully non-purposeful way (Morton, 2007, p 139). Morton calls this view of consumption the

¹⁸¹ A simple look at today's economic development (an economy where agriculture and manufacture provide virtually no jobs), leaves little room for insisting on capitalism's fate of making of all jobs factory-type of jobs and presuming that all goods come out of a factory line.

beautiful soul syndrome, a romantic and aestheticized understanding of consumption as something one must do, but must do so in a proper way¹⁸². Consuming for the pleasure of it alone creates guilt for the beautiful soul (2007, p 181).

I notice that, the beautiful soul syndrome gains its footing as being the opposite of consumption as sheer consumption, as exhaustion and expenditure of the planet, for our own human mastery. In other words, the beautiful soul syndrome is romantic in its attempt to gain purity and in its rejection of capitalism as a project of mastery over the planet's resources. This alleged purity, as it turns out, is tenable only for as long as impure, use-value driven consumption exists at its side (Morton, 2007, p 118). Morton criticizes, thus, the essential hypocrisy of this attempt at purity: and he says, quoting Hegel, that the beautiful soul 'cannot see that the evil it condemns is intrinsic to its existence—indeed, its very form as pure subjectivity is this evil' (Morton, 2007, p 118).

This seems to imply, in practical terms, that the 'green' consumer is a hypocrite because she passes judgment on a way of consumption that has allowed for 'green products' to exist in the first place, while remaining unaware of the fact that her own consumerism is morally better only for as long as that traditional way of consuming stays in place. Still, I must pointedly ask here, what is the point of the critique of the beautiful soul syndrome? Is Morton passing over the practical differences between the production and consumption of green versus 'conventionally' produced goods? Does he wish to deny that there are substantial differences between the modes of production and environmental consequences of both?

As I read him, this doesn't seem to be the case at all, or at least, he is not explicit about it. That he seems ready to criticize the beautiful soul syndrome, from a perspective of consumption alone, is what strikes me and convinces me further of his own belief in the work/leisure divide. Whatever one's opinion is, regarding the beautiful soul syndrome as an aesthetic reduction of consumerism, one cannot forget that

¹⁸²Morton highlights the aesthetic component in Romantic consumerism (Morton, 2007, p 117).

behind these attempts at purity there are material conditions that cannot be disregarded, even if for the sake of argument. Still, if the material conditions of a change in practice are not his concern, then what is it? Is it the alleged difference between subjectivities that are, in fact, different sides of the same coin? Does he actually see consumption as an either/or approach, between the traditional use-value driven consumer and the beautiful soul syndrome? Or, if he is critical of both, but still insists in repeatedly affirming that we are all consumerists, then what is the way out? How is one to consume if there is no place in the modern world for a life without consumption?

Morton seems to love trapping his reader between a rock and hard place. When one reads that ‘Both sides [ecocriticism and postmodernism] miss seeing that it is not so much technology and language that are the issue as oppression and suffering’ (Morton, 2007, p 123), one cannot help but hearing the air of hopelessness that accompanies a Marxist that is well aware that no revolution is coming, but who still wants to be a revolutionary—Modern and Romantic.

Practical consequences, I have argued, do matter: sustainable and unsustainable modes of production pose differences that cannot be ignored and which go beyond a person’s thoughts or feelings, while consuming them. General Marxist presumptions, as I showed through my earlier presentation of Harvey’s critique, make it impossible for the concrete to be seen as relevant in any way, for the concrete is always either particular or symptomatic, in other words, it is always subsumed under some generalisation that surpasses and determines it.

Morton’s claims about subjectivity may seem dead on, at first glance, but they too cannot escape the double clamps. Morton condemns the gesture of purity, for being naïve, only to throw us all into a mesh of impurity: ‘Beautiful ecological souls hope that by circulating ambient rhetoric enough, the olive oil of subjectivity will blend with the vinegar of the objective world’ (Morton, 2007, p 121). Oil and vinegar

surely don't mix, but neither do subjects and objects according to Morton, while still wanting to convince us that he is not modern.

Morton's ability to deconstruct oppositions with one hand, while crossing his fingers with the other one, seems to be what allows him to harshly criticize romanticism and capitalism, while still wishing to heroically stand against oppression and suffering. I have argued earlier, in greater detail, against his criticism of rhizomatic thought and the in-between. His criticism on consumption is acidly focused on the beautiful soul syndrome, which is a critique that gains weight only if one believes in the either/or consumerism that stands behind the argument. I have, in fact, proposed an understanding of consumption that is not detached from production and, thus, cannot be reduced to the intentionality of the person who consumes with complete negligence of its effects on the economy. I have also argued that talking about the subjectivity involved in the consumption of experiential offerings cannot be done granting a reserved place to either the humans or the non-humans involved. There is no experiential consumption without the experience, and there is no experience that will last without humans passing judgment on it. One may fear that many such experiences are foolish and entirely irrelevant as events that create awareness regarding the suffering and oppression in the world—granted. However, if one wants events to touch everyone in the same way and to be conducive to an equally foreseeable political action, then one is not only being romantic, but totalitarian.

If, on the contrary, these fears are raised for the concrete effects that they can have, and without generalizations, then I agree with Morton about the danger of 'interactive passivity', a notion, which Morton takes from Žižek's 'interpassivity' (Morton, 2007, p 135). This concept talks about the danger that arises from thinking, for instance, that hearing about the war in an ecological manner, through a rhetoric of ecomimesis is the same, or close to, being in the war. It is a danger I share, because the experience that is given to the senses by using real time footage, real time testimonies, HD images, Dolby surround sound, and even virtual reality, can be deceiving if they are taken to be a

representation—in the modern sense of the word. This is a danger, nonetheless, that is neither inevitable nor all encompassing. The use of several media can be positive, even in this example, for it can allow for humans that are far apart to be able to identify with the people that may be in actual struggle: with the fight against the oppressive hand that wants to silence them, with their pleas for the political recognition of their demands, and their desire for democracy—the so called Arab Spring being perhaps the most palpable case in point in this respect.

The question that surfaces, time and again, is not so much whether experiential consumption, and working within the Creative Economy, will provide us with a moral standpoint that those, who do neither, lack, but whether it is possible to use experiences and creativity to multiply the efforts of the few and to make resonate the desires of the many.

Supplementary remarks on the Creative Economy

Consumers today want authenticity, they want experiences, they want an economy that provides them with the opportunities they need, in order to make consumption a memorable experience. Consumers want offerings that allow them to create alliances, offerings that will sustain their attempts to associate with others, offerings that will allow them to innovate, and to experiment with their own becoming. The Creative Economy, by all means a fragile assemblage, has yet emerged as a grid where such consumers can inhabit. It has, not without luck, gained enough strength by mobilizing human and non human resources and it has confidently claimed a place within a global economy. One may challenge Florida's assemblage, one may question his data and his results; the Creative Economy is as fragile as can be, its boundaries still mobile, and the fate of most of its economic players uncertain.

The Creative Economy, I have shown, has flourished by putting creativity at its core. Creativity, in turn, has been reshaped; it comes as the result of the powerful alliances that have been forged by the workers

within the Creative Economy. Workers have become powerful mediators. Technologies (the internet, software, hardware, plug-ins, etc.) have played a decisive role within the Creative Economy, for they have enabled the worker to mobilize innumerable elements, to make unthinkable associations possible, and to make of experimentation a profitable endeavour without it being captured by the will for profit.

Worker and consumer, as the two main human actants studied, have been clearly situated as pivotal nodes in the creative networks. Their possibilities, as actants, are as concrete as the alliances that they are able to make and sustain. The fragility of these alliances is patent, but their ability to succeed, to endure, remains present. This new understanding of consumption and economic production, thus allows for the question about art's political relevance to gain a new horizon.

The breathing of art into life will take the same networking shape as the intrusion of creativity into the working place. This by no means implies that artists and workers within the Creative Economy can be identified under a common category and that art will be nothing more than another industry within the Creative Economy. Florida's statistics would surely include artists as part of the Creative Economy. My analysis here, however, departs from hierarchical underpinnings, and is uninterested in posing such conclusion, because I find that it will hardly shed light on the issue of political art. Reducing art to its role within the economy is actually a straightforward task, but one which, as with all macroeconomics, reduces all actors behind the production to their role as suppliers of goods and services (and every object produced, to its commodity role). If art can have a political impact then one cannot take all art produced and place it in the same column of a table titled Human Production. My focus on Intermedial and Relational Art gives further reason not to do so, and instead to concentrate on artists whose aim is to produce artwork that uses common objects, that displays common events, and whose originality does not derive from their ability to escape societal grasp. Still, these artists do have something in common with workers within the Creative Economy: they propose associations, mobilize objects with the aid of technology, and invite their audience (viewers or consumers) to experiment.

Once all prejudices regarding the spectator are left behind and equally all reductionist notions of consumption deemed lacking, it is possible to see the relation between consumers and spectators without presupposing a reduction of one to the other, nor of art to economic life—the sole notion of a separate economic sphere shatters, when profit needs to ally with memory, innovation, and creative labour in order to be effective. Consumers and spectators are subjectivities whose production occurs in becoming: one must become a consumer of experiential offerings and one must become a spectator of Intermedial and Relational Art. Becoming¹⁸³ means accepting an invitation to deterritorialization, where new associations are possible, and where new modes of experiencing a fully mediatized life are envisioned so as to be able to gain a concrete form—reterritorialization.

The next section will aim at 1) tracing the networks in which artists, artworks and spectators play a role, 2) highlighting the differences and similarities that exist between these networks and those of the Creative Economy, 3) identifying the elements that allow for associations between both kinds of networks to emerge, 4) rekindling the notion of experience and the experiential, in favour of understanding an experience as an event of experimentation, and 5) rephrasing aesthetic experience in a way that is less centred on social criticism and romanticism, and more in line with scientific experimentation.

¹⁸³ Again I stay close to Deleuze in my use of the term. My use of it here relates to the term's portrayal of subjectivities as fleeting identities that carry with them no strict line of demarcation, but mere changes of intensities: 'Starting from the form one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfils, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire [...] 'We could also put it this way: Becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a particular zone of proximity. Or, it is to emit particles that enter that zone because they take on those relations' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, pp 272, 273).

PART 4

Lessons and implications from Deleuze and Actor Network Theory

The creative age requires nothing short of a change of worldview... We must begin to think of creativity as a common good, like liberty or security. It's something essential that belongs to all of us, and that must always be nourished, renewed, and maintained—or else it will slip away.—Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*.

What Deleuze and Latour teach us about Aesthetic Experience

The importance of the Deleuzian conceptual framework lies in its ability to capture aesthetic experience without recourse to oppositional thought. Being able to bypass the danger of reducing aesthetic experience either to pure sensation or sterile reflection is crucial in two ways. We could say that, on the one hand, Deleuze takes, from Nietzsche, an understanding of art as presence beyond representation, as a movement of life (of forces, not yet inscribed in power relations), and as a practice (Zepke, 2005, pp 11, 12). Going beyond representation allows one to escape understanding aesthetic experience as a contemplative event, which runs the risk of being divorced from having a practical impact. A crossbreeding of political and aesthetic *Gesamtkunstwerk* neglects the Intermedial and Relational qualities of aesthetic experience.

On the other hand, Deleuze avoids the reduction of aesthetic experience to a purely sensible event, which would remain sterile as well, even if taken as something more than idiotic enjoyment, where, for instance, the sensible experience would have a clear purpose (e.g. ‘the shock’ in order to trigger strong stimuli to enhance the bodily awareness of being there, such as bungee jumping). I have argued, on the contrary, that when sensations are aimed at triggering reflection, an immediate split between work and meaning is created. The hermeneutical approach deals with such rupture through the use of metaphysically charged concepts, like causality, communication and convergence of horizons of meaning as a weak form of the transcendental, which would secure a stable structure of meaning and a fully controllable reflection¹⁸⁴. The Deleuzian approach as presented here, with its focus on challenging common sense, and its calls for connective experimentation, took us in a different direction entirely.

¹⁸⁴ Reducing aesthetic experience either to the material arrangement or to the artist comes close to the problem that Latour sees in the fact/value opposition. Criticizing the absolute characterization of religious icons along the lines of either facts or values, Latour says: ‘if the iconoclast could naively believe that believers exist who are naive enough to endow a stone with spirit, «it was because the iconoclast also naively believed that the very facts he employed to shatter the idol could exist without the help from any human agency»’ (Latour, 1999, p 274).

The question of aesthetic experience with Deleuze is not what art is, but how it works¹⁸⁵. The experiential and procedural aspect of aesthetic experience—its becoming—that I have dealt with in Part 1, is what allows one to truly rekindle aesthetic experience as an experience that has an effect on how we are situated in the world and on how we gain insights, and how we become responsible for our individual and collective actions, i.e. our subjectivity. This implies, to be sure, that subjectivity is always already there: old alliances always pre-exist new ones, and black boxes remain so until explicitly opened. The experience of the aesthetic will involve, in turn, a myriad of sensations (affects and percepts) and reflections (concepts) that, nevertheless cannot be taken as two parallel sets of forces that would throw us back into oppositional thought.

Guattari claims that it is the combination of a “sensory affect”, the simple empirical perception (the views I have from the window as I work at my desk), and a “problematic affect”, the network of associations and feelings evoked by this particular sensory event (the sunset as a planetary event, planes landing make me miss absent friends, my mind drifts towards the distant hills.... etc.). In the problematic affect connections are made beyond my immediate sensual experience, introducing all sorts of temporal and emotional flows. (Zepke, 2005, p 152)

The sensational and the problematic, as Guattari calls these connectives, are precisely lines of flight that in a sensitively embedded reflectivity are fed back into the organism, forming a node, connecting the many associations that are triggered by percepts and affects. It is this ‘problematizing’ performance that makes of aesthetic experience a deterritorializing experience: an experience that challenges the way we perceive ourselves, and our own becoming. In Derridean terms: it opens the process of appropriation that is still at work in the Kantian sublime (Zepke) and Gadamer’s hermeneutics. The deterritorializations of aesthetic experience, nonetheless, are not to be reduced to the particular associations of an individual, as if to a psychological profile—it is not exclusively or more pressingly about ‘what is in it for me?’ It is,

¹⁸⁵ ‘Asking “what it is” is to frame the work within a metaphysics of truth, of essence and representation, but “what is it for me” poses a question concerning the forces involved within the thing and a question of subjectivity’ (Zepke, 2005, p 17).

as Oosterling indicates, a techno-psychological assemblage in which the applied media go from intermediaries to mediators, adding their medium specificity to the production of sense, in turn, enhancing the rhizomatic quality of the aesthetic experience. The reason behind this, simply put, is that subjectivity is not confined to a personal body, let alone a single soul. Subjectivity—and this has been my main contention throughout—by definition surpasses the modern individual, as an entity closed upon itself. Subjectivity is not an idea of self; it is not an ego, but an articulation of desire shared by many. A desire that is fully anchored in relationships or, in Deleuzian terms, that is machinic: It functions; it works.

Yet, it is at this point that I depart from the Deleuzian conceptual framework, for I find it to be too limited a heuristic set of tools, when trying to understand the way subjectivity is sustained and effectuated. I have instead turned towards the Latourian framework of ANT, in order to create an understanding that is traceable and empirically based. I have shown, following Latour, that a networked form of subjectivity is essential not only to the question of aesthetic experience in a strict sense, but also to the question of art's political relevance. And it is here that Relational and Intermedial Art can 'organize', i.e. reassemble a collective, which I called, with Florida, the Creative Class, which stands against Harvey's proposal, which is still dependant on the Marxist idea of class.

The issue of subjectivity becomes with Latour an issue about sustainable alliances between humans and non-humans and an issue about the translated effects produced by those alliances. With Latour Deleuzian deterritorialization can be analyzed more deeply, so as to uncover its workings along different levels. In order to maintain the possibility of reflection, i.e. the dynamics between parts and the whole, between the particular and the general, the instance and the law, I would argue, therefore, that aesthetic experience is an event that develops at two different levels: at the level of the actants and at the level of the network. Yet, in any case remaining within the Latourian perspective, where human actants are never separate from non-humans. It is a radically democratizing gesture that surpasses Rancière's effort to

position artists and spectators on an equal basis. Aesthetic experience does not find isolated humans, which would be then called upon to create alliances. On the contrary, aesthetic experience makes sense precisely because alliances exist and because networks, through which subjectivities are sustained, are enhanced, transformed or created. At the level of actants, aesthetic experience challenges ideas and preconceptions, but, from a materialist perspective, it challenges the alliances and the associations that those ideas justify or validate. Social critique may be part of aesthetic experience, but there is no need to think of deterritorialization mainly as a challenge directed at the way an actant understands her role within a social whole. The whole is at most a scaled network in which the spectator participates or chooses to participate. Social critique is rather, part of a more concrete challenge, for the more palpable, earthly, alliances are the ones that will be affected by the event. Keren Cytter's *Avalanche Series* (2011) of short films provide a clear example in this respect¹⁸⁶.

The films entirely deconstruct all ideas regarding narration and storytelling; they play with time perception, character roles and traits are unclear and inconsistent, no clear story line is followed, atmosphere is purposefully sabotaged through the use of wrong props and incoherent settings, etc. There would indeed be much to say about how the films challenge any common conception of modern cinema, of narration, and even of the museum as the setting where the viewer is invited to make that reflection. Yet here, aesthetic experience goes beyond being a general criticism. To properly grasp this 'beyond' is the work of the ANT framework.

¹⁸⁶The series consists of four short films: *Francophile*, *Lonely Planet*, *Ducks and Woman*, *Chain Review*. As shown by Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam on July 2011.



Illustration 16: Keren Cytter. *Avalanche Series*. 2011.

This Relational and Intermedial aesthetic experience goes beyond critique by 1) challenging some of the alliances that the viewers have been counting on and by proposing, in turn, a set of new possibilities or connections, which could lead towards the formation of new alliances, the opening of black-boxes, and, consequently, the constitutions of new forms of subjectivity and 2) by proposing a renewed political scenario that would come as the effect of these same new alliances and associations.

In terms of alliances, it must be clear that the prejudices regarding the function of films and museums, as institutions, work, in fact, as powerful black boxes for the viewer. Through these, more or less cohesive, theoretical tools the viewer informs and normalizes her own experience; in this sense then, criticism still plays a crucial role in opening black boxes. These particular black boxes are, however, not limited to describing a theoretical framework or even an ontology, for what they sustain cannot be understood without taking both percepts and affects (the problematic) into account. For a viewer who works in any industry where film equipment, in the broadest sense of the term, is used, the film proposes an entire set of problems regarding the function, proper use, and acceptable combinations of the many tools involved when filming.

Doesn't this simply mean that I am taking aesthetic experience to be an event that is targeted towards a specialized, well-informed and artistically trained public? Or, even worse, doesn't this imply the

complete subjugation of art to the logic of the market, where aesthetic experience gains its value according to its relevance for a particular industry? The first question, one must notice, presumes the existence of specialists and, more broadly, of specialization as a sort of ritual which would create insurmountable distances between groups of people. Now, it is true that in order to make a film, very specific knowledge is needed—so far can be conceded without hesitation. The question, however, shifts towards the quality and form of this knowledge and, consequently, towards ceasing to understand specialization as a binary concept. In ANT's terminology, specialized knowledge can be taken as a determined set of plug-ins, which will affect both individual and cooperative actions. There is indeed a minimum of plug-ins that may be needed in order to fully understand all or most of Cytter's proposal, in terms of its production process. The issue, furthermore, is not simply one of learning how to replicate a singular process in order to arrive at an equally singular object: The Avalanche series. I must remind the reader that this interpretation would fail to see the artwork as a network rather than an essence. Cytter's films are a network of human and nonhuman elements and as such, are neither singular nor relevant only to filmmakers. Still, the weight of the specificity of each plug-in cannot be neglected. This simply means that aesthetic experience is a singular experience inasmuch as each actant—as a techno-psychological assemblage—makes part of some but not all networks. There is no instance—God, Reason, Market or Capitalism—that reassembles all networks on the most expanded level and in a meaningful way. An aesthetic experience establishes singular alliances with a determined number of actants. Next to this, is what determines the ability of Cytter's films to have impact beyond filmmaking and storytelling, as both topics of discussion and technical practices depend on the particularity of the spectator's own alliances.

Taking a step back, one must remember how the networks of the Creative Economy allowed us to distinguish common alliances, which, however, did not follow thematic lines or market channels.

Concretely, non-humans such as cameras, software, video editing tools, design tools, truncated stories, etc., are all actants that serve as strong allies for many outside the filmmaking school. Florida's Creative

Economy showed how creative labour traversed disciplines and markets by allowing actants to find allies in both common and uncommon places. Pine & Gilmore's experiential offerings, in addition, allowed us to see offerings as propositions rather than "objects of consumption". This means that artworks as nodes in networks put forward a myriad of propositions that can potentially touch an actant, whose alliances touch upon any other node of this network.

Fully grasping the spill-over potential of Cytter's work, and Intermedial Art in general, greatly depends on clearly understanding two particular concepts in Latour: proposition and collective. Despite its extensive use in Latour's writing, the use of the concept remains faithful to Whitehead's thought, where the concept 'proposition' originates. Propositions are not statements, nor are they mainly meant to denote a semantic or a logical relation between concepts, objects, or their attributes. Propositions relate to the way objects, words, humans and non-humans in general, are presented or put forward by actors (or actants) Whenever a scientist works through an experiment, the way in which the experiment itself is designed and the way it develops, constitutes a proposition, presenting humans and non-humans as being related in a particular way, as playing a specific role, which appears as matter of fact, but which could have been otherwise.

Following Whitehead, Latour says that propositions are, in a way, agencies or, more precisely, actants (Latour, 1999, p 141). They are agencies, because they do not represent fixed points or stable positions, but occasions (Latour, 1999, p 141). The pivotal role that the term has in ANT is equally stated by Latour, who argues that 'a good ANT account is [...] a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there' (Latour, 2005, 128). Propositions, therefore, create a particular state of affairs: they put objects in motion. The way in which humans and nonhumans are put in motion is what makes the term especially relevant when discussing works of art. The artist puts forward a proposition; in other words, she puts forward a series of possible relationships between humans and non-humans, which appear as having a consistency of their own. This consistency (or composition) of the artwork is not

based on common sense, but will actually challenge or defy common meanings and vulgar pragmatism.

This same idea is brought forward, for example by Lazzarato, when discussing Duchamp's ready-mades:

These undecidable propositions [refers to the ready-mades], these techniques and practices, which only with great difficulty could we define as exclusively aesthetic, have the production of subjectivity at their aim, the production of an ethos and a *modus vivendi*. (Lazzarato, 2010, p 105)

But how do these refer to Latour's actants. These are actually propositions.¹⁸⁷ In an illuminating way Latour deconstructs the scientific experiment—as an equivalent of the artificial work of art—in referring to Pasteur's experiments that are conducive to the identification of yeast as a living being:

Pasteur, the lactic acid, the ferment, the laboratory are all propositions. [...] They are not positions, things, substances or essences pertaining to a nature [...] but "occasions" given to different entities to enter into contact. These occasions for interaction allow the entities to modify their definitions over the course of an event -in the present case, an experiment. (Latour, 1999, p 141)

After this passage from Latour one could try to set him straight by adducing to Pasteur's ability to master a series of non-humans, rather than engaging in negotiations with them. One must, in that case, keep in mind that 'Non-humans escape the strictures of objectivity twice; they are neither objects known by a subject nor objects manipulated by a master (nor, of course, are they masters themselves' (Latour, 1999, p 185). Latour's recognition of what one could say is the dignity of non-humans, challenges indeed the modern myth of mastery and, consequently, raises a challenge to the role of intentionality when it comes to associations and alliances. There is then an issue regarding the proper accountability of the forces,

¹⁸⁷ Latour takes the term originally from Whitehead (Latour, 1999, p 141).

objects, or entities. To begin with, there is an issue about objectivity, which I dealt with earlier at some length, but which can be summarized in Latour's words:

Every time we seek to mix scientific facts with aesthetic, political, economic, and moral values, we find ourselves in a quandary. If we concede too much to facts, the human element in its entirety tilts into objectivity becomes a countable and calculable thing, a bottom line in terms of energy, one species among others. If we concede too much to values, all of nature tilts into the uncertainty of myth, into poetry or romanticism; everything becomes soul and spirit. If we mix facts and values, we go from bad to worse, for we are depriving ourselves of both autonomous knowledge and independent morality. We shall never know, for example, whether the apocalyptic predictions with which the militant ecologists threaten us mask the power scientists hold over politicians or the domination politicians exercise over poor scientists. (Latour, 2004, p 4)

Propositions, moreover, carry an important element of creation, an element of subversion, because it is not only an innovation without consequence, but a deployment of new possibilities; the possibilities of breaking with social continuity 'by some new, nonconformal occasional mode of becoming one' (Stengers, 2001, p 21).

This 'becoming one' refers to the Latourian notion of the collective. This notion departs from the notion of community. It is intended rather as a notion akin to 'political ecology' as it is also applied by Stengers (Stengers, 2009), that is, to an understanding of community that must include the relationships and the political voice of nonhumans. In this sense, the collective that Cyttar's films addresses cannot be reduced to the humans working within an industry, to the rules that would be said to govern filmmaking, to a common notion of taste, or to any one thing that supposes abstraction from the material relationships at

stake. In a word, it is the collective what must be built every time, what must prove to be such at every turn.

While Morton's aim of creating a new collective led us to 'the mesh', I will instead turn towards Latour's understanding of collective:

The collective, as we understand now, is not a thing in the world, a being with fixed and definitive borders, but a movement of establishing provisional cohesion that will have to be started all over again every single day. (Latour, 2004, p 147)

The Deleuzian becoming is restated and reincorporated within a Latourian perspective. The collective is neither immobile nor immutable. Provisional cohesion depends entirely on the temporal character of all alliances, and, thus, on a network's ability to remain flexible: to grow in order to include new actants, to allow for actants themselves to switch nodes, to make new connections, etc. Without this inherent instability the network would fall quickly into another form of structuralism. Essential to its heuristic advantage is its ability to go through internal and external changes. An actant's ability to act is accounted for by its place within a network, within the alliances that it forges in order to gain that place and in order to sustain it through time. Without being explicit about it, a general becoming would assure that no matter how stable a Latourian collective would seem to be, it would still be impossible to assert its inevitable persistence through time¹⁸⁸. Becoming is indeed a crucial aspect to understand the Creative Economy, which is the collective that must be accounted for, when asking about the political relevance of Inter-medial and Relational Art.

Yet, it is not only the inherent instability of a collective that convinced me of the need to abandon

Morton in favour of Latour. It is the lack of boundaries within the former's concept that makes of the

¹⁸⁸ While aiming at a 'metaphysical' version of Latour's ANT in order to prove his object oriented ontology, Graham states that ANT is incompatible with Deleuzian becoming. Latour, however, compares the modern myth of progress with what he calls pragmatogony, which states a close parallel to the term becoming as I have used it. In all of these concepts time remains a line forward, but one cannot say they (pragmatogony and becoming) are the same as progress in any other respect (Latour, 1999, pp 200-201).

Latourian option a preferable one, next to its reappraisal of ecology in political terms, which is done by both Latour and Stengers¹⁸⁹. The mesh, as Morton's way of conceptualising the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans, will fare well against the inside/outside opposition and, hence, against an understanding of environment as something external or exterior to society, where non-humans would find abode. The problem arose, as one needed to pin down in a more analytical fashion how this interconnectedness works. Just as Deleuze and Guattari remind us that desire is not an object but a machine, one must in a similar way keep in mind that the collective is equally machinic, for it works; it plugs, it breaks, it creates flows as much as it creates breaks. The collective gathers actants in a particular way, which before they interact in the work of art do not belong together, neither by essence nor by force. It is precisely at this point that Latour's collective proves more suitable for the task at hand. The collective is neither a whole, nor even a diagram, but a movement towards provisional consistency. It indeed connects humans and nonhumans, but it never connects all humans to all nonhumans. It is cohesion itself that must always be proved; that must be constructed at every turn, yet, which must never be assumed¹⁹⁰.

This will mean, therefore, that it is with the actants themselves that the analysis begins. Yet, because actants are always connected, and because these are aiming at cohesion in a techno-psychological way these relations are per definition ecological, it will always be true that talking about actants must always mean talking about associations, alliances, agencies and networks (and assembled subjectivities in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms). The question begged at this point, is how can the reality of a collective that works at various levels of association be evaluated or even measured?

¹⁸⁹ Latour reminds us in this sense of the true nature of the task of political ecology: 'Political ecology does not shift attention from the human pole to the pole of nature; it shifts from *certainly* about the production of risk-free objects (with their clear separation between things and people) to *uncertainty* about the relations whose unintended consequences threaten to disrupt all orderings, all plans, all impacts' (Latour, 2004, p 25).

¹⁹⁰ 'What it [Political Ecology] calls back into question with such remarkable effectiveness is precisely the possibility of *collecting* the hierarchy of actors and values, according to an order fixed once and for all' (Latour, 2004, p 25).

It is by its capacity for work, by the number of items of equipment and sensors, by the artificiality of its shapings, by the interventionist nature of its setups, by the intentionality of its research, by the scope of its requirements that a good assembly is measured. Thanks to such an assembly, we understand through the mediation of its translators what is being demanded by the candidates for existence that are thronging at its door. (Latour, 2004, p 168)

Analyzing and evaluating a collective demands a more detailed and informed level of inspection rather than a higher level of abstraction: the purpose is not to recognize identity at ever higher levels, but to be able to handle difference without annulling it from within the process, to recognize that alliances work because they articulate difference instead of reproducing identity. In this sense associations demand certain artificiality to work, to be recognized as real—as Pine & Gilmore argued in *Authenticity*—i.e. to be strong enough to matter, to be effective:

[R]eality grows to precisely the same extent as the work done to become sensitive to differences. The more instruments proliferate, the more the arrangement is artificial, the more capable we become of registering worlds. Artifice and reality are in the same positive column, whereas something entirely different from work is inscribed on the debit side: what we have there now is insensitivity. Thus the dividing line does not pass between speech and reality through the fragile gulf of reference, as in the old polemical model of statements that are simply true or false, but between propositions capable of triggering arrangements that are sensitive to the smallest differences, and those that remain obtuse in the face of the greatest differences. (Latour, 2004, p 85)

The negative surplus of difference is indifference. Its psychological pendant, as Oosterling argues, is cynicism as a spill-over effect of modern nihilism. The cynic is still craving for control but in his arrogance draws back and affirmative action overrules cynicism (Oosterling, 2014). At every knot, or

every connection there is an actant whose reality consists precisely in what it proposes to an even more complex assemblage, which through a feedback loop actually shapes the assemblage to a certain degree¹⁹¹. An alliance is only forged after a successful outcome of negotiations is reached. Dialectical negation and upscaled identification is replaced by an ongoing negotiation between differences, willing them to cohere in a consistent way.

ANT has allowed me to focus precisely on this procedural aspect of aesthetic experience. Grasping the effects, the outcomes, the movement of becoming demands of us to abandon the object/subject divide—although it is not the only reason to abandon oppositional thought. The above-mentioned example of Pasteur helps Latour to prove his point, because by abstaining to presume the passivity of objects, in order to account for their footing in reality, he is able to avoid making of Pasteur a puppet master:

By refusing to tie politics to humans, subjects, or freedom, and to tie Science to objects, nature, or necessity, we have discovered the work common to politics and to the sciences alike: stirring the entities of the collective together in order to make them articulable and to make them speak.
(Latour, 2004, p 89)

In a way, Oosterling's distillation of Hannah Arendt's notion of the political as a combination of speech and action—overdetermining labour and work—can be acknowledged in Latour's more radical deconstruction of the political beyond the modern subject/object divide. Still, next to the issue of assuring a proper accountability by means of establishing objective knowledge a priori, there remains, for one to consider, a question about human intentionality. Wasn't Pasteur intentionally manipulating a series of objects in order to prove a point that he alone would have seem to know from the start? Or is Latour trying to convince us that non-humans acted intentionally to help Pasteur convince the scientific community of his time? Is that the way he pretends to prove his point about the importance of alliances?

¹⁹¹ 'Actors are defined above all as obstacles, scandals, as what suspends mastery, as what gets in the way of domination, as what interrupts the closure and the composition of the collective' (Latour, 2004, p 81).

Purposeful action and intentionality may not be property of objects, but they are not properties of humans either. They are properties of institutions, of what Foucault called “dispositifs”. Only corporate bodies are able to absorb the proliferation of mediators, to regulate their expression, to redistribute skills, to force boxes to blacken and close. (Latour, 1999, p 192)

Would this not be another way of affirming Althusser’s notion of ideology—ideological state apparatuses—that was the indirect inspiration of Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary institutions? If so, then we have to take into account Foucault’s critique on the Marxist notion of repressive power as well. And that means a revaluation of the passivity/activity opposition, which is a close accomplice of modern mastery that stands at the centre of the controversy.

Actants do not overpower and master each other in a successful negotiation. Pasteur’s ability to construct such strong alliances and to assemble his experiment as a network did not come as the result of his subjective intentions. Pasteur’s experiments with yeast were not his first experiments and, hence, cannot be said to be the product of his theoretical knowledge about essences put into practice. On the contrary it is practice itself that allowed Pasteur to understand the challenges that his network would face, in order to stand on its own. In other words, it is because Pasteur had attempted many previous negotiations with these non-humans, that he knew already what they would propose to the network. In terms of McLuhan: The medium was the message throughout the process. In similar terms, it was also not the first time that Pasteur would have had to present his results to a sceptic scientific community; he had too, the experience of previous negotiations working on his behalf.

Actants are, therefore, propositions, and as propositions, techno-psychological agencies. Intentionality is never absolute and no direct causality can be called upon; for when it comes to politics no *sensus communis* will be irremediably conducive to political action. The issue of creating associations is without a doubt a (micro) political issue: associations, one must always remember, refer not only to the

alliances formed between humans, but include non-humans; and associations are based on having a defined set of shared goals that imply a varied political relevance: ‘How many new propositions must we take into account in order to articulate a single common world in a coherent way?’ (Latour, 2004, p 110); In up- and downscaling feedback loops these associations can be labelled as micro-, macro-, and according to Stengers, even mesopolitical (Massumi, 2011).

Latour’s political ecology may appear to grow too big too fast. Where does it end? Anyone who has ever sat through a parliament session knows that political processes can be just too slow, too bureaucratic; politicians are either too lenient or starkly intransigent. Markets, we are constantly told, punish the inability of politicians and political institutions to take bold decisions in a prompt fashion. Latour tells us that there is a requirement of relevance:

It is necessary to make sure that reliable witnesses, assured opinions, credible spokespersons have been summoned up, thanks to a long effort of investigation and provocation (in the etymological sense of “production of voices”). Let us call this constraint the requirement of relevance, to remind us that all the relevant voices have been convoked. (Latour, 2004, p 110)

The question begged for politics is, of course, how does one know who is relevant to the conversation?

[I]t is indeed this power to establish a hierarchy among incommensurable positions for which the collective must now take responsibility. We cannot homogenize the voices that participated in the power to take into account, any more than we can avoid seeking to homogenize those which participate in the power to put in order. (Latour, 2004, p 113)

This is indeed a contested point. One can, however, keep in mind that the greater issue for Latour is the clash of supposedly relevant opinions rather than the endless debate of a multiplication of actors.

Irrelevant opinions have until now been shut out by violent abuses of political power. Foucault’s power-knowledge ensemble has been crucial in understanding the apparatuses or dispositifs that modernity has

put forward. Speech is never alone, but always coupled. If one thinks of Latour's appeal for a less violent use of this machinery, in order to recognize the voices that have wanted to speak but were not allowed to, then it becomes evident that his concerns are not prescriptive.

Still, there will be more to say regarding the relevant voices by returning to Latour's perspective on scientific experiments. An experiment, for Latour, can be understood as running through at least two axes. As a progression through time and as an extension in space: humans and non-humans involved pass through changes and such changes can potentially associate them with more and more actants: 'No event can be accounted for by a list of elements that entered the situation "before" its conclusion [...] all elements have been partially transformed' (Latour, 1999, p 126). Actants gain after the event, which means that experiments have a direct impact on alliances and networks. By implication it is the collectives that will change: Pasteur's scientific community (schools, and labs) changed after the event; text-books changed; beer makers were affected as well, and twentieth century philosophers of science did too. An experiment, says Latour, is performative and transformative, it changes collectives: 'Let us retain from the sciences the word "experiment," to characterize the movement through which every collective passes in this way from a past state to a future state, from good sense to common sense' (Latour, 2004, p 195). If the purpose of an experiment would be to change a collective, then how can one measure the success or failure of any such experiment?

A bad experiment is not one that fails, but one from which the researcher has drawn no lesson that will help prepare the next experiment. A good experiment is not one that offers some definitive knowledge, but one that has allowed the researcher to trace the critical path along which it will be necessary to pass so that the following iteration will not be carried out in vain. (Latour, 2004, p 196)

A critical path then makes of an experiment an event whose purpose is to basically destabilize settled networks. Actants gain, whether or not, a particular theory is 'proved', whether or not a specific element

behaves according to previous predictions. What makes an experiment an event is precisely its ability to produce deterritorializations, followed by new alliances or reterritorializations. The collectives, which are touched upon undergo constant change, constant expansion or contraction. Each experiment raises the question of relevance and tries to answer it in turn.

Still, how does the scientific community, a human group, be affected by Pasteur's experiments, which are said to gather humans and nonhumans? How can one maintain that actants are on an equal footing when the collective for whom the experiment matters is entirely made up of humans? The quick answer is precisely that the scientific community is not a network of humans alone. The humans and non-humans involved in scientific work will be the 'real' scientific community. Does it matter to yeast whether or not it is recognized as an entity by a group of scientists? Perhaps not, yet if one were to judge the dignity of yeast according to its recognition as an actant, then yeast indeed does matter, and letting it exert its force, as an actor will be equally important.

I argued that Morton's 'mesh' was unsuitable for the task at hand. By making of relations an ontological presupposition, the question of freedom, of wilful action, becomes again a difficult one. I said earlier that presuming the connection of every being to all others was, for instance, a common argument used by free market enthusiasts in order to hinder localized action. The reason for such hindrance is precisely our human inability to understand the undesirable consequences that inevitably occur in a world where we are all intertwined; we are all en-'meshed'. This is Latour's most radical statement on equality.

What if freedom consists in finding oneself not free of a greater number of beings but attached to an ever-increasing number of contradictory propositions? What if fraternity resides not in a front of civilization that would send the others back to barbarity but in the obligation to work with all the others to build a single common world? What if equality asks us to take responsibility for nonhumans without knowing in advance what belongs to the category of simple means and what

belongs to the kingdom of ends? What if the Republic becomes at once a very old and very new form of the Parliament of things? (Latour, 2004, p 227)

In sum, freedom ceases to be an attribute of a chosen group of beings and becomes entirely articulated; actants are neither over- nor underdetermined. Articulations mean both that alliances will always be negotiated and that purpose is never a question of individuals. Creativity, therefore, is the product of creative work, of human and non-human associations, and, as such, is not reduced to individuals and will always come after the event. Creativity is an event of the in-between.

Intermedial Politics: how art affects our daily lives

A Deleuzian framework has told us that aesthetic experience is one that can no longer—if ever—be grasped through oppositional thought, because its constitutive elements escape the disjunctions that are necessary for oppositions to be uphold as proper demarcations, as tangible separations. These are always paradoxical propositions, once they are formulated in the negated oppositional terms: reflective sensation or sens(a)ble reflection, non-rational communication, neither submissive or subversive. These artistic spaces lack clear boundaries, constitutive for subjectivities that gather rather than separate individuals, against the background of a presumed common sense that is framed in disunity and dissent. etc.

Intermedial Art, in turn, has been used so far, as exemplary in creating artistic propositions that trigger an aesthetic experience that occurs in-between the disjunctions, before the separations that inform oppositional thought take place. Intermedial Art, I have argued, proposes relations between humans and non-humans, which are innovative, critical and independent. These new relations have an aporetic dimension in so far as they are lines of flight with no fixed target, but remain always within a pragmatic horizon, and are not intended as universal symbols of possible utopias. The political emancipatory

gestures of modernity, whether in the form of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or of an autonomous rational subject, are replaced by creative and fragile networks, by alliances, which are products of negotiation rather than of repressive imposition or overpowering necessity. The role of actants in aesthetic experience has equally changed and can no longer be reduced to passivity or activity, abstract reflection or sensationalism. Actants, I have argued, remain always wilful and active, but are seduced into articulations of power, becoming, thus, part of networked subjectivities. Autonomy, of the artist and of aesthetic work—theorized respectively in a production- and work aesthetics—loses, in consequence, its meaning of being freed or detached from societal constraint, i.e. capitalist modes of production. It is the material qualities of the relations proposed that constitute the ‘substance’ of artistic production. Aesthetic experience, in short, calls upon spectators to experiment at a variety of levels: with their own sense of self, with their alliances, and with their ‘fundamental’ beliefs about the world.

The final stage of this research will consist, therefore, in focusing on the experiential aspect that has been discussed, presenting aesthetic experience as a Latourian experiment. An experiment, to restate it briefly, will 1) make actants undergo trials that test their ability to act, 2) will trace a critical path along which it will be necessary to pass so that the following iteration will not be carried out in vain, and 3) will denote the movement through which a collective must pass while on its way from a past state to a future state. This implies two dimensions that need some clarification: the second methodological aspect calls for a revaluation of ‘vanity’ or—in Pine & Gilmore’s terms: real and fake—and the third aspect suggests a linearity that was criticized earlier. Ecology offers another approach.

In order to understand how Latour’s notion of experiment can help to properly assess both the way Intermedial Art works and how its political relevance can be asserted, it is worth recalling the criticism raised against forms of art that can no longer be measured against modern political goals, or against art practices that make no promises of liberation, and which uses capitalism’s tools and machines in an ‘ambivalent’ manner, where complicity and parasitism are difficult to assess. The main theoretical

criticism that Relational or Intermedial Aesthetics receive can be summarized using one of Lyotard's above-mentioned arguments:

The penetration of techno-scientific apparatus into the cultural field in no way signifies an increase of knowledge, sensibility, tolerance and liberty. Reinforcing this apparatus does not liberate the spirit, as the Aufklärung thought. Experience shows rather the reverse: a new barbarism, illiteracy and impoverishment of language, new poverty, merciless remodelling of opinion by the media, immiseration of the mind, obsolescence of the soul as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno repeatedly stressed. (Lyotard, 1991, p 63)

Lyotard's worry is a valid one, because, to repeat, it is not an easy task to make a clear distinction, between parasitic practices and submissive complicities. Lyotard's critique, furthermore, comes close to Morton's criticism against the green economy inasmuch as consumption, according to the latter, becomes a void aesthetics of sorts. For both Morton and Lyotard, the problem at stake is mainly one of appearances: Intermedial Aesthetics appears as a revolutionary form of art and consumption appears as a revolutionary form of consumption, but in truth they are but failed attempts to criticize and transform the system. The failure of Intermedial Aesthetics comes as it is judged against a backdrop of modern values (e.g. the sublime) and against equally modern political ideas (e.g. Marxism, Situationism). In symmetric fashion, consumption for Morton is judged against modern presuppositions (e.g. as exhaustive, as alienating) and against equally modern political ideas (e.g. emancipation from an exploitative capitalism). For Lyotard, Intermedial Art cannot but fail on both counts, as an autonomous aesthetics and as a political program. For Morton, in turn, sustainable goods would also fail on both counts, as non-exploitative modes of production and as putting forward non-alienating consumption habits.

I have been at pains to explain that it is precisely those modern goals that can no longer be upheld. There is little point in attempting to divorce aesthetic experience from Kantian or romantic reductions, while

still judging its political relevance according to modern political utopias. Along these lines I criticized Morton's thought; for the weight of his own criticism against the beautiful soul syndrome, relies still too heavily on an understanding of capitalism along traditional Marxist lines, which, I argued, cannot be used uncritically. Moreover, the argumentative similarities of my criticism against Morton, Lyotard, and to some extent Rancière, by no means overshadow the fact that consumptive experience is not a direct parallel of aesthetic experience. Similarly, arguments raised against reductions and dichotomies, say more about their way of problematizing the issues at stake, than about the human and non-human relationships that are produced by Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics as an integral aspect of a Creative Economy. Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics intersect the Creative Economy as a collective, where creativity is produced through cooperative networks that function within the market economy. Art overlaps life. It is immaterial labour or creativity that is the common element between art practices and the industries of the Creative Economy, or between artworks and authentic offerings.

Authenticity and linearity have been deconstructed, as has the notion of emancipation. Are art practices offering new knowledge? And is the consumption of art progressive in a linear sense? Not at all!

Intermedial art practices loop existing insights into new ones in more of a cyclical than a linear sense. There is no ultimate wisdom gained by consuming art, neither is the ultimate health and wealth gained in consuming experiences or working in creative cooperation. An experiential approach to science, art, and commerce enhances the present state of being, sensitizing its participants as actants which experience their own mediatization—an experience that has the purpose of making actants more reflective on the ways they interact with both human and non-human participants.

My analysis of aesthetic experience mainly touched upon issues that arise from a spectator's perspective: the spectator appears as an actant involved within a myriad of networks on an array of levels—mental, affective, physical, social, political, commercial—that are not fixed, but that can be expanded, destroyed and restructured depending on the qualities of the experiences undergone and the experienced quality of

the interactions and relations. When dealing with experiential offerings, my analysis has, in turn, shown that authentic offerings, in a way not dissimilar to artworks, challenge the consumer (the human actant) by means of a deterritorializing experience: they put a utilitarian point of view on trial, propose new associations and call upon existing networks to reconstitute themselves in accordance to these new realities. Yet, once again, one must resist the temptation of equating aesthetic experience with experiential consumption. Consumers and spectators may naturally be reduced to their position as human actants, yet it is the networks that both events presuppose, and the proposals advanced, which radically distinguishes the nature of both activities. With Derrida, I prefer to qualify the relation between art and commerce as supplementary, not complementary: There is already art in business and industry as there is commerce and business in art practices. Art is commerce's *hors d'oeuvre*, i.e. a frame that is rhizomatically connected with what is framed by creativity and experiment. Creativity, once more, is in the in-between.

It is, therefore, not a matter of gradation, where aesthetic experience would challenge an actant further than experiential consumption. The two events related by means of the presupposed creative networks that bring them to life and which give them both a meaning and articulate them as practices that belong within a greater, albeit provisional, collective. Artworks then, are not objects of consumption, even when straightforwardly adopting the idea of consumption that I have advanced here. Engagement, memories and reflective entertainment may be terms that can be applied to both, yet there is a disjunction that separates the two types of events. Intermedial Artworks propose techniques of existence: they are machines that challenge an actant from an existential point of view—although not only. Actants are proposed to conduct their lives differently and this in a way that is not reduced to an exercise of reflection, but by an experience of becoming part of a process. Intermedial Art challenges the constitution of subjectivity or, in ANT's terms, it destabilizes the networks that sustain an actant's sense of self. In both events—aesthetic experience and experiential consumption—an actant's participation

within a network is challenged, but only within aesthetic experience is an actant primarily motivated to judge this function based on the new subjectivities that it allows for, that is, based on the way of life that it advances for her as an actant. Aesthetic Experience reveals to the actant the limitations of her current alliances, the way these alliances demand from her to conform to certain modes of subjectivity, constituted by intermediaries as black boxes. In Oosterling's concept of Radical Mediocrity this self-evident way of living is reflected upon, including human and non-human mediations. Sensitizing for this experiential consumption unlocks black boxes and enables participants to connect in a different way to the disclosed mediators. It is the generalized challenge that is brought forward by Aesthetic Experience that makes of it an existential event or, in other words, an event of self-creation or—as Foucault argues—of self-care within an aesthetics of existence. It does not come as a surprise that Pine & Gilmore anticipate a new economy after the experience economy that is focused on transformations, involving lifestyles:

But what are people really after as they enter in all these pursuits? Experiences, yes. But there is more than that: we want to transform ourselves, become different. [...] When you customize an experience, you automatically turn it into a *transformation*. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, pp 164, 165)

So in the final instance, guiding a transformation is what moves the economy. But in Latourian terms challenging an actant's relationality within a network, challenging the stability of her fleeting identity, is a deterritorializing exercise to the core. The reason is that an actant's becoming is being touched upon. It is crucial to keep in mind that becoming aware of one's own fleeting identity is an empirical performative gesture and not a revelation about something yet to come; one functions as a fleeting identity, as an actant that attaches to networks seamlessly and constantly, only to reterritorialize via feedback provisionally or temporally, although this provisional stability can last for years. The difference then with experiential consumption lies precisely in the recognition of that fact. Authentic offerings create an experience of consumption that even if challenging with respect to a utilitarian point

of view, must still find a stable abode, that is, must still be conducive to a process of normalization; experiential offerings even if the product of experimentation, must still make economic sense. Economic sense does not mean, furthermore, that they must simply be profitable, while presuming that profit cannot be but the product of appropriated surplus value. If reduced to monetary terms, profit is then only the outcome expected; what allows for scalability to be put forward, but as such it is not self-explanatory of a production process. Experiential offerings playfully challenge a consumer, by proposing a way of consuming to them that is more demanding and, I have argued, more rewarding, because it satisfies on a more integrated scale.

However, experiential consumption must still find a place within a market. Normalization, as a process that takes away the autonomy from the human actants and which ends up transforming novelty into institutionalized forms of enjoyment is a notion that needs rekindling. It remains true that no matter how innovative and individualized the experience offered is, producing it will never occur in an institutional vacuum—but does anything? Normalization, it can be argued, implies the process of exerting domain or control over individual experiences and, hence, can be rephrased as a process that would help guard social life from threats that may be subversive for the stability of that social whole, on whatever scale: individual health, family life, public space, national security, global warming, the survival of the species, or cosmic karma. Censorship would be, for example, an institutionalized practice that illustrates the point behind such notion. The negative connotation that the concept of normalization carries has to do with the implied submission to authority and with the harmful effects on social critique and political dissent. In particular at this point, it has to do with its function as a hindrance on novelty and autonomy. All in all, a normalized human experience of consumption is unlikely, for arguing so relies on the assumption that, in order for businesses to carry on as usual, economic offerings must always comply with an already institutionalized understanding of consumption—one which I have critically analyzed as lacking.

Authentic offerings do challenge what Morton referred to as 'idiotic enjoyment'. This understanding of consumption still thinks in terms of alienation and liberation via emancipation; offerings would not even provide an escape valve in that case. Authentic offerings not only challenge economic utilitarianism by proposing a processual understanding of consumption, but also challenge the leisure/work divide that has been surpassed in the Creative Economy. Human actants' ability to associate with authentic offerings is what constitutes the patent difference with respect to objects of consumption that are meant to be exhausted or which are limited to be enjoyed in specific contexts. The associations made between authentic offerings and human actants are also not pre-determined, which means that consumers have a certain degree of freedom to experiment and constitute, according to their interests, the way in which they would couple with the offering, the way in which the offering would also relate them to other humans and non-humans. Such coupling may transform the offering into, for instance, a multifaceted tool, or perhaps into an extension of the human body or of its computing capabilities.

If there is an area of social life where the political relevance of authentic offerings is relatively easy to spot, it is the music or media industry at large. While music labels use their economic power to restrain the free exchange of music, bands decide to produce their own albums, and professional and non-professional musicians use the same free exchange to share their own compositions with millions around the globe. Authentic offerings present themselves as if awaiting completion, as parts of a machine that is meant to be put up by a human actant: through a process of negotiations that is dependent on the available plug-ins. The human actant mediates the negotiation between non-human actants, for example, in a recording studio, where computers, instruments and speakers are connected through the use of software, which, in turn, not only allows for communication to exist between the non-human actants mentioned, but also for the human user to manage the sound emitted through a digital console. A myriad of seamless translations take place for a recording studio to work and for an actual song to appear as a whole, rather than as an addition of separate elements. It is authentic offerings, furthermore, that have allowed for such

complex processes to be able to occur outside of a recording label: free available programs allow for budgetary constraints to become practically irrelevant. All in all, the monopoly on creativity that record labels thought they had, has shattered as humans have found non-human allies that allow them to associate and become parts of creative networks, where music, as well as theatre, dance, and virtually any form of artistic expression, is produced and shared in a democratic fashion¹⁹².

Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics have become, as it turns out, essential for these creative networks. It will not mean that one can boldly assert, without a grin, that the Creative Economy would disappear, were it not for Intermedial Artists, but, in truth, the latter's experimentation allows for the former's networks to undergo greater changes, and to achieve faster speeds. The role of Intermedial and Relational Artists is precisely to use their 'labs' in order to find new entities, which can later become part of the discourse, the tools, and the offerings of the Creative Class. This dynamic, however, is not a matter of capitalist appropriation, or rather, the point is that practices that arise in the Creative Economy will destabilize capitalism's attempts to master them, which is precisely why they are parasitic; in an immanent and not a transcendent way they will change or eat the host from the inside.

For Florida, (Intermedial) artists become part of the Creative Economy. Still, following Florida's characterization of the Creative Economy does not lead us to reduce the worth of the art industry exclusively to Intermedial Artists nor assume that all forms of art produced are part of the Creative Economy. As a collective, the Creative Economy (the Creative Class in Florida) gathers and associates a myriad of humans and non-humans along a series of common themes: inventiveness and innovation, interdisciplinarity, cosmopolitanism, weak and virtual relationships, etc. None of these thematic lines is

¹⁹² One could also mention similar trends in other industries such as design and photography, journalism, and even academic publishing and research. In all these industries powerful 'players' are more and more unable and unwilling to exert control over copyrights and file sharing—it's a losing battle as independent sources gain ground, designs are retouched, rebuilt, etc., and academic discussion takes place outside the mighty and powerful academic journals.

meant to describe molar aggregates, but barely segments¹⁹³. Their porosity as concepts must be preserved, for it is necessary, in order for these to make reference to a diversity of associations, even if such effort may simply highlight their theoretical shortcoming. These concepts are elucidating when the purpose is to rekindle human talents, attributes and qualities without resorting to the modern subject/object divide. Their elucidatory character, nonetheless, comes at a great cost. Innovation, interdisciplinarity, multimedia, interactivity and so forth are concepts that always seem to come too late, which is precisely why they work; they always assume too much and are used as starting points, as causalities. How these are produced will remain a mystery for all those who use them as starting points, although as propositions these are crystal clear for those actants who reflect upon their place within a network.

This implies, in turn, that novelty, understood as a constitutive element of societal change is, thus, not dependant on the existence of humans whose attributes would allow them to go beyond social practices and institutions—the romantic figure of the artist as marginal, misunderstood and ahead of her own time. Massumi, for instance, states this same idea when telling us that ‘By this thinking, the discipline called art does not have a monopoly on creative composition. And the domain called politics does not have a monopoly on real existential change’ (Massumi, 2011, p 12). Producing art becomes more earthly, in the sense of being more connected to human production in general, without this meaning that art would be now subsumed under a logic of socio-economic reproduction. Rather than thinking of novelty as dependant on an absolute gesture of emancipation against a regime of control, this research has to

¹⁹³ The use of the term molar follows Deleuze & Guattari and is meant to denote the type of aggregate that I’m referring to at the level of Florida’s appreciation of the constitution of the Creative Class. The molar relates to modern subjectivity in that the constitution of the subject would be always a process of reproduction. One adheres to the molar: the student, the teacher, the banker, the father or the son, etc. In turn, the molar relates to the institutional conception of social groups: the molar is organizable, totalizable, unifiable (D&G; 1988, p 33). ‘The molar is transcendent, the molecular immanent’ (Flieger, 2000, p 42).

recognize that novelty instead as the product of trial and error, of associations that will risk failure, because of their experimental character¹⁹⁴. Therefore, continues Massumi:

There is no less an aesthetic side to politics than there is a political side to art. Practices we call doing politics and practices we call doing art are all integrally aesthetico-political, and every aesthetico-political activity is integrally speculative-pragmatic. Every mode of practice, however its domain is conventionally classed, is aesthetico-political/speculative-pragmatic, each in its own inimitable way. (Massumi, 2011, pp 12, 13)

Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics become politically relevant at the moment we begin to think of them in terms of the associations they propose. The closeness to all-too-common objects that their production entails, transforms the latter's use and confirms to us all that common objects (from commodities to slang, to popular culture) cease to be hindrances or necessarily vulgar practices. In fact, the role that the 'new' associations proposed becomes a determinant factor when it comes to political change: 'The aesthetico-political production of novelty is the excess invention of experiential forms of life'(Massumi, 2011, p 18).

Given that no umbrella notions of community are being used here, then the question that must naturally follow will be: for whom are the 'new' associations proposed relevant? For whom are these associations not only novel and experimental, but, more importantly, for whom are they the expressions of self-creation, or experiments of new ways of life?

There is no easy answer. It is undeniable that associations will always take part in concrete realities: gathering tangible networks and pre-existent relations. There is, however, a concrete texture to explore here—which is a texture that I have tried to unfold in this text. Artists whose work is interlaced with an

¹⁹⁴ The issue of immanence and the relation of novelty with transcendence is playfully undermined by Latour when he says: 'All the transcendence one needs, in practice, to escape from the straitjacket of immanence is found there, on the outside, within reach' (Latour, 2004, p 125).

array of all too common objects—within the Creative Economy— (video editing tools, design related software packages, Google, Wikipedia, stock images, smart phones, iPads, PC and Mac computers, Geek Squads, YouTube videos, etc.) are part of the Creative Economy, of the networks that sustain the collective described by Florida. Their common focus is their freedom to experiment. This freedom, whether big or small, lies in their ability to gain from both the common associations that already exists in the Creative Economy and, in particular, from their ability to take those alliances apart: to reconstitute them along different lines, on different planes in order to assure a different destination, a different becoming. Hacking is only one thread within this digital texture, Wikileaks only one radical political implication that by now gains ethico-aesthetic traits since Assange's lifestyle as negative (failed) *Gesamtkunstwerk* has been hacked by the media and the security forces of the US.

In addition, an artist's ability to be creative, to effectuate a different destination, an uncomfortable deterritorialization and an unexpected reterritorialization, lies not exclusively in their intentionality (as actants). For gathering and mastering the vast world of highly sophisticated non-humans exceeds by far the ability of a single actant or even of a highly sophisticated, but marginalized, organisation¹⁹⁵. Not only is wilful action limited, but even the earthly idea of an artist's mastery of a technique after years of practice, which relates quickly to the Renaissance classics—where Leonardo is probably the benchmark or archetype—has also become obsolete when it comes to its explanatory power over an artist's creative abilities or talents. Rather than years of repetition and constant growth, we have constant influx of ever-smarter non-humans which demand of their 'users' to speak their language, to be able to understand their codes. Know-how, as a skilful practice, becomes, hence, an informational plug-in, an update which must be taken (or performed) periodically, but which allows an actant to couple, or to associate previous know-how with the new; and which also allows an association with non-humans that cannot relate on

¹⁹⁵ It is interesting to reflect here upon the way groups like *Anonymous* or *Wikileaks* work, for even if they are indeed perceived as marginal and anti-social for the public opinion, their success and survival has indeed depended on the lack of centralized governance. The focus of governments on Julian Assange seems rather to confirm the lack of understanding of how the organization works rather than the former's actual governing power.

their own—the sound engineer, for example. Yet, one must not forget that what makes the idea of artistic mastery almost an archaism, is the fact that these ever smarter non-humans have made the need for precision, achieved before through repetition, an outcome of their alliances with humans. The stronger the alliance, for instance, between a designer and a program such as Photoshop, the more detailed, the more complex and also the more novel a design produced will become. Through the right know-how, and the proper plug-in, the designer will be able to use the program's attributes in order to achieve technical precision that not even the great masters could ever have dreamed of. An entirely new light comes to shine on the notion of technique, seen usually as no more than a practice that develops as the product of repetition through time. The sole purpose of a technique as mastery disappears. Non-humans free their human counterparts of their need to master one form or another of technical work, in turn, allowing the latter the luxury of an ever-greater experimentation. The ability for experimentation has become the new technique that must be mastered by anyone within the Creative Economy. It is for this reason that Intermedial and Relational Artists become the spearhead of the Creative Economy, for they enjoy a greater degree of freedom when it comes to experimentation. The common need that networks within the Creative Economy share is the need for experimentation. If there is a real threat to creativity, as the product of innovative alliances, it is precisely the ability that capitalist economy in its fragmented efficacy has in reproducing its outcomes; by way of smarter non-humans that propose simpler (cheaper) solutions. To some extent it would seem as if the Creative Economy is always biting its own tail. When seen from the perspective of the objects it produces (the artworks, the software, the designs, etc.) this is a threat that artists, scientists, writers, and so on, would not have faced in the past, because of their ability to maintain their mastery of a technique as a black box. There are still many within the Creative Economy, which similar to the most profit-driven transnational companies, will spend their time and energies in protecting their outcomes, their intellectual property. The Creative Economy is better served by copy left than by copyright.

There is surely a matter of distributive politics at stake; for everyone deserves a reward for their contribution to their greater economy and the recognition by social institutions for their efforts and their energies spent. I am passing over this discussion in order to remain close to the argument under consideration: the Creative Economy becoming a vicious circle of profit and destruction. The issue of creative alliances being undermined by capitalism's ability to produce ever-smarter non-humans is actually a non-issue once we are determined to accept that the contingency of all networks is an advantage and not a shortcoming. Their generalized becoming is not their weakness, for absolute permanence is neither realistic nor even desirable as a form of utopia. What lies at the heart of the matter is experimentation as the proposal of new alliances. It is the ability of humans to constantly reconstitute their alliances that makes of experimentation a crucial process for novelty and of novelty an essential element for the Creative Economy as a collective. The emancipation of creativity from technical mastery is, in consequence, its strength against capitalism's dynamic of turning singular complex labour into simpler processes characterized by being technical or easily reproduced in high volumes. This means then, that the availability of smarter non-humans will not threaten the Creative Economy, but will always be the lack of experimentation that will, beyond question, result in its demise. The lack and unwillingness to experiment, is precisely what makes of capitalism's attempts of appropriation, a failure: to make of experimentation a technique, contradicts the whole cost-effective endeavour where risk must be diminished or even abolished, yet it is also here that, for instance, risk-driven investments may help to expand the Creative Economy as a network of creativity¹⁹⁶.

An artist, hence, no longer works alone, no longer masters specialized techniques, no longer proposes utopias, and no longer focuses on denouncing everyone else's chains, and their lack of courage to escape them. Judging the political relevance of Intermedial Art has become an issue of understanding a common life rather than a common politics. Latour explains this as follows:

¹⁹⁶ So-called venture capital is the key reference here, however, I would by no means assert, in spite of its predatory ingenuity, that venture capital is necessarily interested in anything besides short-term profit.

Whereas the moral question of the common good was separated from the physical and epistemological question of the common world, we maintain, on the contrary, that these questions must be brought together so that the question of the good common world, of the best of possible worlds, of the cosmos, can be raised again from scratch. (Latour, 2004, p 93)

Moreover:

In practice, politicians have never dealt with humans, but always with associations of humans and nonhumans, cities and landscapes, productions and diversions, things and people, genes and properties, goods and attachments, in brief cosmograms. (Latour, 2004, p 145)

I maintain that the Creative Economy is, on the one hand, the collective where networks have specialized in the production of creativity and novelty. On the other hand, within the Creative Economy, humans and non-humans constitute a common world that interlaces the networks in which alliances sustain and advance the production of creativity. It is creativity as an effect of experimentation with a common world what constitutes the Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics' unique ability to affect their own becoming, and by implication, the becoming of the Creative Economy, of all those who are willing to take part in experimentations of their own, as part of a network.

I am aware that my focus on the Creative Economy seems to neglect aesthetic experience or, at least, reduces it to its effects on the production of creative offerings and, by implication, on the way humans and non-humans organize or better cooperate, in order to deliver such offerings. Their political relevance would seem thus reduced to the ability to relocate capitalist production—which is quite an achievement on its own, one must confess. This is by no means a small thing, nor one that needs be explained solely in economic terms. The measure of such impact is not intended as one that can be accounted for in terms of GDP alone, although the Creative Economy does affect the GDP of the global economy and of national economies. '[T]hey [the Creative Class] represent not an alternative group but a new and an

increasingly norm-setting mainstream of society' (Florida, 2004, p 82). So some words should be used specifically for aesthetic experience from the perspective of a dissensual community of spectators.

I have used Latour's conception of experiment to understand how aesthetic experience, taken as a network of associations, works and develops in a way that allows for the actants involved to change, that is, to associate differently, and to reorient their lives. When it comes to the question of what Guattari calls 'the problematic', this must also be understood within the concrete associations that an artwork proposes. Intermedial Art challenges primarily the associations that rule over the Creative Economy or, in other words, it proposes new associations for actants that currently populate the networks of the Creative Economy. This, however, does not mean that spectators will gain something from an art exhibition for as long as they can apply some practical lesson learned to their current job; although, I must remind my reader that there was a purpose in challenging the idea of a 'job' earlier in this text. My arguments against the work/leisure divide must be kept in mind here, for even if for analytical purposes one decides to concentrate on the experience of a somehow one-sided spectator one cannot translate this necessity into the reintroduction of the work/leisure divide. What remains to be explained is not how aesthetic experience of Intermedial Art affects a human life that exists outside economic production, but how a life enmeshed within capitalist production, from head to toe, uses Intermedial Art in order to challenge alliances that are not limited to the way in which an income is earned. It would be a mistake to superimpose flows of money on top of networks of creativity, even if authentic offerings are bought and sold. Latour's words on how a scientific experiment gives voice to actants that have no voice of their own are enlightening in this respect, for the question of aesthetic experience's impact on spectators is equally a question of voicing:

We shall say, then, that lab coats have invented speech prostheses that allow nonhumans to participate in the discussions of humans, when humans become perplexed about the participation of new entities in collective life. [...] What is at stake here is only a simple translation, thanks to

which things become, in the laboratory, by means of instruments, relevant to what we say about them. Instead of an absolute distinction, imposed by Science, between epistemological questions and social representations, we find in the sciences, on the contrary, a highly intense fusion of two forms of speech that were previously foreign to one another. (Latour, 2004, p 67)

The artist in a similar way uses her own experimentation as a means to present actants, which were either silenced by force, or simply presumed to be voiceless. This voice is equally characterized by its lack of univocity and its strict adherence to a code. An artwork creates a speech prosthesis that is not dependant on an artist's voice and which cannot be exclusive to the Creative Class, because the latter does not share a common language (understood as a code). Furthermore, the appeal to language made by Latour should not be seen as attempting to create a gap between the linguistic and the purely notional or eidetic. Language plays a purely functional and, actually, even a playful role in this respect. Going back to Cytter's film one can see that language, as a form of territorialisation (which gives stability to the elements within the film and a progression to the story) is directly challenged on one level. There is, however, a second functional level at work: where language is playfully mocked as an instrument. More than a deconstruction of the metaphysics behind the notion of a pure language, there is a proposal of language that is still instrumental even if destabilizing—in other words there is an in-between proposal at work. It is no longer a language whose purpose is to deliver stable meanings, but rather a language that allows human relationships to arise, but to do so without them being subsumed under a guise of rationality and instrumentalism. Language, therefore, becomes purposeless, with respect to the generation of meaning, but still remains functional with respect to its constitutive role in human relationships. In a word, Cytter's usage of language produces an understanding of human relations that is neither instrumental nor necessarily reasoned, without that implicating that they cease to be desirable. One could say that relationships in his films are the product of a desire that is not a lack, that is not using

language to master something else, but that is playing with the role that language has in helping relationships to arise.

Would this mean, in practical terms, that the spectator must begin to use language in a non-purposeful way? The answer would be, yes; to the extent that she fully realizes the concrete potential that the film's deterritorializing character has in store for her. Does this mean that the spectator must solely use language in order to challenge the use of narratives and progression in a way that challenges economic networks that make use of story-telling (from academic articles to TV commercials)? Here the answer would be, not necessarily; there is little sense in doing that, which is the reason why the artwork is not meant to enlighten experimental filmmakers alone.

To sum up, Latour's analysis of the scientific experiment, which I have used here to condense the procedural aspect of aesthetic experience, emphasises the cyclical nature of the deterritorialization/reterritorialization continuum: there is a challenge raised against current associations; followed by a process of experimentation which affects the role of the actants involved (even allowing for new actants to arise); this leads to a proposal of new associations, and consequent stabilization through the production of new alliances that are institutionalized in greater networks. Latour's own account runs as follows:

Every new proposition first goes through the four compartments of this figure, responding in turn to each of our essential requirements: it induces perplexity in those who are gathered to discuss it and who set up the trials that allow them to ensure the seriousness of its candidacy for existence; it demands to be taken into account by all those whose habits it is going to modify and who must therefore sit on its jury; if it is successful in the first two stages, it will be able to insert itself in the states of the world only provided it finds a place in a hierarchy that precedes it; finally, if it earns its legitimate right to existence, it will become an institution, that is, an essence, and will

become part of the indisputable nature of the good common world. Such are the various phases of one cycle. (Latour, 2004, p 123)

Craftsmanship, collaboration and the challenges of creative labour

The role of Intermedial and Relational artists on the greater Creative Economy throws new light on two integral aspects of current creativity—the binding force of all kinds of media, but as I have stressed in my research, especially on digital media, and the necessity to cooperate, given the primacy of relations over identity. These two aspects intertwine and bear a strong resemblance to sociological analyses that redefine the quality of work and the worker, such as Richard Sennett’s texts on craftsmanship and collaboration¹⁹⁷. In his critique on Arendt’s crucial division between labour, work and politics, i.e. speech and action freed from labour and work, Sennett rethinks the craftsman as an instance of the irreducibility of creative labour, and of an understanding of mastery that cannot be equated to a technical process, based on repetition or, at least, not to in the sense that would reduce such a process to the principles of efficiency and productivity behind the division of labour. This final section will explore the insightful approach on craftsmanship proposed by Sennett and its relation to the networks of creativity, which I have argued, sustain the Creative Economy in order to make an argument for the integral incorporation of creativity in the sphere of labour and work as a result of which the lives of the participants are directly influenced in a qualitative sense¹⁹⁸.

Sennett’s *The Craftsman* can be understood as a micropolitical exploration of the phenomenon of craftsmanship in postmodern times, although he does not use this periodic terminology himself. I will

¹⁹⁷ I will stay close to two of Sennett’s recent texts: *The Craftsman* (2008) and *Together* (2012).

¹⁹⁸ This relation between craftsmanship and lifestyle is the main inspiration of Oosterling’s own mesopolitical project, Rotterdam Skillcity, which he developed via educational interventions in schools in the socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods in the south of Rotterdam (Oosterling, 2013, pp 51-64). In these projects Oosterling concretizes his critique on our current radical mediocrity by enabling transformations into ‘inter-esse’, both as a techno-psychological and an ontological concept, as the foundation of a relational philosophy (See www.vakmanstad.nl and his latest book ECO3. Doendenken. Rotterdam Vakmanstad 2010-2012).

not attempt to condense his work, which is rich in detail and historical nuances, but rather to selectively focus on a series of ideas, which are paramount to the creative work, that is, to the core of the Creative Economy. Sennett argues that the craftsman must be distinguished primarily for her unique ability to remain engaged and dedicated to her craft (Sennett, 2008, p 20), i.e. the qualitative application of her skills in handling her specific medium. Dedication and engagement are central to the Creative Economy and highly relevant in western societies, where most workers acknowledge being entirely disengaged from their work¹⁹⁹. The persisting discontent is, sadly enough, not entirely surprising, for many influential business voices have been spouting about the tragedy that the factorial model (of high productivity and minimum costs) entails for modern workforces. The alienation thesis is a strong tenet that Sennett tries to deconstruct by pointing at hidden forces of creativity that are focused on dedication and engagement.

These cannot, therefore, be underestimated. They affect both the worker and the workplace in a way that directly affects the constitution of creative networks: creativity requires engagement and the latter requires collaboration. The craftsman's ability to bring both to the table amounts to a fundamental lesson that any organization must take seriously. Sennett highlights a series of important aspects that characterize craftsmanship. Dedication and engagement as high-level psychological terms surface over and over again in Sennett's works. Oosterling qualifies these terms as techno-psychological, because the interaction between the worker and her medium is fundamental for creativity. However, these terms should not be disconnected from their earthlier implications, which can be rephrased in Latourian language as an attitude of constant experimentation of constant problem solving and problem finding²⁰⁰ (Sennett, 2008, p 26), an ability to deal with contingency and limitations, an ability to let go of her work

¹⁹⁹ Gallup's 2013 State of the American Workplace survey shows that up to 70% of the workforce in the US reports being disengaged from their work. The entire report can be found at <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/163007/state-american-workplace.aspx>

²⁰⁰ At the very end of *Together* Sennett refers to Latour: 'In a pregnant phrase, the modern social philosopher Bruno Latour declares, 'We have never been modern'. He means specifically that society has failed to come to grips with the technologies it has created; [...] I'd amend Latour's declaration: we have yet to be modern' (Sennett, 2012, pp 278, 279).

(Sennett, 2008, p 262)—to avoid perfectionism from becoming an obstacle—and an interest in mentorship (Sennett, 2008, p 248). These characteristics can be understood as plug-ins in ANT's terminology. However, unlike software plug-ins these ones will unfortunately, take more than a couple of minutes to install; to be exact, 10.000 hours.

Yet, Sennett illustrates the craftsman's unique engagement and attitude of collaboration with an example of postmodern life: the Linux community. Linux is an operating system like Microsoft's Windows or Apple's IOS, yet it is substantially different in that it is an open-source type of software. This means that, contrary to the products of the high-tech giants (Apple and Microsoft), Linux allows for individual programmers to make changes to its operating system. Such changes have, in turn, given leeway to the constitution of a large network of programmers who discuss and exchange ideas on how to make further improvements, which has made of Linux an operating system that is, for many, superior to its counterparts. Linux programmers, argues Sennett, embody some of the elements celebrated by the Homeric 'Hymn to Hephaestus' (Sennett, 2008, p 24). As a group, Linux programmers are a marginal community, for only a few can engage with the type of language and activity that concerns them.

Their work, transforming and improving code lacks the glamorous tone that many jobs in the Creative Economy have, but is exemplary of the close relation between problem solving and problem finding (Sennett, 2008, p 26). Their relationship to technology is an enlightened one, and one which forges strong alliances conducive to collaboration. 'The machines are used by the craftsman to propose rather than to command human labour, thus, their uses are fashioned with complete acknowledgement, but without fear, about the operator's own limitations' (Sennett, 2008, p 105). 'Sound judgement' is exerted by the good craftsman, who chooses the machine, not so much because of its mechanical or functional capabilities, but for its ability to reveal something about the nature of the craft, in other words, for the machine's ability to enlighten her (Sennett, 2008, p 106).

To restate, the craftsman's ability to remain engaged and committed to her craft requires for the right plug-ins to be in place. These plug-ins, which enable the interactions needed to survey vast amounts of differently coded information, not only emphasize the importance of collaboration, but also shed light on how knowledge is produced, enhanced and transformed, in a way, akin to the pedagogy of Media Literacy (Risko, 1999, p 137). Media literacy is beyond being media savvy. Media literacy teaches students to maintain an active/reflective approach to connections and associations which have an impact on the ability for creative thinking (Risko, 1999, p 135). One example of this is the use of the hypermedia system (HS) by students in order to explore events (the fall of the Berlin wall). Hypermedia allows them to explore the power of imagery, but especially to create negotiated readings (by juxtaposing images they create a challenge and allow for all relevant voices to surface to the same level). Such exercise, by having several groups, invites students to critically assess each group's approach (Hammett, 1999, p 214). A similar exercise was done by asking students to critically compare the burning of the books in *Fahrenheit 451* with Jimmy Hendrix's flag burning on stage (Risko, 1999, p 214). The reflective component is crucial. Media literacy is not about what we can do with our media, but what media can do with us.²⁰¹

The technical proficiency of the craftsman is particularly valuable, because it generates an approach to her craft that stands out for its honesty and its authenticity: the craftsman appropriates the craft at hand in a unique manner, where authenticity comes as a result. This authenticity results from a creative act and does not refer to a pre-established order. As with Pine & Gilmore, it is a performative notion that lies beyond the distinction, between the real and the fake. The development of skills rather than technical repetition is better seen as the emergence of a ritual, where challenges are met with patience and with an interest in experimenting with the various possibilities for resolution (Sennett, 2012, p 215). Skills

²⁰¹ Oosterling's projects on inter-esse show that this interaction between man, machine and media is the core business of a shift towards a new literacy beyond language, a literacy that is needed in a visual culture and a media society. Oosterling has coined this project in emancipatory terms Medial Enlightenment. Since emancipatory pedagogical implications presuppose a revaluation of the concept of apprenticeship in order to fit my critique on the modern 'urge to a total work of art' I will not elaborate on this project. My main concern with Oosterling is his affirmative transformation from radical mediocrity to interesse and the implications for the media literacy within the creative economy.

become rhythms and rituals rather than endless reproductions. This is why the craftsman is such an important figure within the Creative Economy. Creativity can only arise under such conditions, where experimentation reigns and where the main goal is the creation of value, quality and authenticity.

Craftsmanship, to be sure, is not simply about honing the attributes of an isolated craftsman, for the workshop is inseparable from the craftsman—there is no craftsman without a workshop, no craftsman without a team. The workshop is ‘a productive space in which people deal face-to-face with issues of authority’ (Sennett, 2008, p 54). Authority is a vivid interaction between master and apprentice, focused on the transmission and transformation of skills. This surely means much more than agreeing on who is in charge or who must be obeyed; this would be a sterile definition of the workshop. The workshop is a place where skills work as ‘a source of the legitimacy of command’, which dignifies in turn, the obedience given (Sennett, 2008, p 54). In a workshop, the ‘master’ earns the ability to command, but not through a pre-existent authority, like the one given to the newly arrived CEO of any corporation, but instead through her ability to teach in a way that allows for those under her command to absorb those skills and to see in obedience a pathway or a journey towards mastering a craft (Sennett, 2008, p 54). The craftsman, hence, is a pivotal node within a creative network. The craftsman must be able to translate and transform complex skills into processes that allow those skills to be learned, but also to be improved and magnified in their reach. The craftsman, whether the Linux programmer or the project manager of an advertisement agency, has the task of proposing and supporting new alliances, of building pathways for experimentation between human and nonhumans, which, in turn, are what grant her authority over others.

Talking about skills does not imply solely technical expertise. The micropolitical impact of craftsmanship lies far beyond technology and technics. The acquired skills only ‘work’ in combination with social skills, creating a mentality and attitude that endure beyond the divide work/leisure.

Cooperation requires the social skills of Sennett’s craftsman, which next to the proficiency and

commitment to her work amount to the powerful combination that is required for creative networks to endure and expand in a micropolitical sense. And in the same vein, cooperation appears to be the core business of the creative industry but it remains, to be sure, its most challenging facet too. Sennett acknowledges that serious threats to collaboration exist in the way in which most businesses operate today. I agree with him and would also add a few of my own to his list. The following section is intended to explore the main issues that threaten not only the emergence of cooperation, but also the ability for individuals and organizations to engage in the constitution of a broader and more resilient Creative Economy.

Dangers, threats and spillover effects

The frailty of creative networks, the engagement and collaboration they demand to be sustainable through time, and the lack of a clear communitarian binding principle, are, however, not the only dangers that can harm the Creative Economy. The micro- and mesopolitical impact of Intermedial and Relational Art requires for the Creative Economy to remain a viable form of collective that is open to the experiential and experimental approach that characterizes the performative dimension of Intermedial practices. There are no longer strict boundaries between art, work and life, although there are always institutional settings. These are, by the same token, threats that affect the possible futures of the Creative Economy and, thus, the future of Intermedial and Relational Art.

For analytical purposes, the dangers to keep in mind can be said to be internal, and to prevail within the creative networks (e.g. Sennett's arguments on engagement and the viable workshop) as well as external, or coming from outside those networks, e.g. corporations' interest in exerting greater control over human and non-human resources by means of avoiding competition and destroying regulatory frameworks or High-Art enthusiasts' (e.g. Sotheby's) institutional pretensions to claim autonomous (exclusive) spaces

for abstract contemplation or cultural enjoyment. External dangers will regularly challenge the Creative Economy's ability to coexist within the broader market economy without being absorbed by older, yet remaining, forms of organization and economic production, or being reduced to a marginal role, similar to the economic role that markets for traditional or native handicrafts play for the tourist industry.

What I label internal dangers, however, pose equally difficult challenges. Next to Sennett's concern it is worth noticing that scholarly criticism based on reducing the Creative Economy to just another market, where profit or a quick buck is the sole driver of the actants involved—just another 'alienating' factory helping to stimulate senseless consumption—will constitute an internal danger, although a positive reminder too, of what is at stake: assuring that art remains affirmative and denunciatory, that it continues to challenge our ability to connect, and that it continues to generate the hope that we can change .

I'm aware that a distinction, between the external and the internal, is informed by a discrete language that so far, has not only been used rarely, but also, has been hardly criticised. The purpose of such distinction is entirely rhetorical²⁰². It is meant to elucidate the dangers involved at the level of the molar aggregates that dominate common discourse on, among others, art as an economic industry, marketing as a causal force behind consumption, or on topics such as sustainability. Why would this be desirable from an analytical point of view? It can be elucidating given the practical weight that such aggregates entail despite the dichotomous discourse that often accompanies them. ANT, I must note, is not left behind. I have no intention of proposing these aggregates as having an equal footing on reality as networks or actants, but I do believe that, in order to understand the practical consequences that an action oriented politics can take, these theoretically dirty and messy aggregates must be taken into account.

It remains the case that neither Florida nor Pine & Gilmore are interested in escaping common oppositional thought or in ceasing to work along molar or discreet lines; although it is still true that they

²⁰² Oosterling's adjective 'techno-psychological' and my methodological and ontological emphasis on the in-between or the 'inter' are similarly motivated.

are both, critical of dichotomies such as the work/leisure divide, and remain attentive to the challenges that a discrete description of ‘the real’ poses. Their propositions on the Creative Economy, hence, are to a certain extent hindered by residues of oppositional thought that still inform their view—Pine & Gilmore’s audience at stake may also explain their interest in avoiding the complex language that is required for an educated discussion of the prevalent issues that affect organizations and their workforce, beyond common motivational concerns. Sennett’s ethnographic interest in the modern workplace, therefore, provides again an enlightening approach that highlights the most relevant ‘internal’ threats to the constitution of creative networks.

Broadly speaking, Sennett identifies two main forces that harm cooperation: structural inequality and new forms of labour (Sennett, 2012, p 192). Structural inequality is partly connected to the macroeconomic trends explored by Harvey in his critical assessment of Neo-liberalism. Structural inequality as a trend that continues to create an ever larger gap between those who thrive economically and those who don’t, poses serious difficulties for the Creative Economy, and for the possibility of dissensus not to be exacerbated by such an income gap²⁰³. Sennett, however, puts his focus on the micropolitical effects of inequality. For him inequality directly harms people’s ability to cooperate: people’s willingness and interest in collaboration affects the social skills (the social plug-ins) that individuals require, in order to know how to seek and benefit from cooperation. Inequalities of Anglo-American children, argues Sennett, makes these children less sociable, in comparison to children in more egalitarian European societies. The reasoning behind this is that inequality becomes an inherent part of children’s lives by means of invidious comparison, where, for instance, the fact that social relations are increasingly consumed online, diminishes the likelihood of those children having social relationships across class lines (Sennett, 2012, p 160). I would add, in addition, that the more social relationships are

²⁰³ The weight of inequality on cooperation is well known and has even been noted by Unicef: ‘The internal distribution of wealth in a society, as described in the Unicef report, creates different sorts of adulthood relations in different social classes. Contrasts in behaviour among children begin to appear as a result; children in relatively egalitarian societies are more likely to trust in one another and to cooperate; children in societies marked by great disparities are more likely to deal with others as adversaries’ (Sennett, 2012, p 204).

reduced to online ‘interfacial’ relationships, the less capable an adult will be to forge face-to-face relationships. Complex social cues related to deference and demeanour are missing in online relationships, but are crucial for face-to-face interaction and, more importantly, for cooperation to ensue in the workplace²⁰⁴.

This same inequality gap affects the relationships between individuals with different skills, that is, it affects interdisciplinary collaboration, and reinforces invidious comparisons. Sennett refers to the case of steel grinders and painters in construction, where their input is entirely dismissed by designers and architects, who do not see in their skills relevant ‘medial’ knowledge that would entitle them to the ‘privilege’ of such meetings (Sennett, 2008, p 45). Similar cases may emerge virtually in any industry, where a patent gap between planners and doers exist, in particular, if an educational gap underlies such difference (having a university degree versus vocational studies).

Next to inequality, Sennett also identifies the issues that come about with new forms of labour. The main concern, with respect to the constitution of creative networks, is in this case, the way that such forms of labour affect a worker’s engagement. The pressure and long hours that come with the jobs in the Creative Economy can be conducive to dissociation and disinterest, if workers have no expectation of being rewarded for remaining engaged, that is, ‘for doing a good job for its own sake’ (Sennett, 2008, p 36). If the structure of rewards is informed by the inequality of skills mentioned, then technicians and the like will quickly become disengaged as they see their work as fundamentally demoralizing, by a structure of rewards that ignores their skills and effort.

The new forms of labour can many times be the result of an organization’s almost exclusive concern with the short-term alone and an entire disinterest in the long-term. The financial industry is perhaps the most illustrative case of the short-term threat that Sennett wants to convey, but companies that are more

²⁰⁴ The urban intervention of Rotterdam Skillcity with its educational programs is focused on stimulating these social skills in children’s behaviour. The scientifically monitored programs show that the socio-emotional interactions and their social skills—i.e. their ‘inter-ests’—are exponentially strengthened. See Rotterdam Skillcity’s website at <http://www.vakmanstad.nl>

and more dependent on freelancers are especially at risk: ‘Project labour in chameleon institutions acts like an acid solvent, eating away at authority, trust and cooperation’ (Sennett, 2012, p 176). The short-term is indeed a recipe for disaster, in terms of cooperation and engagement, and, hence, in supporting the creation of networks and new alliances. Sennett’s concerns point perhaps more patently towards the corrosive effects that hierarchies in the workplace have on the ability and interest of workers to cooperate. It has been a vice of most businesses to reward individuals on the basis of their individual contribution, yet as Sennett points out, such contribution is biased by the inequality of skills that sees value in certain areas of work, while neglecting the contribution from others. It is not surprising, therefore, that thinkers like John Dewey, John Ruskin, and William Morris have all urged ‘workers to assess the quality of their work in terms of shared experiment, collective trial and error’. In other words for Sennett ‘good craftsmanship implies socialism’ (Sennett, 2008, p 288).

His reference to Dewey, Ruskin and Morris reminds us of a political *Gesamtkunstwerk* that in a craftsman-like sense is formulated by Sennett as ‘socialism’. It must be clear that this totalizing concept is not available in my analysis of new work conditions. Yet, it can be redefined in terms of Relationalism. Horizontal relationships, however, are not intended to do away with authority, but rather to legitimize that authority and to dignify the obedience of those who attend to it—this was Sennett’s point with regard to the earned authority of the good craftsman. In order to create a structure that enables an honest command rather than an imposed authority, Sennett compels us to pay attention to the ‘social triangle’ that such working relationships entail: ‘The three sides of the social triangle consisted of earned authority, mutual respect and cooperation during a crisis’ (Sennett, 2012, p 161). His ethnographic work on factorial conditions after World War II gives him a unique vantage point, in understanding the delicate balance that exists in the workplace and that enables cooperation to emerge even in places where one (falsely) believes that hierarchy and authority are especially rigid, such as inside a steel factory. The social triangle cannot exist in organizations focused exclusively on short-term profit, where, in addition,

such profit is distributed in arbitrary and unequal fashion. 'Faced with a weak, lightweight and unreliable social order, people retreat into themselves' (Sennett, 2012, p 205). Anxiety and subsequent withdrawal are the result of a dysfunctional 'social triangle'. A result, which, to be sure, is detrimental to the constitution of networks, as well as to the interest of individuals to want to take the relative risk that experimentation requires.

Sennett's criticism, however, is not a sign of pessimism, for his interest is to provide reasons to choose for cooperation, rather than to simply present a bleak picture of despair. He emphasizes, as shown above, the positive role of the craftsman for an organization. His work on craftsmanship is followed by his book, *Together*, which focuses on the topic of cooperation in the workplace. I have already perused some of the most relevant ideas that this second text proposes. Furthermore, in his study on collaboration, he compels us to recognize the basic communicative value of Relationalism: Dialogics, which is a 'technical word [that] names attention and responsiveness to other people' (Sennett, 2012, p 27). Oosterling's 'interesse' or being interested can be seen as pertaining to the same line of thought.

Sennett, however, differs from Oosterling in positioning the individual as a centre of sorts: his craftsmanship still refers to intentionality and interiority. This is why the social horizon of dialogics is framed in its relation to empathy. Sympathy, argues Sennett, can be understood as a process, not dissimilar to the dialectical thesis-antithesis-synthesis in dialectics, which ends with a final understanding and a corresponding emotion of satisfaction—it feels good to reach an agreement (Sennett, 2012, p 35). Empathy, however, is more suitable to understand the role of dialogics, because in dialogic exchange there is not an experience of closure, for such exchange is conducive to more questioning instead of closure, yet the empathy that ensues does carry its own emotional reward—it also feels good (Sennett, 2012, p 35). Via empathy Sennett opens up to Relationalism and the in-between. Instead of a dialectic process, dialogics is akin to the experimentation process that creative labour entails, where proposing and experimenting with new associations is crucial for eventual networks to be

created. Dialogics refers, hence, to the process of constant becoming, albeit from a sociological perspective, where cooperation and engagement are the relevant metrics at stake. Dialogics is a necessary aspect of human relations that is fundamental to the constitution of alliances. It works as a plug-in of sociability that is required for associations to have the potential of becoming alliances. Dialogics does not entail the mutual understanding and final sublation to a new enriched identity of the dialectic process, where ‘all cards are set on the table’. On the contrary, it entails a mutual understanding about the existence of undisclosed zones, of something always yet to be uncovered, and, thus, of further questions to come. Knowing how to positively manage this uncertainty—how to deal with the anxiety it raises—is especially important for a community characterized by dissensus²⁰⁵. In Sennett’s words:

My premise about cooperation has been that we frequently don’t understand what’s passing in the hearts and minds of people with whom we have to work. Yet just as Montaigne kept playing with his enigmatic cat [the exemplary case Sennett refers to], so too a lack of mutual understanding shouldn’t keep us from engaging with others; we want to get something done together. (Sennett, 2012, p 287)

Cooperation, and this has been my argument all along, is not the opposite of dissensus, for disagreement and cooperation can coexist. The opposite of cooperation is, to restate, not dissensus but modern subjectification (the conjunctive synthesis), the beautiful soul syndrome and invidious comparison, and Radical Mediocrity. These three aspects are fundamentally detrimental because of the damaging effects they have on the individual’s social skills, on her fear of error and experimentation, and on the perception of withdrawal (disengagement) as a palliative against social pressure and anxiety.

²⁰⁵ Dealing in a positive manner with patent disagreement can at times require not much more than remaining silent about tacit knowledge that participants know will damage cooperation. Sennett, for instance, refers to the civility that arose between Korean, Latino and African-American communities in the US. By avoiding giving in to the anxiety product of prejudice and their own sense of marginalization they were able to ease conflict and to allow civil relationships to emerge and persist (Sennett, 2012, p 246).

In my critical reading of Morton, I spent some lines on what he calls the ‘beautiful soul syndrome’: where a utilitarian perspective on consumption would be replaced with the queer notion of purposeless consumption; to consume properly would be, for the beautiful soul, to consume in a purposefully non-purposive way (Morton, 2007, p 139). This same consumption without a purpose is noted by Sennett, who labels it as ‘modern waste’, where consumers would appear to be ‘more aroused by anticipation than by operation; getting the latest thing is more important than then making durable use of it’ (Sennett, 2008, p 110). Both Morton and Sennett warn us against the double-edged sword of radical mediatization²⁰⁶. Still, bringing the wasteful and aestheticized consumption together must be done with caution. One must avoid falling back on a utilitarian notion of consumption, where a certain frugality would appear as emancipatory—it would be the only way to keep wasteful consumption at bay. The beautiful soul’s aesthetic approach to consumption is, I believe, entirely in line with Oosterling’s Radical Mediocrity, for they both share a moral undertone and they are both essentially underscoring fundamentally shallow choices. I argued earlier²⁰⁷ that the mediocrity emphasized by Oosterling must always be understood as a choice, as a decision that never bypasses agency. I identified modern subjectivity and the conjunctive synthesis as the ontological form of that choice to create relations that revolve around an individual body. It is certainly possible to address this same point from a different level, where some light is shed on its more earthly aspects.

Sennett follows Tocqueville’s view on the threat that individualism presented in a democratic society. ‘Each person, withdrawn into himself, behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others’ (Sennett, 2012, p 201). In other words, individualism closes the horizon of relationships that a person would have otherwise. Individualism in democracy would reduce the circle of relationships to the family, making of all other citizens complete strangers whose existence is negligible: a person would sadly exist ‘only in himself and for himself alone’ (Sennett, 2012, p 201). Tocqueville’s prophetic lines

²⁰⁶ Oosterling’s double notion of Radical Mediocrity can also be taken as carrying a similar warning.

²⁰⁷ See *Relationalism and the Inter-medial*

are, no doubt, what captured Sennett's attention and the reasons why I mention him as well.

Cooperation, without a doubt, requires outward looking people, and such form of individualism effectively hinders the constitution and interest of people in new relations (in forging new alliances).

For Sennett, behind this corrosive individualism lies status anxiety, which he characterizes as the individual's need for constantly engaging in invidious comparisons. Dissensus, as the lack of a shared sense of community and communitarian bonds, is transformed into anxiety by making an individual question the qualities and reasons behind her own tastes, such as consumer habits, and values (Sennett, 2012, p 201). It reaches a point, argues Sennett, in which such differences are perceived as an insult: "different" becomes translated into better or worse, superior or inferior, a matter of invidious comparison' (Sennett, 2012, p 201).

The invidious comparisons, which constantly put the individual in an anxious state, are certainly not sustainable in, for instance, large urban areas where contact, even if minimal, would in any case be almost impossible to avoid. The individual answers to this perceived threat, in turn, by voluntarily withdrawing from relations. This withdrawal, continues Sennett, takes the form of either narcissism or complacency: 'the first is a matter of vanity, the second of indifference. Both psychological forces deform character, understood as a matter of acting responsibly toward others, or submitting to a demanding code of honour' (Sennett, 2012, p 203).

The question already raised by Tocqueville, two hundred years ago, is simply: 'Can cooperation weigh heavier on the scale?' (Sennett, 2012, p 203) Sennett's concern is precisely this, for which there are no easy answers. The state of anxiety does produce real fear and the question is not whether to respond to it or not, but what the best response is. For Sennett, and I find his argument compelling, the issue of dealing with anxiety must be seen under the light of an absence of rituals in modern society. The role

that rituals play in the construction of social bonds is fundamental, if one wants to understand how a dissensual community can develop into something more than an autistic gathering of bodies:

Ritual's role in all human cultures is to relieve and resolve anxiety, by turning people outward in shared, symbolic acts; modern society has weakened those ritual ties. Secular rituals, particularly rituals whose point is cooperation itself, have proved too feeble to provide that support. (Sennett, 2012, p 293)

Sennett suggests what he calls minimal resistance and sensibility:

Anxiety-reduction aims to diminish outside Stimulation; it does so by individual withdrawal. Whereas in deploying minimum force, both physically and socially, we can become more sensitive to, more connected with, more engaged by the environment. The things or people that resist our will, the experiences which resist our instant understanding, can come to matter in themselves. (Sennett, 2012, p 225)

Instead of facing the disjunctive, either resistance or withdrawal, Sennett seems to point towards an in-between solution, which is a reminder of the role of becoming in aesthetic experience and artistic practice. Becoming means certainly transformation, a permanent process with no real end in sight, because its purpose is not to end but rather to keep on opening new possibilities (what Deleuze & Guattari refer to as lines of flight). In a word, to 'create is to resist' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p 110).

The gesture of continuous experimentation that is a marker of Intermedial Aesthetics is the in-between solution that the anxious state requires for its resolution to become, facing outwards rather than inwards. Sennett's concern, which I share, centres around the effects that such invidious comparisons have on cooperation. The individual who wants to become a subject in the modern sense cannot but permanently confront this state of anxiety. It is here, as well, where the Creative Economy has a role to play, for it allows individuals to build spaces of cooperation that allow for different terms to be agreed on; their

networked character does not incite invidious comparison, because it avoids focusing on the individual as a centre of gravity. The Creative Economy also presents a space where individuals can disengage from the confrontational nature of dissensus. It is fundamental for people to count on their human alliances, where their anxiety can be relieved and where confrontation can be dealt with in more amicable terms. The problem of the beautiful soul syndrome, moreover, is one of invidious comparison, where the aestheticized form of consumption functions as a way to deal with the ensuing anxiety, but does so by means of a much more confrontational manner: responding to insult with injury by looking down on others with presumed justification.

Beautiful souls replace the open nature of reflection and experimentation with the rigid boundaries of a hierarchical structure, where they feel at ease by safely placing others on a lower level. When it all comes down to a person's ability to pay for certain offerings, when individuals reduce difference to elitism, based on their ability to buy what others cannot, then offerings themselves will lose their fragile connections within creative networks. If we were to say, hypothetically, that the production of authentic offerings would shift entirely towards feeding a shallow idea of 'cool' and towards bourgeois elitism, then the creative networks that sustain it would come under downward pressure: there is no need for creativity to be produced, when the sole purpose is to feed a sense of status, based on a brand's image. The connections between Inter-medial Art and the Creative Economy would not survive, making the former, in turn, ever more marginal. Art's propositions are irrelevant if 1) objects of consumption are meant to be inert and consumption, in consequence, is equated with exchange²⁰⁸, and 2) economic offerings appear as separated from their production process. Yet, what must be kept in mind is that a shift towards an exclusive group of consumers is a decision that entails more than marketing, and would need to mobilize great resources even if with the single aim of achieving greater profit. Well, one may beg the question, isn't this what characterizes capitalism's own process of becoming? Yes and No.

²⁰⁸ Use value is equated to exchange value.

My analysis of the ideas found in Korten and Harvey found a common subject in both: the overpowering role that corporations have in a globalized market. This asymmetric role entails not only the ability to affect the direction of prices as well as to hinder the possibility of success of smaller businesses, cooperatives, and the like, but also the ability to directly and indirectly use governmental agencies and policies for the consecution of their own interests. Stating without hesitation that corporations would be indeed to blame, were the Creative Economy to shift its marketing apparatus towards ‘beautiful souls’, would be surely as speculative as any of the metaphysics I have tried to avoid thus far. Still, one can quickly understand that an exclusive focus on the short-term, on above-average profit margins, and, especially, on avoiding competition by monopolizing or colluding certain markets, is indeed a real danger for the production of authentic offerings. What would be the relation between this behaviour on the side of business and ‘beautiful souls’ on the side of consumption?

Unless one can assess that ‘beautiful souls’ are indeed stable entities, so as to assure that their habits of consumption will consistently and extensively reject the engagement needed for authenticity to be perceived as valuable, then a straight answer could be given, but through generalizations that would lack the slightest hint of rigour. If, however, we follow Pine and Gilmore, when they state that the growth of counterfeit goods would be a clear sign concerning the decline in perceived authenticity, then one could speculate that the growth trend followed by those other consumers, the ones who would still buy the original, would bear some relation to the relative weight that Morton’s beautiful souls would have with respect to the total demand.

Even as this last statement would undoubtedly take us into the realm of economic analysis—as it should—this does not mean that there is nothing more than economic data to the dangers behind the beautiful soul syndrome. There is, thus, an aspect of the beautiful soul syndrome that aligns more clearly with my analysis here. I have mentioned earlier, while critically assessing Morton’s ideas, that proposing an aestheticized form of consumption would take us back to reinstating the work/leisure divide, which,

consequently, would help to hide again the networks of production, thus, sending them back to oblivion.

A company's partial or insubstantial efforts, which would quickly fall prey to being labelled as greenwashing²⁰⁹, for instance, actually become an unnecessary nuance, if consumers don't actually agree that sustainability is a desirable (and determinant) aspect of economic production.

The work/leisure divide, would reinforce, in turn, a view that compartmentalizes art as an activity that bears no relationship with normal/real economic production. This would be justified through a bourgeois discourse that argues in favour of art's presumed decorative purpose; a purpose that differs essentially from the utilitarian goal of economic goods in general. All in all, beautiful souls actively pursue forms of greenwashing, and elitist discourses relate to each other, forming a network of their own. How such a network would work and what kind of alliances would help to sustain it, is a question that requires an ANT analysis that surpasses the scope of the text here. What can be assessed, nonetheless, is that it is not coincidental that such seemingly unrelated entities work together and sustain a common oppositional divide: a divide that, among others, informs the neo-classical economic theory that is largely present as a theoretical beacon of many supranational institutions, research centres and think tanks, around the globe²¹⁰.

Intermedial and Relational Art pose, however, a counter force to the beautiful soul syndrome, for, I have been at pains to argue, they propose an aesthetic experience which does not rest on passive contemplation, nor on abstract reflection; both gestures are typical of an elitist understanding of art (as high art) and of a bourgeois preference for decorative motifs, which are meant to be displayed without the risk of hurting anyone's sensibilities. The issue at stake, regarding the effects of the beautiful soul

²⁰⁹ Greenwashing is a common term nowadays to denote sustainability efforts that are based either mainly in marketing campaigns, which would present a product as environmentally friendly, but would give no details on how this is achieved, or deceiving notions of sustainability, which would for example highlight the lack of water pollutants in textiles, while abstaining to include things like fair labour conditions in that notion of sustainability.

²¹⁰ There are many ideologically biased research centres and think tanks, which conceal their agenda and work as powerful allies in the construction of a pseudoscientific discourse that legitimizes the neo-liberal agenda among others: The Heritage Foundation, The Cato Institute, and Citizens Against Government Waste in the US as well as the Centre for Policy Studies and the Bow Group in Europe.

syndrome and art's political relevance is, hence, much more concrete and subject to be made accountable. It has little to do with explanations based on notions like reproduction (taken as the lack of novelty and the ad nauseam return of the same), or with sighs of resignation and postmodern despair (the giving up on utopias and political ideology), or with the shortcomings of a philosophy that by taking immanence seriously must forever abandon the human striving for emancipation (the still too-modern quest for a true science and for an alternative to capitalism as a regime of power).

The use of technologies, the communication wants, the video-game-like engagement at times proposed, and the appropriation of artworks by marketing and popular culture cannot be seen in a positive light if one insists on passing judgement in accordance to a modern understanding of politics; where they cannot but be taken as tragic effects, and which instead of bringing the liberation promised, would simply end up contributing in putting us all under the watchful eye of the panopticon. The becoming of modernity—please allow me the poetic license to make such statement—has not brought us all into a social grasp that would forever get tighter and tighter—I believe this is precisely what Latour means when insisting that, we have never been modern. One cannot deny the sense of powerlessness that can be felt by individuals and groups throughout the world as they face realities that seem overpowering, faceless, and merciless. However, this common feeling of dispossession and injustice cannot be voiced through the speech apparatus of militant groups alone. Social critique, shock and guilt have proven to be powerful yet insufficient tools for achieving much of their own political goals on economic fairness, a more transparent democracy, and a greater respect for non-humans.

It is for this reason, crucial for the Creative Economy, that authentic offerings continue to appear, that is, that economic offerings continue to challenge the way people, not only understand, but perform consumption. It is equally important that artworks reject their position as objects of passive consumption (as decorative motifs) and, in turn, that artists escape their fate, as a marginal group of bohemians. It is only within an adaptable and experimental Creative Economy that Intermedial Art will be able to

effectuate political change. Not by becoming an ally of economic interests, but by affecting the way those same economic interests organize labour for their own sake. The question is not whether economic interests should exist or not, or should be powerful or not: they are already, on both accounts. What is at stake, when it comes to art's subversive effects on capitalism, exceeds the analytical capabilities of a critique on the capitalist drive for profit. The notion of profit-making is simply too broad, it abstracts too much. It turns a blind eye to relevant questions regarding how businesses mobilize labour, about the externalities or effects that economic production has on humans and non-humans that do not share in the profits, and about the vision of the consumer that they sustain and promote. As I have earlier shown, approaching these matters requires us to completely abandon a notion of capitalism as a sheer set of impersonal and determinant social forces, and as an essentially reproductive and alienating way of organizing human (and non-human) energies. The Creative Economy, as a collective, continually challenges prevalent modes of production, but not by somehow reaffirming a standpoint of anti-production that would be destructive of capitalism as a whole. Its strength lies precisely in that it playfully challenges the desire for profit that naturally motivate flows of investment. It allows, on the one hand, for an entrepreneurial spirit, alien to profit, to survive within a broader market economy, where profitability does reign. On the other hand it proposes a mobilization of labour that, in order to function (to produce creativity), must allow for workers to associate freely and to identify with the aim of producing experiential offerings.

There are indeed gradations and concrete networks that must be taken into account before any generalizations can be made. These two aspirations of the Creative Economy will survive through both political commitment and success at the market. The key here is to keep in mind that even if market success does imply the existence of profit, profit alone does not imply exploitation and alienation; these later implications depend on how such want for profit is articulated into concrete modes of organization and an expected behaviour on behalf of consumers.

There is yet, an internal danger that appears as a reactionary response from many human actants within the Creative Economy, who do not see the type of experimentation I have discussed as fundamental to their role, and to the role played by their alliances within greater networks. This threat to the Creative Economy relates to what Bard and Soderqvist labelled as netocracy. In short, the term proposes a concept of democracy that is, in fact, undemocratic, at least to a certain extent. Those in the netocracy, explains Zizek, are either pro-capitalist, who want to keep capitalism functioning in its current or neo-liberal form, or post-capitalist, who want a sort of reformed capitalism which would depart from the neo-liberal stance (Zizek, 2010, p 173). The concept, however, is relevant here as a functional notion, as it describes the movement of a collective that would put forward a predatory dynamic, which would stall the production of creativity in its most general sense²¹¹. Concretely, the threat that comes with netocracy is that of human actants who have been able to construct stable and powerful networks (including a considerable amount of market power), by taking advantage of precisely the things that the Creative Economy allows for (inter-disciplinarity, flexibility, alliances with advanced technologies and the ability to procure and to encourage, experimentation), but end up seeing that same advantage as a permanent threat to their own success. It is a 'kicking away the ladder after climbing it' type of situation. The main issue is that those who are pro-capitalists want markets to be left alone, because they have significant market power, which they can leverage against upcoming competitors. Pro-capitalists are those who, after profiting within the Creative Economy, would want to hinder it, through a variety of legal and economic tactics, so as to protect their own success. The way they would do so, for instance, is by encouraging the existence and application of ever more strict and arbitrary copyrighting laws. These efforts would protect their offering's profitability, by closing off the networks that sustain them. However, such hypocritical attitude would seem to forget that networks are not sources of creative energies that would resemble a star, which irradiates energy from its core. A network, to repeat, is an

²¹¹ I have presented the production of creativity as indispensable for innovation in terms of cooperation, production processes, and environmental impact, among others.

essentially open structure, in the sense that energies flow through it, but are not originated in any of its singular nodes, in any of its particular alliances, or in any of its actants. The network's unique feature is its ability to propose innovative connections—with other seemingly unrelated networks—to challenge alliances, and to allow, in practice, for less restrictive forms of cooperation to endure.

Zizek points to this problem as arriving from an ambivalent relationship to capitalism: on the one hand, the need, and the want for more intellectual property rights, while on the other a dependence on the free exchange of information (Zizek, 2010, p 173). It is precisely this dependence that seems to be neglected or forgotten by pro-capitalists. Closing off a network is fruitless, and even suicidal, for the only way in which it can be sustained through time is by allowing the free flow of energies (of ideas, of technologies, of information) to endure. A network is not a one-way street and the issue that Zizek highlights is, in fact, a common occurrence and entirely relevant, but it is not essential to the dynamic of the Creative Economy²¹², but rather a consequence of the struggle between the political forces at stake.

Zizek's argument wants precisely to portray these forces as essential to the innerworkings of current capitalism, which one would expect, in Marxist, fashion, would reach a synthesis, where the antagonism would be broken. When referring to Marx, this synthesis would lead to a higher stage of political and economic organization called communism. Zizek's argument at this point turns upon itself revealing the irony that lies deep down: there is no higher stage, because it is precisely the contradictions within it, which allow for capitalism to subsist as a functional economic regime. Marx's hope of unleashing the true power of a worker's productivity (of factorial cooperation) in a higher stage called communism was naive: '[I]f we abolish the inherent contradiction of capitalism, we do not get the fully unleashed drive to

²¹² Zizek remains too close to the Marxist's faith in the notion of capitalism's own demise being inevitable and a necessary consequence of its contradictory forces. Pro- and post-capitalists are not put forward as dichotomic concepts, but Zizek fails to argue why they are so. As a good idealist, in the Hegelian sense, he unapologetically dismisses the concrete as irrelevant to the 'real' forces at stake and hence proposes only speculative scenarios, which appear plausible for as long as one is willing to concede truth-value to his conjectures.

productivity finally delivered of its impediment, but we lose precisely this productivity that seemed to be generated and simultaneously thwarted by capitalism.’ (Zizek, 2010, p 176)²¹³

Zizek’s argument puts us in a difficult position. He is not calling upon nostalgia or despair, but is instead asking us to search for a commitment that stays well beyond pragmatic compromise. Zizek asks us to think utopia, to break with the apparent weight and necessity of capitalism in order to think something truly different. At this point I can embrace Zizek’s intentions enthusiastically, but I still must depart with the air of inevitability that characterizes his description of the capitalist economy, where there is simply nothing to be saved. For Zizek there will simply be a future where capitalism will be nothing more than yet another superfluous moment in the movement of history²¹⁴. Although, I have by no means put forward the idea that the Creative Economy is somewhat of a ‘sublated’ stage after capitalism, I have noted repeatedly that pragmatic compromise cannot be dismissed as a sort of rendition. The issue, nonetheless, is that the only way to depart from this point of view is to consider the singular, the practical, and the concrete as equally relevant as the abstract and universal. It is upholding this horizontality between theory and practice, between facts and values, that allows for the possibilities of the Creative Economy and, in particular, of Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics to be embraced as a true becoming: as enabling change, as being free from the weight of necessity and the yoke of inevitability.

Zizek himself notes that the netocracy does not put forward an ideologically uniform collective, but it encourages both reactionary as well progressive visions of the Creative Economy. This text would unapologetically fall into what Zizek calls the post-capitalist side, because it asserts that the Creative

²¹³ Zizek argues that Negri and Hardt, continue to be trapped in this naive hope by appealing to the liberation of the deterritorializing dynamics from their constraints, and from the logic of capitalist profit. (Zizek, 2010, p 176).

²¹⁴ Zizek describes the dialectical process in what he calls a more refined manner: ‘the standard notion is that one can only arrive at the final truth at the end of a series of errors, so that these errors are not simply discarded, but are “sublated” in the final truth, preserved there is as moments within it. What this standard notion misses, however, is how the previous moments are preserved precisely as superfluous’ (Zizek, 2010, p 28). Capitalism, like feudalism is simply flawed at its core: it is unjust, unfair and immoral.

Economy proposes modes of production that depart from traditional modes of capitalist production, where cost structures are the sole determinants of profit. Pro-capitalists, on the contrary, would fall prey to this traditional vision of capitalist success, and would simply be too shortsighted or too overconfident to see that their ability to produce creative and authentic offerings will come under fire in the long run. Pro-capitalists would be dogs biting their own tail, for they would be in constant need to become always more protective of their offerings, and, consequently, more arbitrary and dependant on their use of their market power and more averse to competition—while at the same time more dependent on the constant flow of innovation that would allow them to remain authentic. The pro-capitalist vision, furthermore, would be practical only for those who have enough market power to enforce their conditions and to effectively drive their competitors away. The truth is, that only very few, and considerably large, businesses would actually be able to act accordingly. The main threat, I believe, cannot be reduced to the Apple's and Google's, but to the regime of truth (Foucault) that is produced by such companies, in order to drive many in the Creative Economy to become pro-capitalist and hypocritical: to forget that they profit from the relative freedom that their creative work entailed and which allowed them to productively use the work of others. The political discourse derived is naturally aimed at those starting professionals who are lured by the 'lifestyle' of wealthy pro-capitalists and who think that their own professional success is dependent on their ability to get the laws and governmental institutions 'on their side'; they cannot but equate the production of creativity with individual 'talents' and, thus, end up seeing networks as a threat to their own success. It is the reactionary production of such a regime of truth that would return us to a metaphysical notion of creativity and human qualities at large; what appears as a threat, and which this text has critically assessed throughout.

Finally, one must keep in mind that Intermedial and Relational Art play a role that goes far beyond their capacity to impact economic organization and the production of experiential offerings. Aesthetic experience challenges molar forms of subjectivity and puts forward instead, lines of flight; it reveals

possibilities for self-creation, it enables an exploration of the self and its relationships with other humans and non-humans, which a mediated reality allows for. Technologies then, are not an expression of human mastery or degradation (Heidegger), but rather tools for self-creation²¹⁵. Actor Network Theory has, in turn, provided the perspective that is necessary for actants to recover their pivotal role as mediators and articulators of collective forces. Recovering an actant's ability to impact its own becoming is perhaps one of the crucial aspects that this text has repeatedly argued in favour of.

Intermedial Aesthetics is, hence, much more than what Lyotard or Rancière would agree on, and much less than what Morton and Žižek call for. Its merit, its goals and its effects lie in-between. Cooperation, in turn, must be rescued as essential to the production of the future that Žižek calls upon us to imagine. We must not lose our ability to imagine and to always choose always something better. Nor must we lose our ability to appreciate the value of concrete goals: there is no such thing as small triumphs. Only when we are finally able to value the efforts of the many that strive to move forward, slowly but surely, will the dream of a collective, characterized by empathy and cooperation, be truly embraced.

²¹⁵ Reactionary responses directed against technologies, against the automation of production processes as well as, for instance, those who give metaphysical attributes to the human conscience, in order to differentiate it of the inner works of ever-smarter computers, are a hindrance to the Creative Economy and to an aesthetic experience which succeeds while advancing a decentred sense of self.

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SUMMARY (ENGLISH)

Breathing Art into life: the political role of artistic networks in Intermedial times

I. Setting the stage: philosophy, mediatization and capitalism

If there were a distinct aspect to philosophical practice, it would be its ability to intrude, to disrupt thought and practice, by providing a sense of perspective that seemed to be absent. What is so particular to philosophy is that, unlike other forms of intrusion, the former applies the gentlest of pressures to disclose life as, in the final instances, a non-identifiable field of forces, that is, as a complexity that we are always approaching in an elliptical fashion. A first glance at *What is Philosophy?*, by Deleuze and Guattari, appears as an invitation to create concepts, step-by-step, to understand philosophy's strengths, but mainly to transform its destiny into not so much a universe as a multiverse. If one had to strip its message to its bare bones, it would read: human life is primarily a collective effort to compose heterogeneous forces. Inspired by this message this research is interested in studying the field of forces that come together in a series of seemingly distinct phenomena: aesthetic experience, creativity and collaboration, political identities and self-creation. There is, however, Intermediality, a proposed concept that traverses these phenomena, that brings them together by pointing at that which they all have in common: the in-between. Following Oosterling's approach to the Intermedial and to Intermediality, the study is able to provide a coherent concept that underlies the phenomena at hand and which remains consistent with the methodological and ontological choices taken in this research on art's political relevance. Deleuzian thought next to the use of Latour's Actor-Network-Theory are used to analyse the power struggles, the prejudices and the challenges to reflection that Intermedial experience put forward. Whether they are aesthetic experiences, creative economies or political acts of self-creation, the same Intermedial approach remains, focused on describing the mediatized or in-between character that such networks have in contemporary life.

Despite the ability for synthesis that the network and the Intermedial provide, it is still an important task of this research to construct the political, the economic and the aesthetic against the backdrop of the scientific and humanistic discourse that describes them and attempts to make sense of them. This means, concretely, that setting the stage, the backdrop of the networks and the Intermedial requires for attention to be given to contemporary art practices, namely Relational and Intermedial art, the creative economy as a socioeconomic phenomenon and the role of telecommunication technologies in enabling relationships of a particular kind. I briefly discuss here the reason why these three domains must be brought or knitted together, in order to understand the phenomenon of Intermediality and, ultimately understand the political relevance of art today.

Understanding the role that art as a practice and the cultural industry as a macro phenomenon play in explaining the events of the 'Great Recession' (Krugman, Stiglitz) is, to a great extent, still a pending task. The complexity of modern economies cannot be underestimated and the limits of

theories to capture such complexity must be identified, if one is to say something meaningful about the way in which aesthetic practices are embedded or take part in the production of goods and services that we call capitalism.

This research is motivated by the need to advance this pending task and to affirm that we need art today. The need to understand capitalism beyond the tropes of the merchandise, the invisible hand or globalization does not intend to reduce the social field to an economic discourse, but on the contrary to argue that the scientific discourse on economic life originates and ends within that same social life; there is simply no recourse to an outside, where creative forces would be able to exist free of the limits imposed by market forces or the state as a center of power. Political art is therefore not understood here as art that has been captured by a political discourse, but rather as art that has the ability to subvert and interrupt social life, albeit in a productive manner, where social critique is only but a moment of a much more productive and collective endeavour.

The role of the medium is also central to the argumentative line presented in this research. Marshall McLuhan's interest in understanding the active role of media is perhaps today a more urgent endeavour than ever before. Programmers and ICT experts are today building complex virtual worlds and experiences, which require a scholarly effort to explain the myriad of phenomena that spring from their use and intention. This research argues that being media-savvy is not enough and that what is at stake is media literacy. Media literacy, nonetheless, begins by understanding the omnipresent role that media has in enabling and informing human and non-human relations today and in the future. This is especially important in the digital age, where most relationships take place online and where modern humans have effectively become cyborgs. The main contention can be summarized by saying that mediatized relationships are quickly becoming the rule, rather than the exception, and that part of that commonality springs from the fact that ever smarter technologies will allow for those mediatized relationships to carry, not only more information, but also entail more trust than any other form of human relationship. Mediatized relationships, therefore, open a series of crucial topics that require a deep and systematic understanding of their implications and construction of ever more complex forms of human experience.

It is precisely with the aim of proposing an understanding of experience, relevant to the phenomenon of mediatization, that this text undertakes an exploration of the most experimental practices, between humans and technologies, which result in experiences that are supported and, in many cases enabled, by communication technologies. It will be argued that these experiences belong to the realm of aesthetic experience, and in particular, to the sphere of Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics. Several strands of theoretical work are deemed crucial to this approach. Deleuze and more generally, Deleuzian inspired thought, provide a rich source of critical and original insights that dwell on the issue of aesthetic experience. Relational aesthetics make the reading of Nicholas Bourriaud mandatory. The role of a fuzzy concept such as communications, which seems so

pervasive in popular, as well as in high culture, will be, in consequence, treated with caution and instead, explored as supported by the role of media and through the constitution of relations.

This research, moreover, intends to introduce the philosopher to the complexities and the possibilities that the world of virtual realities, social networks, smart objects, and the like, which are very much a part of our daily modern lives. It is also meant to introduce non-philosophers to the world of Deleuzian and Latourian thought, where they can discover an entirely new way of understanding practical life and an equally original way of projecting their own subjectivity onto the world. For anyone who comes across it, this text is, after all, one that wants to explore the potential of communication technologies that generate new ways of life. Given its creative underpinning, this research is about the role that art is playing in our globalized world today. The question that drives my research is, to be sure, not one that can receive a 'yes' or 'no' answer. It is not whether political art is dead, but rather an interested questioning on what the conditions are or can be for the possibility of art to be political today.

II. Beyond the Gesamtkunstwerk: Intermedial aesthetic experience

Intermedial and Relational Aesthetics have left behind those grandiose modern ambitions, in order to become actively engaged within social life and capitalist production. This incursion of aesthetics into daily life is characterised, however, by a series of particularities that are not shared by art that attempted to be political in the past. It no longer deals with an appropriation of art by political interests or political programs; it is not the latest variant of the modern Gesamtkunstwerk. It is also not the continuation of a deconstruction of representation, in the name of critique and scepticism. Modern critique has run its course and postmodern readings on, either the unrepresentable sublime (Lyotard) or the role of social critique in contemporary art (Rancière), continue to struggle to find new political bearings for contemporary aesthetics.

Deleuze and Guattari were poised in affirming the role of experimentation and sensation - or sensible reflectivity - in aesthetic practice and aesthetic experience. Their prolific thought introduced a battery of concepts that sharply denote the processual character of human life: becoming, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, lines of flight and rhizomes, are today leading concepts to the philosophical analysis on aesthetic practice and aesthetic experience. I will here use this Deleuzo-Guattarian framework to study the role of art practices that would, from a Marxist perspective, be indistinguishable from daily life and convention. Artistic production's is today closer than it has ever been to the modern workspace, where fluidity and immediacy on the one hand and intermediality and connectivity on the other, frame the experience of collaboration and creativity. Creativity, I believe, is no longer the exclusive quality of artists and the means of production have never before been as available as they are today. Fluidity and interconnectivity have become the bottom line of our human lives, where media are always present: from social media networks, to an

ever growing number of virtual realities and ever cheaper smartphones, our human experience is one of Radical Mediocrity (Oosterling).

I use the term Intermedial—following Oosterling—in order to gather those aspects of mediatisation that characterise the work of artists, who are immersed in technological experimentation, multimediatic presentation and interdisciplinary cooperation. My proposal on Intermediality will however go further than Oosterling's. While this text will share in his idea that Radical Mediocrity is, for instance, relevant for us to understand the potential of self-creation (Foucault), it will also and more keenly insist that it is relevant for us to understand that media literacy is all about collaboration and cooperation. And that it is exactly within this perspective that its political potential – be it macro, meso or micro - can be found.

I propose aesthetic experience is politically relevant there where a sensible-reflection of mediatization meets three criteria: 1) there is a patent recognition of lines of flight, i.e. of unpredictable connections between media, humans (nonhumans), and minds, 2) media and the experience of mediatisation are used to create possibilities for subjectification, and 3) boundaries between the proper spaces of aesthetic contemplation (museums, galleries, biennales, etc.), and those of modern disciplined production (the factory, the school, the office) no longer exist.

III. Intermediality and workplace micropolitics: the creative economy as a political body

It is in a world of free and ever-growing financial markets, strong and weak emerging economies, large transnational corporations, and high-tech booming markets, where all quarrels and understandings regarding art's political relevance must take place; the place of the term immanence, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari remains central to the phenomena analysed. It is only in this (immanent) world too, where artists, artworks, and spectators meet each other, and where aesthetic experience produces its effects on the broader public. This field of production cannot be, however, framed within capitalist coordinates alone in the same way that it cannot be framed exclusively within philosophical discourse. Capitalism is presented as no longer being a totality that could, nevertheless, be criticized from an outside perspective. Instead, it is always part of the aesthetic concern—capitalism is a specific dimension of our *network* society.

I will use Bruno Latour and the conceptual framework of Actor Network Theory (ANT) to propose a networked view, where concrete modes of political action can be identified. Using empirical literature in economics as well as consumer theory, marketing, media studies and a few analytical elements from political science, the main interest in this study is to present an analysis of the networked character of these mediatized world, which we at times refer to as capitalism. I intent to show using ANT that practice has a stake in producing networks that lead to creative modes of cooperation and entail an ecological worldview.

Creativity is a common, a relational good (Florida, Sennett, Oosterling). Using ANT allows this analysis to show that economic consumption should be seen as a process that can enable alliances, whose effects are productive, meaning that modern subjectification can no longer be reduced to a moment of sheer disciplining (Foucault) and control (Deleuze). This means, in turn, that consumer subjectivity and creative labour become *actants* (ANT) that come as a result of alliances, between humans and nonhumans (media), alliances which, by being relational, extend the reach and intentions of those same humans and nonhumans.

Furthermore, once all Marxist and Neo-Liberal prejudices are left behind, it is possible to see the stake that creatively produced work has on the workplace and on consumption. Consumers and spectators become subjectivities, whose production occurs in ‘becomings’, where the term refers to envisaging new associations (deterritorializations) and allowing for new modes of experiencing life to take on a concrete shape—territorializations. Likewise, creative alliances subsist through these networks and for as long as the humans and non-humans involved remain able and willing to mobilize and collaborate effectively, time and time again.

SAMENVATTING (NEDERLANDS)

Kunst in het leven blazen: De politieke rol van artistieke netwerken in intermediale tijden

I. De voorbereiding van het podium: filosofie, mediatisering en kapitalisme

Als de huidige filosofisch praktijk ergens door gekenmerkt wordt, dan is dit door het vermogen om zich op te dringen, om het denken en de handelen te verstoren, door een perspectief te bieden dat nog niet gedacht is. Het bijzondere aan filosofie is dat, in tegenstelling tot andere ‘opdringerige’ vormen, zij de zachtste vorm van druk uitoefent om het leven, aan zijn grenzen, als een niet-identificeerbaar krachtenveld te ontvouwen, dat wil zeggen als een complexiteit die slechts op elliptische wijze benaderd kan worden. *Wat is filosofie?* van Gilles Deleuze en Félix Guattari zet aan tot het creëren van concepten. De filosofie toont hierin haar kracht om haar bestemming te veranderen: denken wordt multiverseel en is niet langer universeel. Als we haar boodschap kernachtig zouden neerzetten, dan zou het deze zijn: het menselijk leven is voor alles een collectieve inspanning om heterogene krachten samen te stellen, te assembleren. Geïnspireerd door hun project richt dit onderzoek zich op het bestuderen van deze krachtenvelden waarin ogenschijnlijk verschillende zaken samenkomen: esthetische ervaring, creatieve samenwerking, politieke consistentie en zelf-creatie. Daar wordt haaks een nieuw concept op ingezet: intermedialiteit. Dit assemblerende concept doorkruist deze verschijnselen en wijst op wat ze allemaal gemeen hebben: het tussenin. Het biedt dit onderzoek een coherent concept dat aansluit bij de methodologische en ontologische keuzes die erin worden gemaakt om het politieke belang van huidige kunstpraktijken aan het licht te brengen. Deze intermediale ervaring wordt getraceerd met Bruno Latours Actor-Network-Theory. Zo worden, naast, Deleuziaanse inzichten Latours methodische reflectie op netwerken gebruikt om de machtsstrijd, de vooroordelen en de uitdagingen waar de hedendaagse filosofische reflectie met de maken heeft, te analyseren. Ongeacht of het gaat om esthetische ervaringen, creatieve economieën of politieke daden, de intermediale benadering blijkt een constante factor in de methodische poging om te beschrijven hoe individuen hun leven ontwerpen. Iets technischer gesteld: een individu als knooppunt in netwerken is een intermediaal wezen. Zijn grondpositie is letterlijk inter-esse: tussen-zijn.

Tegen de achtergrond van dit intermediale netwerkperspectief wordt het belang van hedendaagse kunstpraktijken beschreven. In de configuratie van esthetiek, economie en politiek komt de nadruk te liggen op de analyse van relationele esthetiek en intermediale kunst, ‘creative economy’ en telecommunicatie-technologieën als dragers van interacties en transacties. In het onderzoek wordt beargumenteerd waarom en hoe deze drie domeinen met elkaar verknoopt zijn geraakt. Binnen deze context wordt aangetoond wat de hedendaagse politieke relevantie van kunst is.

We begrijpen nog steeds niet precies welke rol kunst en de culturele industrie hebben gespeeld in gebeurtenissen rond de 'Grote Recessie' (Krugman, Stiglitz). De complexiteit van moderne economieën kan niet worden onderschat en de beperkingen van theorieën om deze complexiteit vast

te leggen moeten worden geadresseerd, als we iets zinnigs willen zeggen over hoe kunstpraktijken zijn ingebed in en deelnemen aan de productie van goederen en diensten in het systeem dat wij 'kapitalisme' hebben genoemd.

Dit onderzoek neemt de taak op zich de rol van kunstpraktijken in dit proces te herwaarderen. Wat vermag de kunst vandaag de dag? Willen we het kapitalisme in zijn volle breedte begrijpen dan moeten we het sociale niet buiten maar volledig verweven met zijn legitimatiediscours begrijpen. Er is geen ruimte buiten de kapitalistische axiomatic, waar de creatieve krachten zouden kunnen doorwerken zonder de opgelegde beperkingen van de marktwerking of van de staat als een centrum van macht. Economie, het sociale en politiek werken in de kunst door. Politieke kunst wordt hier dan ook niet opgevat als kunst die is gevangen genomen door een politieke ideologie, maar eerder als kunst die van binnenuit het vermogen heeft het sociaal-economische leven te ondermijnen en te onderbreken, zij het op een productieve manier. Daarmee overstijgt ze louter sociale kritiek als momentopname.

De rol van het medium staat centraal in dit onderzoek. Marshall McLuhans radicale poging om de bepalende werking van de media op het menselijke gedrag en bewustzijn is nu wellicht meer van waarde dan ooit. Programmeurs en ICT-experts bouwen tegenwoordig complexe virtuele werelden en genereren ervaringen, die een wetenschappelijke inspanning vereisen om de talloze verschijnselen die voortkomen uit het gebruik van media door consumenten te verklaren. Dit onderzoek stelt dat het niet genoeg is handig te kunnen omgaan met media. Wat op het spel staat is mediageletterdheid of mediawijsheid. Deze begint met het begrijpen van de alomtegenwoordigheid van media in het leven van de hedendaagse mens. Het gaat daarbij om menselijke en niet-menselijke relaties. Dit is doorslaggevend voor het begrip van het digitale tijdperk, waar de meeste interacties en transacties online plaatsvinden. Mensen zijn effectief cyborgs geworden. En van de belangrijkste stellingen van dit onderzoek luidt dat gemediatiseerde relaties eerder regel dan uitzondering zijn en dat de media de maat van het leven van de 21^e eeuwse mensen zal aangeven. Vandaar dat hier gesproken wordt over middel-matigheid als onze hedendaagse menselijke conditie. In zoverre die middel-matigheid tevens betekent dat media de mens in de wereld wortelen is er sprake van radicale (radix=wortel) middelmatigheid. (Oosterling) Deze gemediatiseerde relaties doordenken roept een aantal fundamentele vragen op over de invloed van kunst op deze steeds complexere vormen van menselijke ervaring.

Met het oog op deze 'human condition' worden in dit onderzoek van de experimentele interacties tussen de mens en zijn media die pas mogelijk zijn geworden door communicatietechnologieën. Maar daarbij zal worden aangetoond dat deze ervaringen tot het domein van de esthetische ervaring behoren, en in het bijzonder tot het gebied van de intermediale en relationele esthetiek. Om dat aan te tonen worden verschillende draden van theoretische werken die cruciaal geacht worden voor deze aanpak in elkaar gevlochten. Deleuze en meer in het algemeen, Deleuziaans geïnspireerde en door Guattari doorgewerkte inzichten, zijn een bron van inspiratie om deze door mij beoogde esthetische ervaring te doorgronden. Voor een relationele esthetiek gebruik ik het werk van Nicholas Bourriaud.

Dit onderzoek heeft de intentie om enerzijds filosofen met de complexiteiten en mogelijkheden virtuele werkelijkheden, sociale netwerken en 'smart objects' die onlosmakelijk met ons dagelijkse, moderne leven verbonden zijn, in contact te brengen. Anderzijds legt het zich erop toe om voor niet-filosofen het zicht op de Deleuziaanse en Latouriaanse gedachtewereld te openen, zodat ze op een inzicht krijgen in de wijze waarop media hun subjectiviteit bepalen. Maar uiteindelijk ligt het zwaartepunt op de creatieve onderbouwing, dat wil zeggen op de rol die kunst speelt in onze geglobaliseerde wereld. De vraag die mijn onderzoek stuurt, is zeker geen vraag die beantwoord kan worden met een 'ja' of 'nee'. Het is niet de vraag of politieke kunst dood is, maar eerder een vraag naar wat de omstandigheden (kunnen) zijn waaronder hedendaagse kunstpraktijken als politiek kunnen worden aangemerkt.

II. Voorbij het Gesamtkunstwerk: intermediale esthetische ervaring

Denken over hedendaagse kunst vereist primair het doordenken van de crossovers tussen kunst, politiek en filosofie. Naast de relationele esthetiek is zijn het intermediale kunstpraktijken die worden bevraagd op hun mogelijkhedenvoorwaarden. Vanuit deze intermediale esthetiek wordt naar het sociale leven en de kapitalistische productie gekeken. Deze blik breekt echter wel met kunstopvattingen die in de afgelopen eeuw het levenslicht hebben gezien. Zeker met die opvattingen die zich expliciet als politiek hebben geafficheerd. Het gaat niet langer om kunst door politieke belangen wordt ingegeven of die politieke manifesten voortbrengt. Het is dus niet de zoveelste variant van het moderne Gesamtkunstwerk. Maar het is evenmin de voortzetting van een deconstructie van representatie. Moderne kritiek heeft afgedaan en postmoderne inzichten over ofwel het onvoorstelbare sublieme (Lyotard), of de rol van sociale kritiek in de hedendaagse kunst (Rancière) schieten ook tekort als het gaat om het specifiek politieke van hedendaagse kunstpraktijken in een gedigitaliseerde wereld te begrijpen.

Het zijn met name de inzichten van Deleuze en Guattari over het 'sensationele' karakter van hedendaagse esthetische ervaringen die worden ingezet om voorbij deze postmoderne vertogen te komen. Hun samenwerking produceerde een verscheidenheid aan concepten die het procesmatige karakter van het menselijk leven benadrukte: het worden in termen van de- en reterritorialisering, vluchtlijnen en wortelstokken. Dit zijn de leidende begrippen van dit onderzoek. Vanuit dit perspectief is artistieke productie vandaag de dag hechter dan ooit verbonden met het werk van al diegenen die door theoretici als Florida als de creatieve klasse worden aangeduid. Flexibiliteit en directheid aan de ene kant en interdisciplinair werken met intermediale connectiviteit aan de andere kant, dit vormt de matrix van de creativiteit. Ik concludeer dat creativiteit niet langer de exclusieve kwaliteit van kunstenaars is. De middelen of media van productie zijn nog nooit eerder zo beschikbaar geweest als nu: sociale media netwerken, een steeds groeiend aantal virtuele realiteiten en goedkopere smartphones, dit vormt onze menselijke ervaring als radicale middelmatigheid.

Ik gebruik de term intermediaal om de interdisciplinaire en multimediale kwaliteit van het werk van kunstenaars te karakteriseren, die in de driehoek kunst, politiek en filosofie opereren. Hun werk ligt ingebed in technologische experimenten, multimedia-presentaties en interdisciplinaire samenwerking. Mijn voorstel ten aanzien van deze intermedialiteit gaat echter verder dan wat het onderzoek van Oosterling heeft opgeleverd. Hoewel de psycho-ontologische structuur van de radicale middelmatigheid wordt onderschreven en het belang van zelf-creatie in en bestaansaesthetica wordt verdisconteerd (Foucault), worden in mijn onderzoek benadrukt dat mediageletterdheid over samenwerking en medewerking gaat. En dat is, binnen dit perspectief, precies waar haar politieke potentieel - ongeacht of het gaat om macro, meso of micropolitiek - kan worden gevonden.

Ik stel voor dat deze intermediaal en relationeel esthetische ervaring op een drietal criteria een politieke relevantie heeft; 1) er is sprake van vluchtlijnen, dat wil zeggen van onvoorspelbare connecties tussen media, mensen, niet-mensen en reflecties, 2) de ervaring van de mediatisering worden gebruikt om subjectiveringspraktijken te versterken of te creëren, en 3) de grenzen tussen de ruimten van esthetische contemplatie (musea, galerieën, biënnales, enz.), en die van de moderne gedisciplineerde productie (de fabriek, de school, het kantoor) zijn diffuus.

III. Intermedialiteit en micropolitiek van de werkplek: de creatieve economie als een politiek orgaan

Het is in een wereld van vrije en exponentieel groeiende high tech en financiële markten, van sterke en opkomende economieën, van multinationals als global players, dat de politieke relevantie van de kunst zich manifesteert. Buiten deze dynamiek is er geen externe macht die het proces bepaald. Het draait om immanentie, zoals begrepen door Deleuze en Guattari. Het is uitsluitend in deze (immanente) wereld, dat kunstenaars, kunstwerken en kunstliefhebbers zo interacteren dat de esthetische ervaring doorwerkt in het dagelijkse denken en doen. Maar ook al is deze ervaring ingekaderd in de kapitalistische coördinaten, deze vormen geen gesloten systeem. Ook al is kapitalisme een specifiek aspect van onze netwerksamenleving, Het Kapitalisme bestaat niet.

Methodisch is in het onderzoek naast het werk van Deleuze en Guattari dat van Bruno Latour van groot belang. Het conceptuele kader van Actor Network Theory (ANT) wordt gebruikt om de complexe en gelaagde structuur van de interacties en vertaalslagen die daarin plaatsvinden in beeld te brengen. Met behulp van empirische literatuur in economie, consumententheorie, marketing, media studies en politieke wetenschappen wordt Latours ANT aangevuld. Ik wil met behulp van ANT aantonen, dat er in de creatieve industrie netwerken worden geproduceerd die tot creatieve vormen van samenwerking leiden en die bovendien een ecologisch wereldbeeld met zich meebrengen gebaseerd op feedback.

Kortom, creativiteit is een collectief, relationeel product (Florida, Sennett, Oosterling). Met behulp van ANT toont deze analyse aan dat actieve consumptie kan worden gezien als een proces dat allianties mogelijk maakt, waarvan de effecten productief zijn. Dit betekent in filosofisch perspectief

dat de moderne subjectivering niet langer kan worden teruggebracht tot disciplineren (Foucault) of controle (Deleuze) maar in de consumptie van media plaatsvindt. Deze ‘consumentensubjectiviteit’ wordt echter productief en creatief door de cross-overs tussen actanten (ANT), die een gevolg zijn van allianties tussen mensen en niet-mensen (media), allianties die, door relationeel te zijn, het bereik en de intenties van diezelfde mensen en niet-mensen overstijgen.

Zodra we alle marxistische en neo-liberale vooroordelen achter ons hebben gelaten, krijgen we zicht op een wereld waarin de creativiteit zich immens vertakt. Kunst is geen exclusief domein, maar is ingedaald in het handelen van individuen die van binnenuit hun leven richting en zin verlenen in hun interacties met anderen. Zowel op de werkplek als in de consumptie van goederen, diensten en ervaringen. Zo worden passieve consumenten en dociele toeschouwers omgezet in actieve subjecten die principieel in 'wording' zijn, waarbij ‘worden’ verwijst naar het openbreken van gefixeerde verbindingen (deterritorialisering) en het scheppen van nieuwe levensvormen (territorialisering). Kunst inspireert het leven op alle lagen van de netwerksamenleving. Kunst wordt het leven ingeblazen.