

Metahuman: Post-anatomical Bodies, Metasex, and Capitalism of Affect in Post-posthumanism.

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Abstract:

Relational intensive bodies have no form or anatomy. They are not representable and are impossible to map because of their diffuse nature. Reviewing the body as an amorphous field of intensities, producing an account of the body, indeed of reality as post-anatomical, implies questioning the conditions of possibility of power regimes that give the human-white-male-middle-class-heterosexual a privileged status as a life that matters. It means to radically redefine sexuality as a field of the production of multiple sexes, beyond binary oppositions, thus producing an account of a pangender metasexual body. This requires addressing contemporary mechanisms of power that operate through new technologies of the production of affect, as well as questioning the positivist account of the human in the realm of eugenics. It means questioning the foundations of implicit power in late capitalist societies of control, masked behind the appearance of modern democracies. Thus, there is a need for producing a new relational ethics and ecology and a new political economy for a relational social body. Examples of post-anatomical bodies in the artwork of Jaime del Val at the Institute Reverso will be shown.

The Posthuman and Beyond

I speak to you from a hybrid heterogeneous perspective as a transmedia artist, a philosopher outside the academy, a postqueer and an environmental activist, the producer and the director of the transdisciplinary Institute Reverso.

I speak to you as a body in the times of Digital Culture’s presumed erasure of embodiment, a body in the times of the Capitalism of Affect, in which the choreographies of our desires are globally produced through technology. I will attempt to resist some of these mechanisms of production, and propose some technoaesthetic paradigms for the purpose of habilitating less coercive, less violent worlds of relations and for a democracy yet to come.

The starting-point for this essay is a revision of the critical traditions of posthumanism related to feminism and materialism, as exemplified by Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles and other authors: the posthuman as an attempt to question hegemonic coercive forms of humanity on this planet:

- the posthuman as a *present condition* in which “computation rather than possessive individualism is taken for the ground of being” (Hayles 1999, 34), with all the conflicting attempts of information society to reduce existence to patterns without presence, whereby there is a “coupling so intense [with the machines] that it is no

longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed” (Hayles 1999, 35);

- the posthuman as a critical figuration to review our past (we have never been human in the sense proposed by humanism, that is autonomous, coherent, unchanging in nature), in the words of the artist Stelarc: “Bodies are both Zombies and Cyborgs. We have never had a mind of our own and we often perform involuntarily and are externally prompted. We have always been coupled with technology, we have always been prosthetic bodies.”¹
- the posthuman as a contemporary and recent emergence of agencies in the borderlands of the realm of humanism, subjects too abject for traditional humanist standards (sexual minorities, disabled, migrants, relations across species and with machines, sadomasochists, etc.), precisely those who are challenging and refiguring universalist accounts of humanity for a democracy to come, what Donna Haraway calls the “promises of monsters”.

Therefore, my starting point is an account of the posthuman that is cautiously and critically distant from technophile transhumanist and evolutionist framings of a utopian future for humanity. I will suggest that we cannot but propose potentialities in present times: The future is always unthinkable, since it will always be subject to the contingencies of bodily interaction, of its production of time-space in its ever-moving potentiality. The tradition of Transhumanism takes the autonomy and free will of the subject for granted and assumes a certain technopositivism that sympathizes with the quantification of reality for the purpose of its “enhancement”. As I will be proposing, the problem that arises herewith is not only about *what* we subject to *enhancement* (whether through education, genetic selection or other means), but also about the issue of quantification itself: I will propose that it is the mere process of territorializing and quantifying reality that reinstates it within specific regimes of power and makes it available to the excesses of coercion. Furthermore, I will argue that territorialization and quantification work generally at the service of existing regimes of coercion and are not *a priori* a condition for life.

Metabodies

I propose that traditional materialist accounts of the posthuman are to be reviewed through a redefinition of the body as relationality and intensity, as a field of forces of affect and desire. We have always been expanded bodies, not so much because of our longstanding technoprosthetics, but rather in so far as we constitute bodies of relationality (metabodies), between humans and across species and the inorganic: with architecture, the territory, the planet. The “material” body is also an effect of relational bodies at the level of bacteria, cells, molecules and the subatomic world.

As both Aristotle and Judith Butler suggest, matter can only be understood in terms of the forms that it undertakes: there is no matter without form. I will provocatively suggest that there can be life worth living without form, and that indeed we urgently need to produce frameworks for our relational becoming, for our affective production within our current biopolitics of human breeding through entertainment and fear. Thus, formed materiality is to be critically reviewed as a political fiction of specific regimes that have their conditions of possibility in certain technologies of representation and its related discursive formations.

This body is not the appearance of matter that ends in the skin, or in its cyborg prostheses, but rather the affective intensities projected here and now through gestures, sounds, or even

¹<http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/arcx.html>

through a written text. This relational body is neither here nor there; it is to be understood as movement, rather than place.

Relational bodies are metasignifying. They are irreducible to information and signification: Who can tell the precise meaning of any of my (imagined or actual) gestures or sounds? Each of you is embodying the affect this body projects in radically different manners. This is the reason why it is impossible to map the diffuse fields and lines of escape of the relational forces. There is never the totality of a body.

It is, however, essential to understand the way the relational forces come to form strata or gravitational fields in which assymetric relationalities sediment into different kinds of subjection, domination and violence.

Even if I build upon Nietzsche's conception of the body and reality as forces, I do not agree with the idea that all forces are either dominant or submissive, as always relating to power of some kind. It is my belief, rather, that this requires already some kind of interpretation of the forces. The forces are multiplicities that are never *per se* stronger or dominant. They can be so within certain contexts of relation and within the frameworks of interpretation and the genealogies that are constituted in the gravitational fields of the forces.

The question is how to put into motion amorphous forces and relations that are not subject here and now to the territorializations imposed by specific genealogical constructs of power and their technological articulations.

Power regimes form through the territorialization of the amorphous, of movement, into quantifiable and seemingly fixed surfaces that conform to the fiction of materiality and of ideality.

Cartesian thinking has provided the ideal framework of operation for a whole set of technologies that operate on the basis of the mind vs. matter divide. Both fictions, of matter and the abstract subject, underlie fictions of universality, signification and its contemporary articulations in terms of information and communication.

Digital Culture reproduces the fiction of the mind vs. body divide through specific technologies that give form to the affects of the relational body, fictions that become, however, problematically real as they are embodied in and through technology.

Capitalism of Affect and the Pancoreographic

Both materialism and idealism have produced a certain blindness toward the more essential problems of power in latecapitalism. Whereas discourses on biocapital proliferate, with important and necessary critiques of ethical problems surrounding DNA and related matters, no significant critical framework exists to understand the functioning of what I call the Capitalism of Affects, or Affectopower, namely an ensemble of biopolitical technologies of global implantation that give form to the affects and desires of the bodies, ensuring our assimilation in market-driven consumer regimes while effectively hiding their own violence, thus eradicating every resistance.

How does that standardized serialized production of affect and desire happen? We need frameworks beyond semiotics and performativity for understanding the phenomenology and the genealogy of affect formations. We can analyze it at the level of choreography, through

what I call the Panchoregraphic: a complex ensemble of technologies that distribute standardized discrete choreographies globally, hidden behind the façade of entertainment, information, communication and diverse rhetorics of liberation and modernization.

Choreographies that we perform daily with the mouse and the keyboard, the software, the mobile phone, the music player, the playstation, in the discos, disseminated through the video music industry, or through publicity, television, cinema and ubiquitous commercial music. What kinds of intensive affective relational bodies are these technologies producing?

Rather than the posthuman, I would call the offspring of such a prosthetic regime a hyperhuman body, one that, like in accounts of hiperreal media and hypermodernity, is inflating modern humanist constructs to the degree of parody that acts like a gigantic machine of seduction and affective production, working at the service of market-driven forces.

HCI –Human Computer Interaction- works through the continuous production of discrete parameters of movement, indeed of new kinds of discretisations, through new sensing technologies. But no matter how advanced the technology is, it will always be a reductionist account of an always irreducible movement. Movement cannot be fully discretized; it has already begun² and precedes conscious formations.

What we need is a new politics of the relational body understood as movement; a politics of movement that questions the conditions of possibility of power regimes and at the same time opens up the lines of emergence of relational bodies, indeed of thinking understood as movement. What is the thinking of the dancing body, of the body that makes music? As Stelarc suggests, post-philosophy arrives when alternate forms of thinking of the body emerge that are not to be framed in terms of the textual discursive production of a biological body, thinking of a Post-biological body that extrudes beyond the constructs of individual consciousness.

Post-anatomical Bodies

Traditional disciplinary divides relate to anatomical conceptions of the body: the five senses and the arts, genitals and the normative domain of sexuality, etc. Some attempts have been made to produce new anatomical architectures for the body³. I propose to go one step further and generate the conditions of possibility for a body without anatomy, an amorphous body of movement. This is close to, but not identical with, the Body without Organs proposed by Artaud, Deleuze and Guattari. Perhaps we already operate as amorphous bodies of relation and affect in a number in contexts of our embodied existence.

Relational intensive bodies have no form or anatomy as we understand these. They are irrepresentable and impossible to map because of their diffuse nature. Reviewing the body as amorphous field of intensities, producing an account of the body, indeed of reality as an post-anatomical, is to question for the conditions of possibility of power regimes that give the human-white-male-middle-class-heterosexual a privileged status as life that matters.

The post-anatomical body is an occasion to set in motion a proliferation of sexes: sexuality understood as events of production of sexes, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, that do not necessarily relate to the gender binary. Traditional accounts of sexuality are based on an

² as proposed by Erin Manning's concept of Incipience. I had got to know her concept in Nottinhan in 2005, but it will be published in 2009 in Relationscapes.

³ notably by Stelarc.

arbitrary zonification of the body in terms of functional reproduction, reducing biological sex to the anatomical production of the genitals. But desire flows through a multiplicities of intensities in motion. How is my look drawn by diffuse forces of desire that traverse bodies in their ways of looking, ways of moving, ways of standing, ways of talking, that is, of different kinds of movement?

Metasexuality is not only about a conception of sexuality and desire that traverses all possible anatomies, but more particularly one that focuses on the diffuse nature of movement as post-anatomical. Metasexuality traverses all human and non-human movements. Every relational body is both a mode and an event of sex.

Metasexuality is post-intimate: intimacy is a biopolitical-technological control of bodies that takes form through choreography and anatomical production: in the realm of post-anatomy, the conditions of possibility for intimacy have dissolved; sex can only be a common relational event. Metasexuality is post-queer since it operates in a plurality of movements outside-inside and through binary and textual constructs in the domain of metaformativity.

The question of which lives matter, of what counts as a life, can also be revisited in terms of the relationality of movement. Different kinds of discrete movements, such as verbal movement, account for distinctions between species, races, classes, disabilities or abilities, genders or sexualities in order to establish hierarchical asymmetric relationalities.

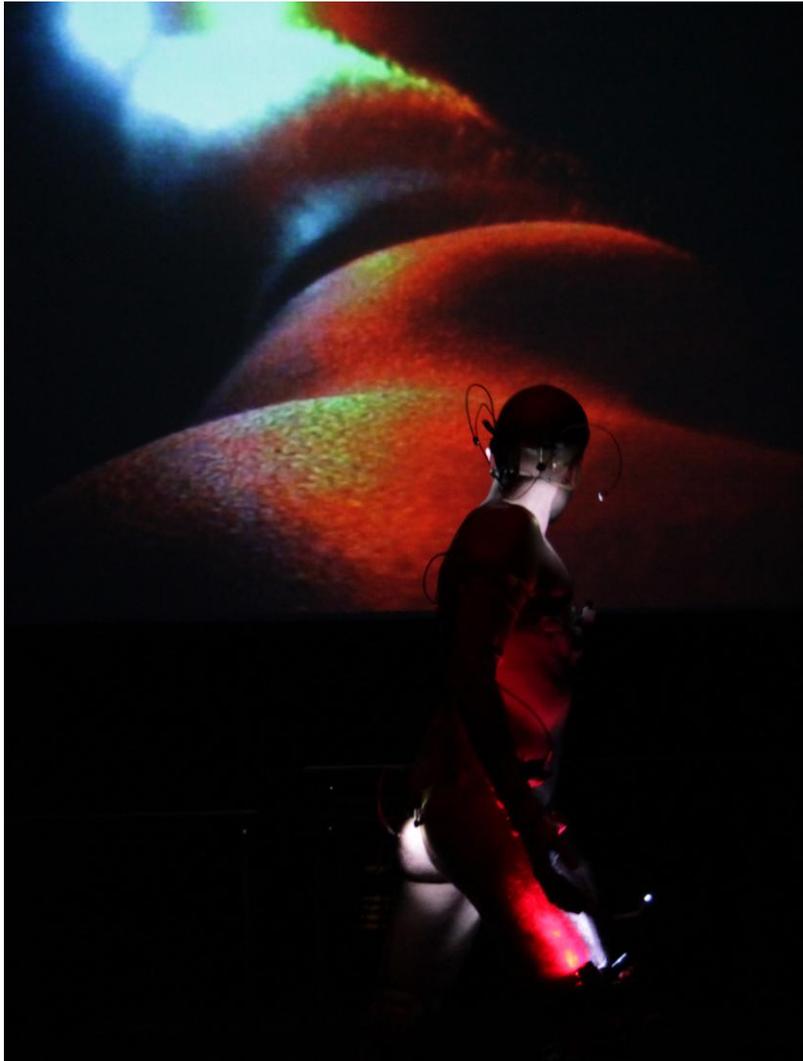
How to promote the proliferation of non-discrete kinds of movements that flow over existing divisions and territorializations? Indeed, we should understand the metabody of movement as a Common Body in the sense of Social Commons: can we define a “right” to a nonquantifiable relationality that questions the contemporary production of standard relational bodies and their specific articulations in movement-space-time discretizations? This goes well beyond articulating new legal figures within the existing anatomies of the social organism, and requires rethinking this anatomy altogether in the direction of a post-anatomical common body. This implies a radical rethinking of technology.

We must rethink interfaces, not as the mediation between a faciality of an abstract subject and a machine within information transmission and communication, but of an intercorporeality within the relational body: from interfaces to intrabodies. We must rethink interfaces not as discrete simulations of real movement within practices of signification, but as metasignifying relational fields for affect formation.

Through the Institute Reverso, I have developed a number of experiments in post-anatomical bodies, generally in the form of media performance and installation. Recent projects include the transposition of the surveillance camera to the surface of the body, questioning accounts of form and anatomy, gender and sex, intimacy and legibility, where the amorphous body and its micromovements become a living architecture, spatialized together with the sound that moves interactively producing a sound space of the body. The camera acts as an intrabody in an intra-active system⁴, a metaformance that displaces proprioceptive feedback and redefines the sensory anatomy in the unfolding of the *Microdances*.

[Fig 1– Antibodies/Microsexes – Metaformance by Jaime del Val - Photo Claude Fournier]:

⁴ this text was written before I engaged with Karen Barad’s concept of intra-action.



The transposition of the camera to the surface of the skin is a simple gesture with powerful consequences: it dissolves the distance, framing and focus that accounts intelligibility in representation (the intelligibility that we have embodied as synonymous to objectivity since the proliferation of the *camera obscura* and of perspectival vision in the 15th century); it makes the object of surveillance unrecognizable and uncontrollable; it dissolves anatomical architectures into formless movement, thus working on the constitutive boundaries of sex, gender and intimacy; it projects the moving body in new scales and dimensions of time-space and capability; it displaces proprioceptive feedback into a transposed antianatomy, redesigning the sensory anatomy and producing a closed circuit for self-production that

disseminates in multiplicities of times-becomings. The lack of distance and perspective generates a space for a body that is like an alien world and yet so near: it is not outside signification, but rather disrupts the frames of reference, the distances of signification, and explodes the signifying body in a supernova of disseminations, where everything that is sex and gender is nowhere, a body of pure excess: excess of dissemination, excess of intensity, and excess of overflow. The outside of discourse is found in the excessive proximity, almost like an inside. It is an exercise for non-identitarian becoming, most therapeutical in our times of obsession with identity as a marketing product.

The life electronic processing of the voice works in the direction of transforming verbal movement, faciality and vocality. The new scale of micromovement redefines categories of ability and disability. In this new space of the body, there is no representation and performance, but rather Amorphogenesis and Metaformance, also in the relation with the audience, occupying the same space of the performers, who come in contact with them at times so that the skin of the audience becomes part of the living environment: a coming in contact, though the surveillance camera, that becomes a new kind of sex.⁵

The same experiment has been done in public spaces, in different cities of Europe and Latin America, through the interventions of the Pangender Cyborg, which projects its own

⁵<http://www.reverso.org/Antibodies-microdances.htm>

amorphous antianatomies onto public buildings, generating conflicting analogies with the anatomy of the social organism. At the moment, we prepare the Microdances/Microsexes to be performed through the Internet, in private houses, in specially-built architectures and across other media, as a metamedia and metadisciplinary project.⁶

[Fig 2– Pangender Cyborg – Metaformance by Jaime del Val in Murcia 2008 – Photo by Alterarte]:



The project of post-anatomical architectures is also one in which we have been developing different prototypes through interactive digital 3D models that avoid a Cartesian simulation of physical space, and it reminds one of amorphous moving body fragments, like the microdances of a digital body. We must also rethink space, not as a physical entity, but as a relational intensity: rather than going along with the assumption that we inhabit and traverse space as physical, we should promote the thinking of space in terms of how we produce it and are produced by it: which is the affective quality of space, how far space is but a projection of the intensities of movement, like time is the unfolding of movement and therefore unquantifiable.⁷

[Fig 3 and 4 – Generative architectures and Microsexes photographs by Jaime del Val around 2003]:

⁶<http://www.reverso.org/Antibodies-dissolution.htm>

⁷<http://www.reverso.org/arquitectura.htm>



Potential low-tech projects for post-anatomical bodies will look into redefining issues of non-verbal communication, architecture, and our daily choreographies, our projected space-times and relations of the body.

Metahuman: Toward a Politics of Movement

We need a radically pluralistic politics that enables us to work both through existing worlds of relations, undoing some of its forms of coercion, while at the same time experimenting with new movements beyond Cartesian dualisms.

We must operate both inside/outside and through existing normative territories, working with its own mechanisms, *amorphous choreographies within the body politic*; and outside in the realm of new formations, liberating among the viruses of simulation an antibody of form, an impossible affect, a non-identifiable desire.

Relational ethics and ecology is one in which the moving (dancing) bodies constitute one single yet diffuse relational body of becoming and becoming-with: in such a dance, violence and coercion are not subject to enter into play, or may at least be partly opened up to less coercive relationalities.

We need to work toward a technoaesthetics of the non-quantifiable, a proliferation of qualitatively different forms of movement according to which no accounts of superiority, superation or superhumanity are possible, as in eugenics, but indeed of qualitative relational differentiation and specificity. This involves a thinking of the body beyond the text, a post-philosophical enquiry.

If the posthuman is both a present condition, a critical figuration of materialist critique and a revision of our past, how do we produce a different set of possibilities for our becoming, how do we reconfigure our posthuman condition in the age of the capitalism of affects? How do we respond to it?

The metahuman here proposed as post-posthuman transcends both the idealism of transhumanism and the materialism of a posthumanist critique through focusing on the new technologies of power that operate in the diffuse field of affect formation, producing an account of the body as affect and intensity in order to both destabilize regimes of affective production of bodies and to produce new conditions for the possibility of relationalities that do not conform to a new regime, but instead to a permanent process of emergence, a non-coercive relationality as a resistive oppositional practice inside/outside and through existing fields of coercion.

Metahuman is an emergent ontology, an ontogenesis for an emergent politics in which it makes no sense to foresee the future: what we can think is already present/potential; the future is unthinkable and defies any principle of evolution.

What does this emergent ontology for a situated and heterogeneous subject bring, different from other accounts of the posthuman? Perhaps a greater sense of uncertainty and a wider range of possibilities of becoming that are not confined to representation, discourse and identity: an amorphous becoming, a metamorphogenesis, and a politics of amorphous movement and affect production that operates loosely on the boundaries of signification. A multidimensional politics far beyond the narrow spatial framing of right-left politics and institutions of an obsolete anatomy of the body politic.

Metahumanity is an open paradigm for relationality and becoming as a movement without form: where relations are never fully stratified, always potential and diffuse, traversing species and the inorganic. Metahumanity and metamodernity are the realms of the post-

anatomical body as a metamorphogenetic process, a relational multidimensional field of forces that is non-quantifiable, a process that acts upon its own conditions of possibility, one that moves along its own diffuse frontiers, unfolding in new dimensions: not a new regime of form, but rather a process of endless formation that never sediments in form, but opens its lines once and again to the impossible.

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