

ONTOHACKING: ONTO-ECOLOGICAL POLITICS IN THE ALGORICENE

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Abstract

The METABODY project proposes an ontological critique of perceptual regimes, such as perspective and rationalised vision, which eventually underlie contemporary control society and imperial colonization projects, thus being an ontological substrate of contemporary environmental problems. Metabody proposes relational and perceptual modes exceeding the ontological splits (subject-object divide) which account for colonisation processes as well as for models of control based on quantification, prediction and modulation in the Big Data Era or Algoricene. These proposals become enacted in a novel architectural paradigm of dynamic selfconstruction techniques across the digital and physical for an indeterminate and emergent space, called METATOPIA.

Keywords

perceptual ecologies, embodiment, intra-action, dynamic architecture, ontology, indeterminacy, becoming

Ontoviolence - Perceptual Genealogy and History of Empires in the Algoricene

The ecological crisis has, deeply embedded in its roots, a particular ontology and epistemology, foundational to Empires, which in the case of the western tradition relates to a particular split between a subject and an object and with a particular way of quantifying sensibility and movement. Empires, and their economies of appropriation, spatialisation and acceleration leading to the environmental crisis, have as their foundation a particular organisation of the senses, movements and bodies tending to totalizing formations.

The organisations of the senses in the western Imperial tradition since at least the birth of Euclidean geometry in Greece and more decisively since the Renaissance has brought forth very sophisticated hierarchies and choreographies of perception. Particularly with the advent of rationalised perspectival vision[1] a perceptual regime is born that generates a radical split between vision and the other senses, a radical fixation of vision that defines an ontological split between an object and a subject and an account of space as fully actualised and measurable.



Fig 1: perspectival machine, engraving by Albrecht Dürer ca. 1525. OASC (Public domain)

A quantification of sensibility is since then at play which has sustained varied forms of appropriation of bodies, territories and ecosystems worldwide. This model of quantification and

representation becomes radically dynamic with the advent of Cybernetics as modular feedback processes allow to constantly readapt the very grid of quantification, in order to more optimally predict, preempt and modulate the world in a changing process of constant actualization. This becomes even more dynamic and emergent, focusing on potentiality rather than actuality[2], in the current Big Data era where algorithmic systems (already present in old cultural formations such as grid technologies), become all-encompassing, hyperconnected, emergent systems shaping more and more of the world and pointing to a new life form.

For this reason, rather than Anthropocene, or Capitalocene, Algoricene could be an adequate way of conceptualising the ontology of capture and modulation systems at operation in the planet over millennia, as collective mode of organisation that tends to reduce complexity of movements to calculable patterns, through algorithmic formations such as grids that constitute a planetary distributed intelligence, a hypercyborg.

From Bacterial Perceptions to Algorithmic and Sensor-based Perceptions.

This hypercyborg, whose perceptual logic is one of radical rationalisation of the senses, capture, alignment and preemption of potentiality, founded on algorithmic organisations and the seemingly disembodied fluid of informational flows, presents a radical contrast with the kinds of perceptions from which the Earth's ecosystems eventually emerged -and are still sustained today- throughout billions of years: the slow and tactile perceptions of bacteria. The radical acceleration imposed by algorithmic flows based on radical subject-object splits and the supremacy of rationalised sensibility, is thus erasing the ecosystems that slow tactile perceptions of bacteria have generated over the eons. The logic of acceleration and preemption is one of capture and alignment, the intra-active logic of slow bacterial perception is one of continuous disalignment, towards increasing richness in co-creating oneself and the environment.

Bacterial perception proposes an intra-active model [3] in which ecosystems-environments co-emerge in the intra-ction processes in which bacteria themselves exchange genetic information, transforming and mutating at the same time as the environment. This intra-active model is at odds with the cybernetic model of radical perceptual acceleration in which environments, rather than co-emerging with the actors of perception, tend to the preemption, capture, anticipation and modulation of movements and behaviours for the sake of the transcendent logic of the planetary cyborg, a logic of control and simulation that has capital as its provisional *raison d'être*. The ontological shift from movement to pattern is at the core of this perceptual ecology in which sensors play a crucial role, capturing movement in calculable forms.

Ontoecology

I propose to rethink ecology in terms of the degrees of indeterminacy and openness vs. degrees of alignment and capture of the movements and perceptions constituting an ecosystem.

Current media ecologies tend to preemption, capture, capitalisation and modulation of movements, aligning emergent movements into calculable trajectories.

Informational ecosystems have at the core of their operation the reduction of the complexity of movement into discrete calculable patterns, grounded on a culture that has invented the powerful and highly problematic fiction of disembodied abstractions. A culture in which the supremacy of pattern/form over movement plays entirely at the service of

hypercontrol paradigms of total prediction, of control dystopias such as enacted by global technology corporations currently aligned with transhumanistic, messianic and capitalistic philosophies of disembodied superintelligencies (singularity theory) and individual immortality.

How to regain the lost body of information [4] in such a scenario?



Fig. 2: METATOPIA - metaformance in Madrid 2015 - Metabody project. © Jaime del Val. Photo: Reverso

Ontohacking and Ontoethics

Ontoethics proposes a turn to media ethics and bioethics by shifting to the study of media and technologies at a meta-level of their ontological force, their structuring of perceptions and movement relations rather than their content.[5] *Ontohacking* is the practice of creatively and critically redefining and opening up the ontological aspects of technologies, in their shaping of movements and perceptions: operating not in content but in the perceptual frames that sustain it.

Metabody is a project that has received the support of the EU commission, with a consortium of 38 institutions of 16 countries coordinated by the non-profit organisation Reverso and Jaime del Val. Metabody proposes experimenting with novel organisations of the senses in which no ontological dualistic splits are presupposed, rather entanglements and alien agencies are mobilised across all strata of the ecosystems and environments, of which the human is not a central element, favouring ecologies of non control.

Metabody develops intra-active architectures called *Metatopia* that defy the idea of an extensive, measurable space, and enact an intensive emergent space relative to movement, proposing an experiential process called *metaformance* rather than performance, as it focus on the structure of perception rather than its content.

Metabody has developed a novel selfconstruction technique of dynamic spaces called Flexinamics, based on the consistency of flexible materials and the constant physical mutation of the space. Flexinamics techniques are enacted in highly portable and foldable modules that may be unfolded and set to motion, and endlessly connected in different configurations between one another, indoors and outdoors, constituting the intra-active environments called *Metatopia*: an indeterminate space of movement [7].

Disalignments are the movement techniques developed in the Metabody project that focus on internal microperceptions and micromovements, on the body as an expanded and formless swarm, exploring subtle microdeviations from the known trajectories and regaining cognitive plasticity in the kinetic relation to the environment.

Amorphogenesis is a concept and subproject for amorphous non representational VR environments, digital architectures that endlessly deform through movement, inviting to discover new movements, never actualising as an extensive space.

Microsexes is a concept and subproject for an antiperspectival machine, with small surveillance cameras distributed on the skin, that have become the eyes of the body, which sees itself with no distance, framing or fixity, enacting a post-anatomical postqueer body of infinite potential sexes.



Fig. 32: METATOPIA - metaformance in Toulouse 2016, Metabody project. © Jaime del Val. Photo: Reverso.

By undoing the supremacy of rationalised vision and enacting other modalities and distributions of sensory organisations Metabody aims at exploring perceptual ecologies in which the very ontological substrate of empires, the dualistic splits of economies of appropriation and quantification are questioned and potentially reversed.

This becomes all the more crucial in the Big Data Era in which behaviours and movements are increasingly subjected to a logic of prediction, anticipation and modulation. By placing a positive emphasis on the indeterminacy and openedness of an environment Metabody seeks to counteract the reductive tendency of predictive logic, across all strata of the analogue and digital. Metabody proposes to enact distributed ecologies of the senses that avoid both the centralised control of a subject and the dominance of algorithmic simulations, and mobilise a metabody favouring openings into indeterminacy rather than capture, a pragmatics for an ontoecological politics to come.

References and Notes

1. The relevance of the invention of perspective as the rationalisation of sensibility is elaborated in William Iivins, *On the Rationalisation of Sight*. (Da Capo Press: New York 1975.)
2. The shift of power to potentiality is elaborated in Brian Massumi, *Ontopower*. (Duke University Press: Durham. 2015)
3. The notion of intra-action is elaborated in Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. (Duke University Press: Durham. 2007.)
4. The history of the conceptualisation of information as disembodied flow is elaborated in N. Katherine Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, literature and Informatics*. (University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 1999.)
5. The relevance of the medium over its content is famously elaborated in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media*. (Routledge: New York. 2001.)
6. Metabody Project, <<http://www.metabody.eu>> accessed 20/10/2016
7. Metatopia environments, <<http://www.metatopia.eu>> accessed 20/10/2016