Abstract: Politically engaged art practices have been important inputs for feminist theory throughout history. In the contemporary art landscape, the work of Spanish multimedia artist Jaime del Val proves to be as innovative as it is provocative in how it reflects complex phenomena – from the undoing of traditional understandings of bodies and identities, to the capitalism of affects and the influence of surveillance technologies. Del Val's expressive strategies such as combining urban interventions with microcameras, and dance movements electronically coded and turned into visual images, create engaged artistic projects such as his ‘Antibodies of Surveillance’ and ‘European TelePlateaus’, respectively. The interview format allows for the exchange of first-hand information from a creative and multidisciplinary posthuman standpoint that questions dichotomous thinking in terms of sex/gender, human/non-human, activism/academy, ability/disability, among others. The result is a mapping of the work of this transnational artist that might inspire fruitful debates on ways to develop alternatives for social, cultural and political change.

Keywords: Posthuman, Sex, Gender, Metabody, Surveillance, Deleuze

Assuming Gender is a Cardiff University project, comprising a journal, seminar, and lecture series. This interdisciplinary project is dedicated to the timely analysis of constructions of gendered texts, practices, and subjectivities and seeks to engage with contemporary conceptions of gender, while participating in the dialogues and tensions that maintain the urgency of such conversations.

Assuming Gender – http://www.assuminggender.com
Cardiff University – http://www.cardiff.ac.uk

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A Pangendered Cyborg of Our Times: An Interview with Jaime del Val
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Second-wave feminism embraced it; postmodern feminism deconstructed it. Some have used and abused it.¹ Gender is an ambiguous and politically loaded concept that is difficult to translate across cultures, and yet one that should not be evaded. What is clear in both contemporary culture and feminist theory is that gender must be reappropriated – problematized, rethought and refreshed – in order to recover its political potential. If taken as an embodied experience, one way to do this is to target the terms in which we see, feel and think of the human body in posthuman times.² This was my main motivation behind inviting Spanish multimedia and transdisciplinary artist Jaime del Val (1974-) for an interview.

Del Val’s work extends into the fields of digital and visual art, architecture, music, dance, writing, philosophy and political activism. Based in Madrid and Almería, he has showcased exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States. Over the past several years, he has increasingly placed his artistic emphasis on developing large-scale interventions in land and urban planning, combining his interest in sustainable technologies of the body with that of the land. He is actively involved in LGBTQI groups in Spain and Italy, and acts as teacher and director at REVERSO, an organization that promotes diverse initiatives at the crossroads of arts and the body, technology, critical theory, queer politics and political action. To coincide with his role at REVERSO, del Val also works as the editor of the first Spanish language queer theory journal of the same name. In conversation with the work of Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, one of the main concerns of del Val’s work is how to ‘undo the anatomies of the biological and social body’. One of his main strategies for this is realised by the ‘microdances’ produced through a set of wireless micro-surveillance cameras attached to his naked body.

² Following N. Katherine Hayles, the posthuman refers to a ‘historically specific construction’ that questions and aims to overcome the construction of ‘the human’ as the liberal subject of the Enlightenment, its unitarian and stable condition as well as its sense of supremacy over the so-called non-human. See N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1999), p. 2.
In our online interview, our cyborgized bodies followed, as he says, ‘the panchoreographies of the mouse and the keyboard’, synchronizing disparate locations in time and space as well as uneven internet connections. It was difficult to focus on a single topic with someone who constantly traverses boundaries of disciplines, political agendas and artistic languages, but what follows is a snapshot of the action and thought of this young artist and activist.

**CG:** In the performance, Antibodies of Surveillance, you take on what you call ‘a pangender technopolitics’ that, with the help of cameras strategically located on the body, contests market-led forces of biopower and technodeterminism. How does the performance break down traditional narratives of sex/gender distinction?

**JdV:** In the project, Antibodies of Surveillance, I use cameras on the body to project what I call ‘microdances’. These cameras, relocated onto the skin, like eyes disseminated all over the body, transpose proprioception and perception to a new scale where there is no longer a fixed framing of distance and exteriority of vision, but rather a condition of immanence and a radical choreography of the senses. Here, the body becomes an amorphous and diffuse field of affect production, of relational forces, of movement-without-form: it is no longer intelligible, it cannot be mapped from an outside, and the subject-object divide has dissolved. This is what I call the post-anatomical body.

![Image of 'Murcia' from Antibodies of Surveillance (2008)](image)

**Figure 1.** ‘Murcia’ from Antibodies of Surveillance (2008)
Freud said that ‘anatomy is destiny’. What I suggest [in this project] is that we can undo the anatomical, political and social destiny of the body. What I am trying to formulate is a body in which there is no longer the possibility of identifying a distinction between morphological sex – as biological sex – and gender. In this post-anatomical body, I propose that there is no anatomy, and that there is no possibility to recognize the forms of an intelligible body […]. I am very critical of the ways in which biological sex reduces sex to genital morphology, so I try to go beyond this.

There are artists who have been very important for me, like Stelarc, when he talks about producing ‘alternate anatomic architectures’. [But], what I am doing, or attempting to do, is quite different. [I imagine] a body without anatomy that we can think of in terms of affects, and fields of relational forces. I call it a metabody, a body of bodies, and the relational body that does not end in my skin but […] projects itself right now, here, as I speak to you through my sound and gestures […]. These are all part of the intensities that I am as a body, which I project and you receive, and which you can feed back on. So, what this constitutes, then, is a kind of metabody, an in-between. It is neither here nor there; it is a pure exchange in the forces that constitute it. If we don’t have a fixed morphology then what do we have? I think my approach is very Deleuzian.

[Like Deleuze], I think of desire as something that flows potentially in any direction: it is movement, both improvised and choreographed. [Desire] is something that flows across categories: binaries of sex and gender; species categories; and even the human, nonhuman, and the inorganic. This is a very anti-psychoanalytical approach. What I mean is that, if I am attracted by a glass or a bottle, it is not because it looks like a phallus, but maybe it is the other way around: I like a phallus because it looks like a bottle. Of course, as Deleuze and Guattari have pointed out, we must undo these Oedipal kinds of sexual relations, and understand desire as excess rather than as lack.

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4 This expression belongs to Stelarc, an Australian performance artist inspired mainly by cyborg subjectivities and the relationships between human and machines in general. He works with the possibilities of ‘bodies and bits of bodies spatially separated but electronically connected, generating similar patterns of recurring activity at different scales’, as stated in his 2009 lecture entitled ‘The Cadaver, the Comatose and the Cimera: Alternate Anatomical Architectures’, Newcastle Digital Media Culture Lab (Seminar Series), Newcastle University (2009).

Considering this, sex becomes a relational movement, neither reducible to any kind of binary, nor any kind of species, nor to an organic kind of life. Every relational force is a modality of sex, and this sex is also sexuality. So this body, the metasexual body, with its cameras and its microdances, is a body of multiple, infinite, and potential sexes which never actualize, and never become concrete; they are never completely defined. *Antibodies of surveillance*, then, is about the potentiality of desire: desire as potential points to movement as something that is always virtual, non-actualised, and opening out onto potentially undefined directions.

**CG:** How do you conceptualize the metasexual body?

**JdV:** While the metabody is the relational body, the metasexual body is the body whose sex is never actualised, but is always potential and undefined. The metasexual body is set to motion wherever our experience of desire moves according to immanent relations, rather than relations of exteriority. It is an effect of the post-anatomical body, [that is], of a body that is permanently questioning its own perceptual anatomy in such a way that it no longer acquires a position of exteriority with regard to the world. Rather, it is one in which vision is no longer primarily a technology of identification; it is, in fact, about setting to motion invisible bodies – amorphous bodies – that are never fully legible, or culturally intelligible. Indeed, the metasexual body is about unvisualising that which Cartesian, humanist, and digital culture has attempted to control through visualisation. Metasex and the post-anatomical body are thus equivalent, though not identical, to the ‘Body without Organs’ proposed by Artaud, Deleuze and Guattari. Metasex is about the movements of a relational body and the affect of a body that cannot be fixed, aligned, or recognised fully within existing structures of desire and affect production. On the contrary, these proliferate as infinite potentials of desire precisely at the point where the body loses its form and becomes amorphous relational movement. In order to induce such an experience, we need to intervene in technologies of the body such as the camera, and to reappropriate them in different ways. The *Antibodies of Surveillance*  

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6 This term was coined by Deleuze and Guattari to conceptualize the body beyond ‘the organism and its organization’. Instead of a structured, functional body, they proposed a dis-organised one ‘populated by multiplicities’ and organs with unexpected and multiple uses or functions. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. Brian Massumi (London, Continuum: 2004 [1980, 1987]), p. 34.
project, where we place surveillance cameras on the skin, thus transposing proprioception while the eyes are disseminated all over the body without the fixed framing and distance or exteriority of vision, is one example.

**CG**: I would like to know a bit more about the microdances. Can you please expand on this?

**JdV**: I am interested in challenging the concept of corporeality. One of the things that I am questioning is the notion of ability as a category that is related to certain calibrations: in architecture; in productivity; in economy. You have to be able to move according to certain scales and speeds and times, within certain economic structures and architectures in the city and so on; if you are not able to do this, then you are ‘disabled’. In the microdances, these scales change radically; you can make a microdance with a bit of your eye, with a part of your finger, with… whatever. In doing this, the body is re-dimensioned in a way which I think can be very enriching to many different kinds of people. I want to work with people with so-called disabilities, with sex workers, with people who have certain specific kinds of approaches to their bodies, [in order to] rethink how this whole story of domination and power works. So what we have in the microdancing body is not a subject anymore, not even a citizen, but a potential body of relational movement which is radically redefining the possibilities of how we conceive of the limits of what we call a subject or a citizen and also of a group: of a connectivity of individuals. There is no individual in the body that I have proposed in the microdances, it is another kind of presence.

![Image of 'Microdanzas' from Antibodies of Surveillance (2008)](image)

**Figure 2.** ‘Microdanzas’ from *Antibodies of Surveillance* (2008)

**CG**: How do you see your artistic work interacting with or positioned in relation to the academic world?
**JdV:** I have a very strange position in relation to academia because I have never been in the academy, except when I was doing music studies in London. I am very self-taught in most of the things I do. I [think this makes me] quite flexible since I sometimes present my work in a radical, independent, or even illegal manner – in urban intervention, for example. I like that part of the work. But then, I also present my work in media art festivals, or as performances. I am never in one single kind of domain; also, I have recently started working on Internet interventions. I am not part of the academy, but [...] REVERSO works a bit as my own institution; I don’t know what the limits of REVERSO are, and I don’t want to know.

The relationship between my art practices and theory, between this and politics, or between the art practices themselves, is interesting. I don’t ground my artistic work in the theory; it is more like a feedback between things that are to a certain degree independent, but become intertwined in the process. So, I can’t say that my ideas on the post-anatomical body are the justification for the work I do, but it is also the case that in the process there has been intensive feedback between these. When I started working with cameras on the body, I didn’t have a clue about the post-anatomical body or the political resonances [...]. But, soon they became intertwined in the work. They are distinct fields of work, but they are not completely separate.

**CG:** Your project involves, directly or indirectly, many ‘post’ prefixes that evidence a double movement of disruption and continuity with exhausted models such as modernity, patriarchy, logocentrism, colonialism, capitalism and humanism just to mention a few. How are they articulated in your daily academic-artistic work?

**JdV:** My current projects are to be understood as discreet exercises seeking the deterritorialisation of normative regimes, as well as movements for an emergent relational body. They don’t offer a utopian project, but rather one of resistance and emergence in the present. They can be juxtaposed with other kinds of political strategies that we, as situated subjects in situated worlds, also need, since the potential dissolutions of the subject-object divide that I propose are not to be understood in absolute or utopian terms, but as exercises and technologies that may transform our experience while we reappropriate and subvert technologies of control. I do think that queer, postfeminism, feminism and
LGTBQI politics that work on ideological or textual frameworks must continue to exist, but I also think that they need to be reviewed in a process of constant self-criticism.

It is sometimes ironic when I say that my work is post-queer, post-post-porn, post-post-human or post-post-colonial. When I do that it is because, for instance, queer movements and queer theory produce territorializing gestures, where some of them tend to produce dogmatic definitions on, for example, equality and marriage. I am very much against dogmatic positions, I defend a much more radical pluralism [...] and I think that to be against marriage may turn out to be as poor a political strategy as to only think about marriage. We should be able to fight within institutional structures for equality, and at the same time experiment with new forms of affect, relationality, kinship and sexuality.

I think that some queer theorists and activists (not all) are assuming a somewhat dogmatic territorializing position, in contradiction to whatever queer pretended to be in the beginning [...]. I am afraid that often both the political and theoretical movements that start as oppositional movements end up producing the same territorializing effects they were fighting against, and I think that happened with queer long ago [...]. Many rich and interesting theoretical proposals are instrumentalised and translated into ideologies in black and white [...].

Insofar as applying this to my work, I think we need to go beyond the body as a text, which is why I am interested in considering the body as affect; I think it is a key issue. It is very important to include this in a theoretical and political agenda nowadays, precisely because of how the Capitalism of Affects is operating.

The body, if understood as affect, is an attempt to question the mind-body split: in this way, we can try to understand both the so-called matter of the body, and the consciousness, or mind, as effects of the relations of forces (affects) that move at many levels. But, above all, it is an attempt to review the criticism of power regimes in the contemporary Capitalism of Affects in order to develop new phenomenological and genealogical understandings of power, and of the possibilities both for resisting it and for reinventing the self. I propose this through a certain choreographic analysis of the affects that don’t necessarily imply signification and by far exceed the mechanism of textual

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7 The interviewee defines the Capitalism of Affects as ‘a modality of capitalism that increasingly aims at the production of affects and desire. It is oriented to giving form to the affects and desires of the body. Gender and sex, as fixed categories, are technologies of control of bodies and they nurture capitalist territorialisations and assimilations of reality into global economic systems in which our movements are increasingly subject to control’ (JdV).
performativity. Indeed, I would like to approach a revision of the analysis of language in both its verbal and textual dimensions, understood as (nonverbal) movement and choreography. This, of course, represents turning upside down almost all the philosophical research on language in the last one hundred years. As Brian Massumi suggests, there is something in affect that is distinct from signification and interpretation, and we need to understand this further to see how we are reinstating power regimes, and assimilating them, as well as how we might resist them and produce other kinds of frameworks for liveable lives. A far-reaching revision of academic critique based on language must be undertaken for that purpose, and this is what I am beginning to get at with my work.

CG: Have you found yourself especially rejected or criticized by certain forces or individuals within these movements that you are questioning?

JdV: Of course I have been rejected by many institutions – it is natural and happens to everybody. In particular, I have often felt resistance, or at least felt [I am] not at home in the kinds of political movements I was supposed to be part of, and I think this was actually because of the way in which, often, there are these kinds of territorialising gestures in the movements themselves. It happens in the queer movement, but also in the environmental movement. I think there are many such problems nowadays in social movements in general, because of how the Capitalism of Affects works. We need to be very aware of this.

CG: Let’s speak now about your latest project, European TelePlateaus: Transnational Sites of Encounter and Co-Production. It is an ambitious transnational multimedia artistic proposal which will enable people from Dresden, Madrid, Norrköping, and Prague to playfully create, record and exchange choreographies of movements, sounds and images with special software that translates all of this into coded patterns. The proposal intertwines issues of urban space, freedom and embodiment, among other things.

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9 http://www.european-tele-plateaus.eu/wp/
JdV: Much like my project with the microdances, what we are trying to approach in the *European Teleplateaus* project, in a very different way, is to distinguish [...] between presence and identity. Usually, telematic presence has to do with identity, so, for example, when we videoconference, we see each other, and we identify that you are a woman: that you are this gender, and this category. As such, telematics is mostly about framing identity; that’s how the information society works. But in this project we are asking: how can we redeploy the same surveillance technologies that we use everyday to communicate for other kinds of purposes where notions of presence are not reduced to identity?

![Image](image)

**Figure 3.** 'Cuerpos Frontera / Metacuerpo' from *European Teleplateaus* (2009)

So, we are working with very abstract kinds of visual processes. Across Europe, we are sending each other the contours of bodies that are in the process of interacting in a physical space, as well as the movement parameters taken from those body contours. In our group in Madrid, we want to ask ourselves how that very abstract stream of data of contours can become a strong presence, while also refusing whatever kinds of identities we may want to project onto it. We came to the provisional conclusion that if we frame abstract presence within some identifiable architecture, like a chair or a table in the space, it becomes even stronger. Within this identifiable framework, we have an amorphous presence of something that may not be human, organic, or gendered. Yet, we are exploring frontier perceptions and possibilities of interpretation. This is one challenge we are facing, and now we are trying to connect it to the issue of sexuality – with the notion of metasexuality – and the potential multiple sexes that are not reducible to any kind of gender binary. We are left asking: how can we put multiple sexes into motion with these audiovisual processes of abstraction?

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10 In telematics, of course, we also use words and text to communicate (JdV).
Figure 4. ‘Taller’ from European Teleplateaus (2009)

At http://www.reverso.org/ you can find more information and updated links on Jaime del Val’s work.
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