

DISTINCTION, PARTICIPATION, AND EMPTY EMBODIMENT

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When even the seer is revealed as a ubiquity of non-selves, a collection of flesh and blood molecules, an assemblage characterized, like anything else in and of the world, by dependent co-arising, then the very sense of life is transformed from a mode of individuality into a collectivity. Our lives are characterized by a strange entanglement with death. No superiority has precedence over the elemental. The elemental is a perturbation, incompatible with any ontological hierarchy. Dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) means, first and foremost, that change, in itself, is incomprehensible. Everything is dependent upon something else. The concepts through which we interpret the world are never commensurate with relations themselves. There is no such thing as a change of state or composition in and of itself; there is no motion prior to the mover's commencement of movement: "Whatever motion in terms of which a mover is spoken of, he does not move by that motion. Because he does not exist prior to motion, who or what is it that moves?" asks Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhyamaka Buddhism.¹ Outside of dependent arising, there can be no power or, indeed, any existence in itself. Aside from relations there is nothing.² Empirically speaking, this means that while relations do exist

1 Nagarjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nagarjuna*, trans. David J. Kalupahana (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 130.

2 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

within the world, and have a certain relative reality, they nonetheless lack any substantial basis: reality, for Nagarjuna, is merely conventional, never substantial.³ It is not enough to say that everything is composed of multiple flows or multiplicities. Rather, the movements themselves are inseparable from that which moves. But the mover itself is also nothing but a surface effect of other entities. And so on, *ad infinitum*. An infinity of movement meets with an abyssal entanglement of entanglements, without end. And yet we see multitudes, we as creatures endowed with vision have eyes able to enjoy saturated visual fields. Nothing lies outside of the perturbations, there is no unchanging, eternal ego-self that would see all of this. If we accept the mutual interdependence of all there is, “we”—whatever it is that perceives, whatever evolutionary tendencies or genetic structures that compose that which calls itself a “self”—come to understand that the world, for all its liveliness and tonality, is “a very colourful nothing.”⁴ If visualization pertains to nothing more than this colourful nothingness, negation too, even the most destructive of aggressions, can be no more than small dots of overflowing emotion, colliding with the vengeful organism’s neighborhood.

Visualization is the practice of coming into contact with an Outside whose content nevertheless determines, even at times

3 Whether this makes Nagarjuna a “nihilist” in any Western sense of the word is an irrelevant issue, as is whether “nihilism” as a broadly defined semantic construct applies to Nagarjuna’s ontology. Ontology always transcends the scope of mere philological semantics. What matters is that we recognize the full ontological implications of negating the substantial reality of all relations. The concept of dependent origination entails the rejection of any preconventional, preconceptual basis for existence. As Jay Garfield writes, “dependent origination simply is the explicability and coherence of the universe. Its emptiness is the fact that there is no more to it than that.” According to the tenets of relational ontology, there is nothing more to relations than their own, promiscuous, inscrutable givenness. What is relevant from our perspective is the “nothing more” of co-arising, mutually neutralizing phenomena. Jay Garfield, “Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why Did Nagarjuna Start with Causation?,” *Philosophy East and West*, 44.2 (1994), 227.

4 Jimmy Pianka, “Colourful Nothing: Emptiness in the Madyamaka,” *Aporia* 19.2 (2009): 33-44.

undermines, our own sense of having a self. Our constitution is rendered amenable to change, to penetration. What is passivity, if not a usage made of our corporeality that reduces this body we have to a state of selfless shatteredness? The dilemma we hope to capture is the question of what ontology can make of passivity, sexual passivity included. What can philosophy make of the state of non-action? All illusions of grandeur and omnipotence melt away once the immensity of the world collides with our impotence. Differences in scale seem to beckon toward acceptance, while rejection tends to be produced by negative molecular constitutions, microscopic parasitical affects that feed upon weakness, desire and resentment. A recent study has highlighted the connection between Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and a high sensitivity to injustice.⁵ Could it be that the unavoidable inequality of reality itself poses a threat to the subject's sense of integrity? It is painful, almost unbearable to even think of the various iniquities prevalent within the world. At the most elemental level, reality is pervaded by force, violence and destruction. Alphonso Lingis puts it well when he writes the following: "birth is discontinuity, unreason, and violence."⁶ Nothing would be more comforting than to envision a world without these three. But the fact of the matter is that these multitudes of molecular forces, dark crevices and mutually inseparable pollutions are always already composed in a manner so as to produce collisions, forceful explosions of activity giving birth to new becomings. Hierarchy is not quite the correct concept; in evolution, one cannot speak of more advanced forms or manifestations. Each corporeality is adapted to respond to another. Drawing upon Amotz Zahavi's idea of the "handicap principle", Geoffrey Miller has proposed a theory of display production that highlights the role of prodigious waste in sexual selection.⁷ How-

5 Stefanie Lis, Anna Schaedler, Lisa Liebke, Sophie Hauschild, Janine Thome, Christian Schmahl, Dagmar Stahlberg, Niko Kleindienst, and Martin Bohus, "Borderline personality disorder features and sensitivity to injustice," *Journal of Personality Disorders* (2017): 1-15.

6 Alphonso Lingis, *Body Transformations. Evolutions and Atavisms in Culture* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 4.

7 Amotz Zahavi, *The Handicap Principle. A Missing Piece of Darwin's Puzzle*

ever non-sexual some visual displays may appear, a sexual function need not necessarily be apparent to any of the participants in a process of courtship. However, displays must have high information value, and this is guaranteed by none other than the wastefulness of their production: “prodigious waste is a necessary feature of sexual courtship. Peacocks as a species would be much better off if they did not have to waste so much energy growing big tails. But as individual males and females, they have irresistible incentives to grow the biggest tails they can afford, or to choose sexual partners with the biggest tails they can attract. In nature, showy waste is the only guarantee of truth in advertising.”⁸ Signals are self-referential, in the sense that they are designed to draw other bodies closer to us, allowing for a blending of corporealities. But such communication can only be effective if it is accompanied by an inordinate, irrational waste of our energies, even to the point of death and dissolution. Bodily realities, just like any other levels of the world, are mutually dependent. One needs another, willing body, a body in heat, in order for a sexually selected signal to operate effectively. Signalling is the production of expensive, wasteful molecular dispositions and constitutions that render a body accessible to another, an Other whose outside strips it of the veneer of its impenetrability. This mutual interblending cannot be reduced to phallogocentric notions of penetration, for sexual union is an interpenetration, a breaking open of the world’s shell so as to extract nutritional values.

The world of inhabitation is a place of hospitality, and is thus always open to multiple usages. No single entity can lay claim to the entirety of signals. Even the greediest of female redback spiders cannot consume all of the males foolhardy enough to approach her. Up to 65% of matings end in the cannibalization of the male by the female.⁹ Does this in any way invalidate our claim,

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Geoffrey Miller, *Spent. Sex, Evolution, and Consumer Behavior* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2009)

8 Geoffrey Miller, “Waste is Good”, last modified February 20, 1999. <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/wasteisgood>

9 Maydianne Andrade CB, “Risky mate search and male self-sacrifice in redback spiders,” *Behavioral Ecology* 14.4 (2003): 531-538.

made just moments ago, that the world is a place of hospitality? What is hospitality anyway? Is the female spider not hospitable in her openness to courtship and genetic renewal? She functions as an ocean of disappearance, an all-consuming vagina that nevertheless allows certain intrepid specimens to escape from her jaws. The fact that 65% of males are consumed during intercourse also entails that 35% nevertheless find a way to escape their fate. Is this not in itself cause for celebration? Nutrition and reproduction, two vectors that necessitate an inextricable involvement with risk, danger, and awful contingency. Meaning signals to us: here is a plenitude operating at the outermost spaces of risky embodiment, an opening within Being that could allow the memes manipulating our senses to continue their proliferation in space and time. When we refer to something repeatedly, we intend to mean the same thing, but this intention must, of necessity, fail to reach its destination. Selection necessitates the inference of a closure that would prevent the accomplishment of any finality. Closure is inseparable from repetition, for closure attests to the imperishable ontological relief that is multiplicity. “Pain”, explains Leo Bersani, “is the organism’s protection against self-dissolution.”¹⁰ In sexual excess, however, as exemplified by sadomasochistic enjoyment, “the ego renounces its power over the world.”¹¹ Again, we have here a passivity that refuses to blend with the Outside. Masochistic enjoyment is the pain we desire to feel, the painful sense of having a body rendered open to laceration, and orifices fatally unable to become re-enclosed. Pain is the movement of a body that would return to a state of self-referential closure with regard to its environs. But excess already forecloses any and all descriptions that would restore a phallogocentric, logocentric rational Occidental male subjectivity.

Multiplicity, including the multiplicity of perversions and strange sexual practices, is truly astonishing. During the course of 2017, scientists observed several instances of Japanese snow monkeys having sexual relations with sika deer. Not only males

10 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 94.

11 Bersani, *Homos*, 94-5.

specimens, but also female monkeys used the deer for their own enjoyment, oblivious to supposed species boundaries. This behavior, the researchers surmised, constituted what could be thought of as a “new behavioral tradition.”¹² What drove the young females to ride the backs of adult deer and rub their clitorises into their manes? What is it about the form of a deer that transforms this, for us, innocuous creature, into an object of perverse desire, a tool for erogenous exploration or masturbation? It was thought that the monkeys engaged in these activities must have been outcasts, social renegades. But such a functional explanation, we feel, cannot really get to the heart of the matter. Forms and relations, after reaching a certain point of development, seem to fragment into newer becomings. Anything that is accomplishable tends to be accomplished. If young female monkeys are able to jump upon the backs of male sika deer—and the latter do not back away from such interspecies encounters—then so they shall. Their sexual excitement will be enacted through perversion. The accomplishable cannot be stopped by supposed species boundaries—warmth seeks after warmth. In the cold climate, any warm body can become an object of sexual frenzy, a hospitable source of stimulation. As Luce Irigaray reminds us, “we haven’t been taught, nor allowed, to express multiplicity. To do that is to speak improperly.”¹³ Whether one speaks of multiplicity in sexual selection, or in political terms, or in the context of a mundane setting, it is always astonishing, always a mesmerizing display of colourful nothingness that never ceases to surprise. Novelty never seems to quite wear off. The multiple is that which elides differentiations of inside and outside, this and that, Self and Other. But multiplicity is also the embodiment of difference. When young female snow monkeys ride male deer, they are embodying themselves in ways that surprise human observers, and perhaps even other monkeys. Deposited within every

12 Nicola Davis, “Sex between snow monkeys and sika deer may be ‘new behavioral tradition’”, last modified December 15, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/dec/15/sex-between-snow-monkeys-and-sika-deer-may-be-new-behavioural-tradition>

13 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 209.

living thing is a multiplicity of molecular forces, energies that form the basis of any ontogenesis. Encompassing speech and communication is a visibility that beckons toward activity, even at the expense of self-shattering annihilation. Bersani invites us to imagine “a nonsuicidal disappearance of the subject”, a contradiction in terms if there ever was one.¹⁴ This contradiction need not be conceived of as something necessitating immediate correction, as if bodies were ever meant to be regulated by words or philosophical concepts. Corporeality is capable of extreme divergence: neither speech, nor bodily materiality may be conceived of as being completely independent of one another. Interdependence means, first and foremost, the exclusion of any solitary view. All things are entwined within relations. In fact, they are the relations they unite within their folds.

Every enclosure demands a commensurate inner openness; borders are predicated upon a multiplicity of productive inner worlds sacrificing their energies for the maintenance of the assemblage they enact. Miriam Kyselo has proposed a model of the self as an autonomous enactive interpersonal system. In the enactivist model, cognition is not a passive reception of environmental stimuli, but rather an interactive interface with an environment that produces meaning: “Cognitive individuation in the autonomous self-production of identity entails a view of cognition as goal-directed, value-driven and purposeful. Cognitive systems have a basic intrinsic twofold goal: to create and maintain an identity and to generate sense or meaning.”¹⁵ Enactivism means that selves are inherently relational, not in spite of their autonomy, but precisely because of the autonomy of their self-production. The body is the ground of cognition, an anonymity that, through various cultural practices, nevertheless becomes our own. This leg, this anus, this mouth, this set of eyes we have are ours, but can also, at least potentially, become those of others as well. Even complete strangers may lay claim to certain body parts of ours. Not infrequently in

14 Bersani, *Homos*, 99.

15 Miriam Kyselo, “The Body Social: An Enactive Approach to the Self.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, (2014): 6.

many countries, organs are removed from dead hospital patients and executed convicts without any legal consent from surviving relatives. Cognitive development is a ripening of our developmental stages, a heightening of our awareness to signals, cues, codes, symbols, attractions and displays. The world would be unnavigable, incomprehensible, were it not for the various signs we find ourselves surrounded with. The world—our world, as well as that of others—is full of signs, signposts pointing toward hidden machineries, divinely ordained or otherwise. What use one body can make of another is always inherently determined by its own constitutive possibilities, its mutational capabilities. Mysteriously, multiplicity also manifests itself in the display of purposelessness. Not all displays can be readily assigned a biological function. Sometimes, machineries intended for the ejection of waste are reversed. Enactment can be turned inside out; the Outside then arrives within a mouth, smeared upon a tongue hungry for the taste of excrement: “every organ coupling and, by an anaclitic deviation, be turned to the production of erotogenous surfaces: the mouth can draw in nutriment but also slaver, drool, google, and babble; the anus can release excrement but also spread it into a surface of warm pleasure.”¹⁶ Once surfaces are transformed into erotogeneous opportunities, enactment runs rampant and maladaptation becomes so much more than a merely negative form of failure. As soon as the powers of suppression and self-restriction are diverted into the enjoyment of perversity, bodies learn to bleed with matter.

Enactment progressively merges with an inorganic environment. Misperception can invite death, as when an animal falls off a cliff or a mountain climber falls into a glacier and freezes. Where some bodies bleed, other are preparing to lay claim to their interiorities. What is maladaptation? What is perversion? All phenomena, we must remember, are dependent upon one another. According to the relational view, there is no such thing as a thing in itself. There is no self outside of the realm of intersubjectivity. Even when we are alone, this solitude is a thing that gains its ontological status from the *absence* of other subjects. Solitude is, strictly

16 Lingis, *Body Transformations*, 61.

speaking, impossible. Nobody is alone. But then again, nobody is truly anybody: togetherness proves just as impossible. Logically speaking, it is inconsistent to accept the ontological circumstance of mutual dependence without also accepting the impossibility of collectivity, at least in a substantial sense. Simply put, if there are no parts in themselves, there can be no whole they compose. But what then of those undeniably colourful phenomena, those displays that dot the landscape and almost compel our senses, through the powers of allure they emanate? What should we make of the peacock's tail? The male bird is surely oblivious to such abstract matters as philosophy. All phenomena are dependent upon their interrelations, the more or less dense ecologies they inhabit. Here we propose a concept that could serve as a bridge between various living organisms engaged in relations of mutual attraction, without compromising our nondualistic ontological commitment to the ultimate emptiness of each and every existing (and non-existent) thing. This bridging concept we call, following Christopher Groves, the "anticipatory assemblage."¹⁷ Allure would be an ontological condition of mutuality, in which participants enact each other's agency by occupying places within a larger relation of anticipation that transcends their individuality. Excess is, above all else, made possible by the elemental need of perceivers to extend themselves through time toward another point, a future environment. Anticipation is a characteristic of organisms endowed with cognitive capabilities, organic beings able not only to respond to stimuli but also to construe new environments of their own. Self-production is a universal characteristic of all that lives. Awakening constitutes the point of departure, an invitation to engage in exploring multiple folds, freeing ripples of illicit pleasures, enjoyments. Each enjoyment is a death, a luxurious expenditure that opens the organism to an Outside that is always already relative to the body's interiority. All phenomena, in this moment of openness, are here, at once, as if summoned by a natural magic. This flesh, in the here and now of emergent emancipation, is a non-melting tex-

¹⁷ Christopher Groves. "Emptying the future: On the environmental politics of anticipation," *Futures* 92 (2017): 33.

ture, whose fullness is derived from the alternation of its softening and hardening. Once the blood rushes forth amongst its vessels, the penis hardens, while the same event has the opposite effect on the vagina or anus: that which accepts the power of invitation is no longer a mere passive emptiness, but likewise an active participant in union, even if the entire chaotic scene of sexual release occurs within a passive, empty *texture*. All relations in and of the world are empty, without final substance. But does this in any way deter lovers from sinking into each other's non-melting flesh? Following Hans Jonas, Kyselo identifies an inner tension within organic life. On the one hand, beings are dependent upon material resources, nourishing flows emerging from a hospitable environment. On the other hand, that which lives is also characterized by "a striving for emancipation" from that very environment.¹⁸ Jonas captures this tension with the phrase "needful freedom", a concept that may also be linked with operational closure.¹⁹ Bodies are social because they interface with their environs, but simultaneously must also remain closed to the various forces surrounding them, otherwise the chaos of the Outside instantiates a complete dissolution of the organism. If bodies are interfaces, this necessarily implies that they are more than mere semantic operations, words embedded within material contexts, or a *Nous*, an intelligence whose language works itself upon an otherwise passive landscape.

Wasteful forms of non-reproductive sexuality are, for Georges Bataille, inescapably linked with death: "eroticism is assenting to life even in death."²⁰ Death does not mean the end of sexuality; only the essentialism of a culture predicated upon the continuous denial of negation and the negative can obscure the suchness of the dark underworld underlying corporeality. Is a Buddhist notion of the machinic possible? What is the machinic, as opposed to the thickness of embodied experience? To better grasp

18 Kyselo, "The Body Social", 5.

19 Ibid; Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge. Understanding the Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1992)

20 Georges Bataille, *Erotism. Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 11.

these questions, let us further elaborate upon the concept of anticipatory assemblages already introduced above. When it recedes from the view of living perceivers, the sensible does not melt away into an invisible nothingness. As the potential for visibility, it remains everpresent within landscapes. The sensible is an order of being that extends across the dual realm of visibility and invisibility. Events taking place within the sensible redouble in the form of memories and stored potentials, within the context of fundamentally heterogeneous structures. According to Groves' broad definition, anticipation refers "to the capacity of an organised system to incorporate projected future states into its present functioning, as a way of orienting or modulating its activity."²¹ Events are never pure exteriorities, hence the nonsensicality of economic theories that define the environment of an economic system in such terms. Anticipation is the ability of any non-trivial system, living or otherwise, to modulate its operations in reference to future events, probabilities and uncertainties. Decisions are not the exclusive prerogative of human actants, because several different materialities affect the outcomes of even seemingly human-oriented political, economic or social acts. The social cannot be conceived of as a clear-cut dichotomy between individual bodies and social institutions, human intentions and material realities. As materially and corporeally embedded bodies, human minds are also dependent upon the cognitive redoubling of various material factors. Anything from a pleasant spring day to the infection of our computer by ransomware spreading through cyberspace can affect our mood, painting it in various hues, provoking gulps, faster breaths or erotic sensations. A 2005 study found that mild spring weather, typically referred to as "good" weather, can temporarily broaden cognitive capabilities in humans.²² Hence moods and emotions too have an ecology, as well as a temporality. Emotions are temporal phenomena that crossover into our bodies from outside, only to be

21 Groves, "Emptying the Future", 30.

22 Matthew C. Keller, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Oscar Ybarra, Stéphane Côté, Kareem Johnson, Joe Mikels, Anne Conway, and Tor Wager, "A warm heart and a clear head: The contingent effects of weather on mood and cognition," *Psychological science* 16.9, (2005): 724-731.

ejected again by either opposing passions, cravings, or some transcendental meditation, designed to disrupt and suspend the passions. Death also has an atmosphere, even a contagiousness which makes it imperative that we hide the bodies of the deceased in tombs or even reduce them to ashes blown away by the gusts of a cruel wind. The weather too is endowed with emotions, concerns, excitements, and enticements. When the sun expends its warmth upon the surface of Earth, genitals become more active, whereas in winter, the locus of excitement shifts to the warm fireplace, if at all (humans are among the few animals whose sexual escapades are not locked into the alternation of the seasons). Glamour and allure are but the superficial sides of a deeper reality, the reality of abjection, pollution, impurity. “The fascination with glamour”, Lingis writes, “ends in a muck of steamy breath, vaginal fluids, semen, and blood.”²³ Every enjoyment is a joyful shattering of self, a return to anonymous, formless materiality. Erotic relations are body transformations, to borrow the title of Lingis’ book, deconstructions of thickness tantamount to a potentially infinite laceration of self and other. Alterity, once it comes into proximity with brutal phenomena, can only be removed at the cost of becoming an absolutely residual, sticky substance, not quite fluid and not quite solid, a goo. Even after the most thrilling of sexual encounters, we cannot help feeling that something has been lost, a mystery has been profaned, fluids have gone to waste, and energy has been expended. Death, like sex, is a disorder, a chaos that explodes the sphere of work and productive utility like some final *kenosis*, with the notable exception that this apocalypse recurs again and again... Eroticism differs from the realm of the everyday; not unlike death, it reintroduces mysterious discontinuities into temporality.²⁴

That which is lost never exists independently of the conditions of its disappearance. Neither presence, nor absence may be derived from themselves. Similarly, the body as a social unit is not entirely self-sufficient. Autonomy does not entail a hermetic separation from one’s own lifeworld. Quite the contrary: autonomy,

23 Lingis, *Body Transformations*, 36.

24 Bataille, *Erotism*, 46.

defined as partial separation, seclusion, is built upon a prior embeddedness within a world that always precedes our desires for emancipation. Beings and organizations alike are intrinsically purposeful, even if at times they also have a need for shedding their purposes, grand plans and goals in favour of aimless debauchery or perversion or simply time-wasting activities. Kyselo extends the idea of needful freedom, transferring it from the level of individual biological entities to social relations in general. Hence the body, as a social assemblage, is an identity selectively open, through various mechanisms of distinction, taste, and identification, to the needs and desires of the alterities surrounding it. In the enactive framework, the self is no longer thought of as being equated with either a disembodied mind, or an individuated body, but rather is conceptualized as a “self-other-generated network.”²⁵ Both self and other affect the growth of new corporealities. We must remain perpetually vigilant against the double temptation to reduce bodies to social and/or biological constructs. Levi R. Bryant’s notion of the machinic can be of help in this regard: “a machine is a system of operations that perform transformations on inputs thereby producing outputs.”²⁶ If we think of the social body, as defined by Kyselo’s enactivist view, as a machinic entity, a product of anticipatory assemblages encoding society, then we may avoid the hazards of reductionist approaches to corporeality. The body would then be a materiality dependently arising from various social operations, while also becoming, through the process of its individuation, ever more able to select inputs from its environment. Every being is a machine, in the sense that it selects energies from a certain ecological contexture, and ejects forces into that very same ecology, contributing to transformative events. Inasmuch as they operate as anticipatory assemblages, societies and bodies alike introduce abstract patterns, empty futures into phase spaces influenced by their unit operations. Machines, if and when they operate in a non-trivial manner, are liable to producing “anticipatory represen-

25 Kyselo, “The Body Social”, 9.

26 Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography. An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 38.

tations”, in order to better orient themselves and give directions for future actions and movements.²⁷ Every machine has some kind of purpose, even if that purpose may often be misinterpreted in terms of the absolute lack of one. Anticipation coils up within the machine, until the time of exertion arrives, until the point wherein the body must learn to make an effort and enact a transformation. That which operates according to principles of self-organization has one imperative: create a transformation, make a change, enact your self. Here, within the self-other-generated network, unprecedented intimacy exists alongside the possibility of incalculable frigidity. Integrity and dissolution are two sides of subjectivity, two poles between which resides the subject as an inevitable, unavoidable choice. Living beings and organizations, as opposed to mere automatons, must always choose between their integrity and the shattering of self-sufficiency. Autonomy means the ever-present potentiality of self-dissolution. Distinction means “emancipation from others”, whereas openness involves “participation.”²⁸ Taken to their extremes, both distinction and participation lead to the death of the social self. Absolute separation, as in the case of solitary confinement, ruptures the relations of the confined individual, while complete openness destroys the agent’s borderlines, ruining the integrity of their inner structures.

When the machinic body shatters, when the self-rupturing event occurs, how are we to react to the shock of real disembodiment and dismemberment? It could be mentioned that we have devoted too much of our attention to merely erotic transgression. There are instances of absolute participation that explode the self in a quite literal sense, without thereby necessarily demolishing the social self. Namely, we are thinking here of the suicide bomber. Analyzing dramatic U.S. media representations of female suicide bombers in U.S.-occupied Iraq in the early 21st century, Marita Gronnvoll and Kristen McCauliff interpret such accounts in terms of abjection. Veiled Muslim women who use fake pregnancies to smuggle explosive devices into crowded, otherwise secure areas

27 Groves, “Emptying the Future”, 33.

28 Kyselo, “The Body Social”, 10-11.

represent the ultimate insult to gender norms and stereotypes, for the female body is supposed to be a life-giving source of plenitude: “their bodies, so particularly diseased and polluted, escape their seemingly secure confinement, and become a deadly weapon of mass destruction not only to their owners, but to everyone else. (...) Women who fake pregnancy to such nefarious ends as taking life rather than giving life demonstrate that the abject is never truly under control.”²⁹ The bodies of suicide bombers are bodies that shatter, while leaving behind traces in the form of martyred social selves, uploaded onto terrorist websites, idolized by their surviving relatives or vilified by the enemy’s media. What the suicide bomber displays is the staggering potentiality latent within self-shattering practices. Without seeking to ethically justify such brazen acts of political and religious violence, the image of a body willingly sacrificing itself has an element of wastefulness that literally beggars belief. It cannot be the case that social death can be entirely equated with absolute participation within a destructive, fiery flux, for these men (and women) who die for their communities survive their own self-shattering experiences in the form of socially instituted martyr-iconographies.³⁰ They participate in networks of religious and political meaning long after they have been dismembered, strewn across the street of a Green Zone, along with the scattered remains of victims both guilty and innocent. Bodies that shatter defy both binary codes of differentiation and the ontological lines of division separating activity from passivity, self and other. Could we postulate a middle point between absolute distinction and complete participation, a stage wherein both melt into one another? This would be the space of absolute freedom, the degree zero of both autonomy and life. A life lived for another would bleed into a death dealt upon oneself that opens a horrifying, nauseatic hole within space-time, detonating the temporal

29 Marita Gronnvoll, and Kristen McCauliff, “Bodies that Shatter: A Rhetoric of Exteriors, the Abject, and Female Suicide Bombers in the ‘War on Terrorism,’” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43.4 (2013): 346.

30 Frances S. Hasso, “Discursive and political deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs,” *feminist review* 81.1 (2005): 23-51.

continuum. Acts of spectacular, undifferentiating violence are the polar opposites of anything that may be termed nutritional, hence the terror evoked by the unlikely figure of females smuggling explosives under the pretense of a non-existent pregnancy. Productive life would henceforth become the object of unlimited suspicion. A particularly melodramatic newspaper article captures the sheer irrationality of the communication that may be unleashed by such destructive corporeality: “Female Bombers Spread Terror; Iraqis Grow Wary of Women.”³¹ The female suicide bomber damages the borders between male and female, activity and passivity, integrity and dissolution in ways that more conventional male suicide attackers cannot seem to achieve. The explosive feminine is a deadly potentiality that comes to matter through the productivity of its absent presence.

Even if our examples may seem indulgent, at times autotelic, this should not detract from the ethical imperative we seek to advance. Namely, we have striven to show embodiment as a fundamentally social and enacted agency. Running across corporeality is the troubling duality of distinction and participation. As we have hoped to show through various examples, these two categories, coalescing in the idea of socially needful freedom, have a tendency to interpenetrate one another. The corporeal cannot be separated from the social or the material. Indeed, as the materiality of anticipation shows, even emotions are never entirely subjective components of the world, but also medial tracings of environmental factors. Every kind of weather corresponds with a certain kind of mood, and each mood has a particular type of weather pattern most adequate to its proliferation. Lastly, we have attempted to show that limitless participation need not entail the complete destruction of the social self, for martyrdom can easily allow a certain form of iconic subjectivity to survive the complete dismemberment of a body that shatters.

31 Gronnvoll and McCauliff, “Bodies that Shatter”, 348.