

# Departure, Arrival, Return

BECOMING AND THE CRISIS OF SUBJECTIVITY

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## Introduction

On a train to Arnhem, I was writing in my notebook. I had trouble starting to write for my research, and the sudden action made me feel extremely elated. This excitement increased in intensity, and I had a feeling I could not stop it. It seemed a valve had turned open, and thought was flowing through. As the landscape hurriedly flew by, thought was in flight as well. I continued manically writing, noting things down for the rest of the day. When I went to bed I realized I could not sleep, as my thoughts continued, seemingly unhinged, escaping into a more abstract and puzzling zone. Something weird, I felt, was happening. Immediately upon falling asleep, I fell into a series of two lucid dreams which I consider powerful, terrifying, exciting, confusing, personal and sacred. In one of the dreams I was underground, and I saw a large ornate sculpture. It appeared to be a ritualistic headdress, an object one could wear like a veil. It was composed of colorful hexagonal segments and partially covered the empty vacuum inside. A powerful and vibrant image, it was the apotheosis of this strange day.

Once the engines of the mind start running, there seems no way of stopping them. At some point of intensity thought abandons its usual structures, like how water changes state at the point of boiling. This was a moment of over-intensification, a moment of crisis and extremely energetic release. In the end, it was not about writing anymore. I was curious how this day led to such a strange whirl.

When traveling, such as on a train to another city, we are suddenly released of something, more likely to think of things, or allow ourselves to think, and be productive. We are less anxious with this passive form of activity. But where was the point where that excitement tipped over into an overflowing? What are the lines that lead to such disassociation? While in the act of writing, I was carried away in a train of thought, which launched the day into a crazy whirl. Was it the train journey itself which helped accelerate the event? The crossing of the landscape? Or was there an underlying mental tension which finally found a form of release? And how can I integrate such an experience into my daily life? Do I fear going mad or do I accept such a dissociation as a unique becoming, which can inspire me to find out more about myself? It is a question which has concerned me for a while.

Thought is altered by our environment every day, by our physiology, by the 'act' we are in, while cooking or washing the dishes, while dancing or in meeting groups of people. Whether we are writing on a laptop or on paper, thought is inextricably connected to materiality. This led me to think about the concern with ob-

jects as “bodies” and “things” that act upon beholders, which exist in “networks”, in “assemblages”. Moreover, it raises the question of the diffusion of the self within the environment, of the borders that once seemed solid that become permeable, and of a self that seemed unitary instead looks more like a multiplicity. To what extent we participate in animating our environment, and vice versa, the ways it animates us.

In the following chapters we will attempt to approach these questions from seemingly disparate angles. In the first chapter we look at the idea of ‘departure’ through romantic poets such as Baudelaire and J.K. Huysmans. We will consider the cyclical operation of departure, arrival and return as analogous with transformation and rebirth.

In the second chapter we look at the spaces of travel and how objects subject us to a form of possession, through the spatial theory of French anthropologist Marc Augé’s, specifically his writing on the non-place we look at the displacement of the subject in the public space. Following that will look at Graham Harman’s description of the metaphor, the ‘elementary esthetic object’, to inform how disparate elements might conjoin and generate new compounds. One of my main interests here is: the dissolution of subjectivity, the places where it occurs, both in the good and bad ways. In a way my central question could be: in what way does the world speak back? What part of the ‘self’ is accessed when it is lost and replaced by an object? We are then concerned with the question of subjectivity all together, which at some points is challenged by intruding forms

of alterity. Can we not speak of a form of communion which occurs in the flight into the object?

The third chapter continues the notion of possession as it looks at early modern architecture's relationship with the technological sublime in its industrial and nautical vernacular. Where pure form is claimed architecture still enchanted by the iconic power of technology. How do we define ourselves through the image of technology and the industrial?

The fourth chapter will consider the philosophy of assemblage from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their ideas draw a picture of subjectivity which is not located in individuals or groups of individuals, but rather one which exists across and between individuals and groups, things, powers, pictures, technology, plants, landscapes, and so on. It points to what has been called machinic animism, which calls for rituals and strategies to resist the coding of western semiology. In animism, humans lose their transcendental status of subject.

The fifth chapter is about a strategy called the Entheogenic Drift. This is a project in psychogeography written during *The Wandering School* in Greece, which suggests psychoactives as a catalyst through which to break out of the mental chrysalis, and experience a wider sense of self within the environment. Enthusiasm is, like the title suggests, at the center as a power which can heal us from alienation.

Chapter six is about color, specifically the color white. It is brought into relationship with the symbolism of motifs of transportation which I touch on in chapter three. The focus of this chapter is on the non-discursive

nature of color, which I approach through writers such as Henri Michaux's writing on mescaline and Herman Melville's white whale. There is in color the capacity to annihilate the subject, or at least for us to experience a becoming beyond our usual limits.

I conclude by relating these ideas to my own practice. I reflect back on the key topics of the text, such as the cyclical kinetic flows of motion and stasis, the notion of the inbetween, and the recurring emphasis on multiplicity opposed to the problematic status of the unitary today.

## Departure, Arrival, Return

At Athens airport I sat in a small Transavia Boeing 737-800, which taxied across a tarmac covered in stripes, markings, signs, and further on, a windsock swept gracefully in the hot air of the day. The running engines filled the womb-like cabin with a low oscillating rumble. The cabin's ambient noise, a high pitch, complimented the sound of the engine, and together they framed the take-off with an acoustic sound piece which was tense but cool. I was reading a book by Alain de Botton I picked up at an airport kiosk. I was amused that I would find, without much effort, a book about traveling, which connects with my own fascination of the spaces of travel, and I would find it, while traveling. In the book, *the Art of Travel*, Botton brings together a myriad of references which "delve into the 'why' of travel". Referring to figures as Joris Karl Huysmans, Charles Baudelaire, to Edward Hopper, Botton explores the spaces and reasons for travel. He describes the plane as 'a symbol of wordliness, carrying within itself a trace of all the lands it has crossed; its eternal mobility offering an imaginative counterweight to feelings of stagnation and confinement.'<sup>1</sup> The power of the aircraft taking off



is the perfect symbol of transformation, within seconds, we soar above the landscape we were previously bound to. De Botton points out that it can inspire us to imagine that such a radical transformation can also happen for us. In this chapter we will look at how the consciousness of romantic poets reflect on the notion of travel. In a chapter dedicated to the spaces of travel, De Botton turns to Charles Baudelaire. Baudelaire's poetry is filled to the brim with the air of departure. T.S. Eliot famously describes him using the term *poésie des departs*:

Baudelaire has all the romantic sorrow, but invents a new kind of romantic nostalgia – a derivative of his nostalgia being the *poésie des departs*, the *poésie des salles d'attente*. In a beautiful paragraph of *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, he imagines the vessels lying in the harbor as saying: 'Quand partons-nous vers le Bonheur?'<sup>2</sup>

Baudelaire's poetry is full of suspended action, hope and resignation. Eliot finds a positive significance in this romantic nostalgia. He sees it as tied to the desire to be released from worldly individuality. In Baudelaire there is a yearning for transformation, a desire for the unknown and new. There is a force displayed in the poetry of flight that yearns for rebirth. Each departure, each escape, means a possibility for transcendence. And herein, for Eliot, is implied a thirst for the ineffable. A religious impulse, that wherever there is a choice of departures, a "route towards beatitude is possible."<sup>3</sup> One

can still choose, whenever, to heed one's inner voice which cries out to be heard. However, we remain in a "directionless condition [...] a state of mind which is in a state of oscillation, of not knowing where one belongs or where one is going."<sup>4</sup> There is a potential which is not realized, a conflict at the heart of an individual, a person not content with the limits of his condition.

Hugh Underhill's book *The Problem of Consciousness in Modern Poetry* analyses the romantic consciousness, its solipsism, sadomasochism, desire for transformation, transcendence, and other psychological quirks. For Baudelaire the entire drama of the world becomes a private suffering, with the possible, beautiful release of death on the horizon. Alterity for Baudelaire is, as a poet, to not be 'a normal man of action', to escape the ennui of being like others. Alterity and difference in poetry is often prized, being able to distinguish oneself from the crowd. For Baudelaire, opium is seen as a better escape than actual travel, for actually travelling will be disappointing. The idea of travel is however potent throughout his poetry.

In J.K. Huysmans *À rebours*, the imagination is likewise raised above the actual drudgery of travel. The character in the book, the eccentric Des Esseintes, closes himself off with his decadent collection of *bric-a-brac*, a gem encrusted tortoise, and elaborate interior decoration. One room is completely fitted to the style of a boat. Travel for Des Esseintes is not necessary, he is perfectly content to 'travel in his armchair'. Des Esseinte's strategy of withdrawal from society, a materialist and decadent version of the hermit in which a heightened

sensorial materiality of gems, flowers, fake flowers, real flowers that appear fake, scents, tastes, spices, form symbolic idioms which seem to precursor Huysmans own religious conversion detailed in his later books. This is a conversion on primarily emotional basis, rather than a moral or intellectual one. The world is for Des Esseintes reducible to his house. Flight for Des Esseintes is on the basis of poetic reverie, which he holds in high and critical regard.

There is a link between these materialist intoxications of prose and the psychedelic experience, in which animation of the person is through their mental voyages. The psychedelic experience shares the same virtuality as literature. It must be said that a religious psychedelic conversion is as much emotional and material, but is often synaesthetic with its moral and intellectual dimension. The psychedelic experience, shares resonance with Huysman's sensorial vocabulary, they are both filled with materiality. Recent research into religion has focused on the material and spatial aspect of religion. Authors like Birgit Meyer and David Morgan question the antagonism between spirit and matter, and the apparent overemphasis on spirit.<sup>5</sup> Instead, they signal a need to pay urgent attention to the material world of objects and the tapestry of lived embodied experience.

We can compare the movement of rebirth to the cyclical operation of departure, arrival and return. If we look at the movement of rebirth, it is a transformation which brings about a new "default". As soon as the transformation is complete we have attained a new default. This new default in some ways will be identical

to our old default. If we do not take care, something is lost, and everything stays the same. We are back to our all-to-familiar state. How do we keep going? How do we dislodge ourselves from business as usual? We must create strategies for departure, we need machines geared towards the unknown. We do not as human beings ever “arrive” in a finality, we circumambulate. After arrival follows the resolution of return, and it is this that it lies at the heart of becoming.

The original title of this text was *Architectures of Mobility*, To me this referred to a class of motifs which embody the potential for movement. Vessels which activate our desire flows. These motifs become more powerful when we are faced with immobilities, alienation, the rigidification of habit or a melancholic ennui. But it is not simply the motifs of travel that I was concerned with, and I was merging two distinct ideas under one banner. It for me began to signify more the situation which allows thought to take flight beyond its subjective limits. The situation which embraces the unknown. It is the machine which can be plunged into chaos and does not drown.

## Self and Space: Possession, Animation

How do pictures (objects and images) and spaces affect subjectivity? In this chapter we will look at the incorporeal transformations one slips through in public space, specifically the airport. We will also pay some attention to the non-human objects which populate these spaces, such as the signpost. I have been for a while fascinated by the objects one encounters in spaces of transit, traffic signs, wayfinding, station clocks, departure screens, notices, advertisements.

These objects are conveyors of information, they tell us where, or when, to go, which direction we are allowed. They tell us what is forbidden. They remind us. They tell us where we are. They tell us what is around us, what is up ahead. They invoke the elsewhere, the nearby. They conjures up places we only know through them, the sign evokes even what we don't know, the sign hints at a possibility to escape, the possibility of journey.

In our investigation into movement, we necessarily come to "space". The interest in space has risen since the early 1990s with French theorists as Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé. In

Marc Augé's notion of the non-place, he argues that non-human objects form the mediating link between the individuals and their surroundings in the space of the non-place. These objects we encounter address and guide us, instruct us, keep us in place. He describes how these objects subject us to a 'gentle' form of possession:

"A person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. Perhaps he is still weighed down by the previous day's worries, the next day's concerns; but he is distanced from them temporarily by the environment of the moment. Subjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while - like anyone, who is possessed - the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing."

These objects make their presence felt and address us as a fabricated average person. While travelling, the experience of this relative anonymity can be liberating, we become for a while simply a person in the process of departure. We are removed to an extent from yesterday or tomorrow's concerns, we are brought to a heightened actuality of the 'now' in the airport, where the present moment is all that matters, and like anyone who is possessed we taste the "passive joys of identity-loss and the

more active pleasure of role-playing". Even if we might not be interested in the on-board items the airline has on sale, we might casually browse through the catalog and read the articles and flip through the advertisements. Acting in accordance to our customer-passenger role affects us with a loss of identity. This movement of loss and role-playing might give us insight into how we relate to spaces and pictures.

On one hand Augé says the non-place is the opposite of utopia: it exists. On the other hand the non-place is also imaginary: 'Holiday, voyage, sun, sea, cruise, etc.', are for Augé 'banal utopias, clichés' as well as 'non-places'.<sup>6</sup> So in a single space we have utopia and its exact existing opposite. This link between the imaginary and the real in case of the non-place is crucial if we return to the notion of possession and role-playing. The banality, the cliché, has any way has no problem activating our imagination. We are brought to the evocative force of words, where what is powerful is not the place, but the word which evokes the place. "Certain places exist only in the words that evoke them."<sup>7</sup> These are the places we have never visited but have only heard about, only see flashing by on the terminal screen. We deal with two distinct realities: "spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces."

For our concern is this relationship between the individual and these spaces. To what extent an individual becomes "active" in the environment which one moves into. On the other hand, it is how much the environment becomes "active" for the individual. The division be-

tween self and reality begins to loosen, and it is exactly in this space of identity loss where different parts of our Self begin to speak to us through objects. We speak of an uncontrollable aspect, an entity both part and Other to us, which comes alive. This movement into alterity is generated precisely by the movement of the individual into generality. By being subsumed into a crowd of solitary individuals we are relieved of our individuality into a multiplicity of anonymous bodies, flowing like blood cells through an accelerated aorta.

In Graham Harman's "flat ontology", he conveys the theatricality of the metaphor in relation to aesthetic experience. For this he turns to the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's essay on the subject. As example Ortega gives this line of poetry "A Cypress is like the ghost of a dead flame"<sup>8</sup> Ignoring for simplicity the 'ghost' and 'dead' part, he argues that the "cypress" attains "flame-qualities". The cypress poses — momentarily — as a flame, when the metaphor is evoked. This act of theatrical stand-in, however, is first enacted by the reader, who in the first instance imbues himself with cypress qualities that in turn attains also flame or ghost flame-qualities. In aesthetic experience we are not casual observers, we are active participants, or as Harman puts it "we place our chips on the casino table: or rather, we place ourselves on the table,"<sup>9</sup> Ortega beautifully describes the union of disparate similarity in the metaphor: "when they collide with one another their hard carapaces crack and the internal matter, in a molten state, acquires the softness of plasm, ready to receive a new form and structure."<sup>10</sup> In Ortega's essay,



the metaphor is the 'elementary esthetic object', and we can see how this applies to art in general. What makes the metaphor work is not by concrete similarity, as that would become factual. It is by a resemblance that is remote enough to become interesting but not so remote that it does not mingle at all. It is the tension between dissimilarity and similarity which makes the connection profound.

Possession implies a little bit more than simple participation. The entire idea of possession is that the something intrudes, voluntarily or non-voluntarily. In the metaphor there is a level of participation within reading and activating, but still we have the words of someone else affect us with conjunctions. There is a pleasure in possession, being subjugated to another entity.

Another displacement of the subject, which we already have mentioned, lies in it being subsumed into the faceless crowd. Michel Foucault reminds us of the pleasure of anonymity. In an interview he talks about the importance of spaces like bath-houses "where, without being imprisoned or pinned in your own identity, in your legal status, your past, your name, your face, and so on, you can meet the people who are there, and who are for you—as you are for them—nothing more than bodies, with whom the most unexpected combinations and fabrications of pleasure are possible."<sup>11</sup> And he continues by emphasizing that: "The intensities of pleasure are indeed linked to the fact that you desubjugate yourself, that you cease being a subject, an identity. It is like an affirmation of nonidentity. Not only because you

leave your ID card in the changing room but because the multiplicity of possible things, of possible encounters, of possible pilings-up [amoncellements], of possible connections, means that, in effect, you cannot not fail to be identical to yourself.”<sup>12</sup>

The airport, although admittedly less erotic and titillating than the bath-house, affords a similar non-identity. Aside from the moments we are scrutinized by body and passport scanners and personel, we are liberated in our passenger role. We entertain ourselves with the *poésie des salles d’attente*, awaiting the flight which will take away. We may through moments of experience connect with the body of architecture around us, high industrial ceilings, skylights, lighting installations, reflective tiled floors, a voice echoing over the intercom, be filled by all sorts of airport qualities, which as Augé says, ‘gently’ possess us.

The airport is the connecting point to a larger global infrastructure. It is an homogeneous structure which will be more or less similar if I fly from Amsterdam to Singapore, or New York. Here the world is showing it’s globalizing symptoms. It is one of the unifying threads in the experience of travel: the similiarities between destinations, and between departures and arrivals, are as striking as the local differences. We can momentarily lose track of time, paradoxically in a space so dominated and structured by time, where the symbol of the clock is always near to us. Time leads into timelessness, movement leads into stasis. The world grinds to a halt, for at this moment we become it.

We talked about the metaphor and the airport

space and the decentering of subjectivity. We find a similar argument in the discussion of the image. Roland Barthes describes for us the uncanny experience of the photograph:

“In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre.”<sup>13</sup>

Here we see the recurring relationship between the experience of a decentered subjectivity and the notion of death, or at least something in between death and life: stasis. The uncanny timelessness of the airport might similarly evoke spectres inside us. Like the popular television series *Lost* (2004-2010), which is filled with the dissonance of flashbacks and flashforwards, constantly replaying moments of departure up until the airplane crash from the perspective and lives of different characters. In *Lost* the entire series is filled with the suggestion of purgatory, the in-between space of life and death. Its characters are constantly in the process of departure, and like T.S. Eliot suggested, are in a state of ‘oscillation’.

The force of the experience in metaphors, pictures or spaces, or any other aesthetic objects, convinces us that something real occurs. For Harman it is the production of compound entities: we never gain access to the

'infamous thing-in-itself', the true dose of reality is the observer acting as the aesthetic object and producing a new amalgamation of subject with the metaphorical object and metaphorical qualities. In this fusion the only real object which is accessed is paradoxically ourselves, which is temporarily filled with the aesthetic object. We might here get a glimpse at a radical new self which emerges at the point of fusion of self and environment. We sacrifice our identity to gain a spectre. The becoming-imperceptible of anonymity, the becoming-timeless of stasis, but also it's opposite pole: the eternity of continuous animation.

## Technological Possession: Vessel Architecture

In the seminal book *Learning from Las Vegas* (Venturi et al. 1972) in a segment about industrial iconography and its relationship to the early modern architectural movement, The authors describe the discarding of eclectic symbolism in architecture to influences from an industrial vernacular. The writers cite Alan Colquhoun, a British architect, who in his critique refers to the “iconic power” attributed by “those in the field of design” who “were and are – preaching pure technology...” “... which they worship to a degree inconceivable in a scientist.”<sup>14</sup> All human artifacts have this potential to become iconic, “whether or not they were specifically created for this purpose,”. Colquhoun gives as example nineteenth-century steamships and locomotives, which “quickly became gestalt entities ... imbued with aesthetic unity and symbolic quality.”<sup>15</sup> Much of modern architecture is captivated with the iconic power of these technological entities. The nautical-industrial vernacular is prevalent in many modernist architecture. An example which comes from my own environment is the “A’dam tower” next

to the IJ-canal, a building originally by architect Arthur Staal for Shell in the late sixties and in 2014 redeveloped by Claus en Kaan Architects. With the white canopy at the top of the tower overlooking the city, the element by all accounts resembles a ship's bridge, completely in unison with the cruise ships docked often across from it in the canal. Similarly, the building makes an uncanny resemblance the public ferries darting back and forth in front of its gaze. I was captivated by this building as it held for me the same unitary spirit of potency as the cruise ships themselves, the only difference being that it was expressed on land in a play of mimicry.

While the canal is an industrial-nautical area, buildings like these do not have this function anymore (in case of the A'dam tower, for Shell), or did never have a relation to it (as an example will show later on). The area because of these qualities feel remote from the city, even though it is situated just across central station. Learning from Las Vegas gives us a comparison between romantic architecture and modern architecture, arguing that in the substitution of symbolism for industrial vernacular, like the Romantics, who replicated the ornaments of the past in order to evoke the remote in time, the modern movement "achieved a new sensibility through evoking the remote in place – that is, the contemporary industrial quarter on the other side of the tracks, which they transferred to the civic areas of the city."<sup>16</sup> Much of the new architecture around the harbors, docks and islands uses iconography continuous this process in a form of mimesis. The Silodam, an apartment building by architectural firm MVRDV,

which lies on the harbor opposite A'dam tower, externally resembles stacks of shipping containers. Much of the harbor has transformed from industrial to civic, but the industrial aesthetics are still pervasive. In reality, it seems that the usage of industrial iconography is only being further reinforced and solidified. The critique that Venturi argues is that modern architects have substituted one set of symbols, "Romantic-historical-eclecticism" for another "Cubist-industrial-process", without being aware of it and claiming 'pure form'.

Le Corbusier's book *Towards a New Architecture* (1923) dedicates several remarkable chapters on steamships, airplanes and cars. He admires the mathematical harmony, the unity of materials, and how they have brought a beautiful solution to problems of technology. The caption to a picture of a cruise liner: "Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light."<sup>17</sup> A serious architect, the book continues, will be liberated by the steamship from his "age-long but contemptible enslavement to the past."<sup>18</sup> Technology is depicted as a rational spirit of the future, and reading the book one feels inspired to, together with Corbusier, cast off the dusty and gaudy coats of the past for a gleaming and pumping future.

In Plato's *Phædrus* we are introduced to the concept of the *pharmakon*, a concept Jacques Derrida would later pick up on in *Plato's Pharmacy*. the *pharmakon* is both poison and remedy, spell or talisman, and the ability for a medium to hold sway over its victims (like a speech can captivate a crowd). In Plato's *Phædrus* the story is not about the question of speech but rather

that of writing. In the story, Thoth (the god of writing and arithmetic) presents his newly invented *techne* of writing to the Egyptian king Thamos. The king rejects him, saying that it would make us dependent on external marks for memory. Given the state of our memory today compared to the speechmakers of yesterday, one could hardly argue otherwise.

One writer who has taken up the the notion of the pharmakon in relation to technology is Bernard Stiegler. In *Technics and Time*, Bernard Stiegler lays the groundwork for his writing in *On What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*. his argument is in essence that human thought has been developed inextricably in relationship to tools. It is the idea that thought did not spring up before the appearance of tools, rather, the first primitive instruments, allow us to develop our “cognitive-noetic” capacities in relation to the manipulation of these instruments. Bound to our technology, it has been with us for most of the way, and have shaped what we are now, in terms of our capacity to control nature, the production of commodities and the capitalization of life. In Stiegler’s exploration of the pharmakon, he turns to D.W. Winnicott’s “transitional object” for comparison. Winnicott’s transitional object from the book *Playing and Reality* is the teddy-bear or blanket which opens a space between mother and child. The transitional object forms a relationship between the child and mother, and eventually the mother has to wean the child from the toy so as to bring into relation other transitional spaces. Like the pharmakon, this situation is one of heteronomy opposed to autonomy, and can be said



in Plato's terms to be hypomnesic as opposed to anamnesic. In Plato's *Phædrus*, Anamnesic memory could be Kant's *transcendental memory* (autonomous thought), whereas hypomnesic memory would be artificial (such as writing, tools). The artificial memory is a pharmakon. It is prosthetic. In Plato's example the story is about writing having the capacity to annihilate autonomous thought. And writing, we must realize, is a machine. It is the machine through which mankind for the first time can cultivate a deeper sense of self-reflection by seeing himself projected on the page. It is also the machine of dogmatic transmission and dissemination.

If architecture like this tells us anything it is quite simply that we see our identity reflected in the mirror of the machine. To what extent we are so alike to it and to what extent we can distinguish ourselves from it allows it, like writing, to form a deeper sense of understanding ourselves. The medium is still the message. We are putting more and more of ourselves and our memory into the world. Every new technology, Stiegler reminds us, brings a new disadjustment. 'Health' is the capacity to adjust to that rapidly changing system, and this constant disadjustment, every increasing into greater complexity, always less manageable than what came before, is what leads to alienation, addiction and frustration.

Modern architecture is still possessed by the aesthetics of industry and technology. Technological artifacts become iconic precisely because of the radical transformation which they enact. The industrial is a form of horror which accelerates its passengers at increasing speeds and at a terrifying rate. The modern architect is

not like the inventor or engineer who propels a technological artifact into the world, the architect is dependant on the aesthetic power of the nearly divine potency of technology. Today, the world is still in thrall with the destabilizing force of technology it is subjected to. We are at a point where machines have the capacity — and do — take over thought, and at that point who is able to walk this fine line of the heteronomous relationship between techne and man?

## The Drug Assemblage: Multiplicity and Becoming

The ability to “move” or to “change” leads us to consider the environment: the configurations and assemblages which we constantly move in and between. To what extent do they transform us, and allow us to change? In this chapter we delve into the strategies of alterity, mainly through the philosophy of assemblage. The introduction of a plant in our bodies changes our configuration from the “default” of consciousness, in this chapter, we consider the drug assemblage.

The concept of the “assemblage” [agencement] has been pioneered by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in which it consists of a unified ontology. The concept has a wide application across different fields, such as science, military, economic-, linguistic history, and schizoanalytic theory. I wish delve a into the case of a drug assemblage through the conceptual frameworks offered by these thinkers. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (ATP) the works and fiction of trail-blazers in experimentation are often utilized to make tangible the dramas of becoming. They dedicate portions to drug experimentation, but under

a very cautious tone. Ultimately, Deleuze and Guattari never fully embrace psychopharmacological experimentation. However, their theory is still useful to reconsider ideas of drug use.

The books of Carlos Castaneda return several times in ATP, and it is a case worth exploring here. In Castaneda we see a ambiguous links in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari with their form of animism. The book is presented as the supposed master's thesis of Castaneda's ethnographic research, it introduces the Yaqui indian Juan Matu from Sonora, Mexico. A bruja or sorcerer, he meets Castaneda in Arizona. Castaneda is interested in Peyote, but Juan urges him to find a 'place' (sitio) first. Castaneda then undergoes a form of apprenticeship with the Don Juan. Castaneda, who from the beginning is pushed by Don Juan to relinquish his western coding and loosen his perception. Don Juan forces Castaneda to, Deleuze and Guattari write in ATP, "combat the mechanisms of interpretation and instil in the disciple a presignifying semiotic, or even an asignifying diagram."<sup>19</sup> Don Juan urges the protagonist to "Semioticise yourself instead of rooting around in your prefab childhood and Western semiology!"<sup>20</sup> This is constantly repeated to Castaneda, who, Don Juan insists, in order to see, needs to 'stop the world'. This stopping the world continuous practice of decoding which resists the rationalizing force of Castaneda himself, who is often stubborn to let go of his own inscribed patterns. The magic here, is to reclaim one's autonomy within the cosmos, rather than relying, heteronomically, on the closed structures existing in the world, which instead work to

separate oneself from the world.

In the book Juan makes a distinction between Peyote (*Lophophora williamsi*), and other entheogenic plants like Jimson weed (*Datura stramonium*) or psychedelic mushrooms (*Psilocybe Mexicana*). Peyote is seen as a teacher of wisdom external to the sorcerer with its own agency, while datura and mushrooms lead to an acquisition he calls an “ally”. The question of the limit of rationality and subjectivity is taken up throughout the books, which take up the challenge to put into words the experiences and describe a logic of a specifically non-western structure of thought which is informed by and guided by its conjunction with and within nature. The ‘plant spirits’ which people attest to as meeting during intoxication can attest to how the plant and subject reach a becoming within the body it passes through. The becoming-vegetal of the human and becoming-bodily of the plant leads to the emergence of a momentary assemblage of entities.

The notion of the pharmakon bears direct relationship to drugs, writing and technology. We can consider the psychedelic drug, an ambiguous agent, as a pharmakon as well. Like a great speech, it captivates and possesses the recipient. The symbol of the Caduceus, the snake-entwined staff of Hermes, the mercurial messenger and trickster which embodies closely the ambiguity of the pharmakon. Hermes had a silver tongue and could mislead people in unfair trades, but is also the bringer of information and the god existing in the interstices between boundaries. The reason I divulged on Bernard Stiegler’s techno-pharmacology and the

transitional object is that much of these concepts can inform us in the case of the entheogenic substance. The question can be phrased as follows; what is the role of drugs in the development of human consciousness, and for the origin of language?

The most interesting and problematic question here is that of heteronomy and autonomy. The question is a little bit different than that of writing in Derrida, as it is not a question of dissemination (at least not physical). What can be said to generate during the psychedelic experience is supposed to be an autonomous action of the brain affected by the introduction of a drug. What however many profound and less profound testimonials of plant entheogens (ayahuasca, peyote, psilocybin) testify to is a complex assemblage between the recipient, social relations of the individual and of the plant, ancestral imagery, plant consciousness, world consciousness, cosmic consciousness, and many other bodies.

The psychedelic mystery in the end is about this question of heteronomy: is it something truly other which enters us in that experience? The counter-argument is just as problematic: is the drug experience completely autonomously generated by the brain and body chemistry? In which case: is transcendental memory unlocked by certain chemical keys? It is an area of wild speculation. Guattari himself has wondered that we might one day show the foundational role drugs play in all cultural and religious areas, mentioning the idea that drug use has contributed to the earliest ascent of language in the Paleolithic area, what he calls a “paradigmatic perversion”, a sort of biting of the apple, lets

say.<sup>21</sup> Terrence McKenna has similarly, infamously, put forth his “stoned ape theory”. It is simply the fact that human beings do not exist in isolation, neatly separated from their environment, but in a form of permanent and continuous exchange with plants, tools, animals, minerals, metals, powers, things.

Another question in the pharmakon in terms of heteronomy is that of addiction or dependance. It is not the addiction how it is commonly understood for drugs, it is more the question of autonomic thought and imagination. Just like how Disney extends our imagination artificially, it also has to potential, as McLuhan prophesied, to atrophy our own imagination. It is not simple to juxtapose the cinematic imagination with a psychedelic imagination. But we only need to look at psychedelic visual art to know that there is not a whole lot of imagination going on. There are of course hermetic undercurrents, psychedelic culture is in any case socially stratified with clichés which we are trying to untangle. In any case it must be certain that the psychedelic experience is a bit more participatory than a cinematic experience, so it retains it’s autonomy to some degree. But this remains always relative, since we are helped along, it feels, with a nudge and a wink, by the plant world.

There has been for a time the notion of the psychedelic drug as a ‘tool’, which tends to objectify the relationship, but I do not wish to dispose of it all-together. There is a machinic identity within the psychedelic experience, not least of all in the infamous ‘machine elves’ from the DMT experience. That drugs can be a form of technology, often considered alien, is a common idea in

psychedelic culture. Between the silicon valley techno-capitalists and new age visionaries is there is a general understanding of psychedelics as “tools”. Some have the idea that the magic mushroom is “alien technology”. Others would reject this argument and treat the plant as a sacred spirit, an autonomous entity belonging to a Gaian noosphere, the spirit of the earth herself which mediates its divine message through her plants. South-American shamans have called the psycho-active brew Ayahuasca the “television of the jungle”, a line which would seem banal to the western psychonaut who has a thoroughly disenchanting view of technology, but paints a beautiful McLuhanesque picture of a medium which would allow us to bridge the so-called Great Divide between nature and culture that Latour has shown. The depiction of psychedelics as a tool and a medium is informative in our age where mass media and technology is increasingly reaching its promethean tentacles into the human spirit, and as the self in turn begins to fuse into the incorporeal bodies of the internet. Hermes, the Greek god of information, the lightning fast courier and trickster, is making his presence felt as he finds embodiment in the hyper-circulation of media online.<sup>22</sup> But aside from feeling very at home on the internet, he is operating at boundaries of plant and human, allowing messages to cross that cultural divide. Such assemblages and agencies do not only have the human in mind. It can destabilize the system which it enters, generating possible lines of flight.

A line of flight, in assemblage theory, is the path a body can take to dislodge oneself from a rigid struc-



ture, or the flows we can access within an assemblage. Manuel DeLanda gives us the example of a mobilized army, once returning victorious to the city, resists being demobilized and thereby threatens the identity and ability of the state.<sup>23</sup> The line of flight takes us “toward a destination that is unknown, not foreseeable, not preexistent”.<sup>24</sup> The line of flight is destabilizing, and therefore must be employed with caution. Total de-stratification lurks as a mad void, as is the case in ATP when mention is made of ‘the drug addict’, an empty “Body without Organs”, the schizophrenic, the hypochondriac. In Castaneda’s books, caution on the path of sorcery has to be the first and foremost rule, one cannot rush in timidly nor rashly. Deleuze and Guattari are similarly cautious:

“getting drunk, but on pure water . . . getting high, but by abstention . . . so that nonusers can succeed in passing through the holes in the world and following lines of flight at the very place where means other than drugs become necessary.”<sup>25</sup>

The strange thing about Deleuze and Guattari is that they distinguish between the line of flight offered by a drug or other lines of flight. Other lines of flight have the same dangerous potential, either of total rigidification through habit and sameness, or total de-stratification. As one dissolves their coding, we dissolve also the structure which we depend on, and we risk a too

rapid destratification. Entheogenic plants and fungi are powerful entities which can accept (heal, teach) or reject (confuse, hurt) its recipient, and to ingest them is to these allow forces of alterity directly into the body. Closely to commenting on Castaneda, Deleuze and Guattari go into long a description on how to fashion oneself a “Body without Organs”, which is worth quoting here at length:

This is how it should be done. Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continua of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole “diagram,” as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs. We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata into the deeper assemblage in which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the other side of the plane of consistency. It is only there that the BwO reveals itself for

what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines.<sup>26</sup>

In this description of the “BwO” we are likewise suggested to find a place and construct our own little machine. Antonin Artaud is the inspiration for this term, who sketched out a body liberated from its own limits, such as memory, habit and society, a body which would be capable of perceiving beyond its limits. Artaud first described it this way: “When you will have made him a body without organs / then you will have delivered him from all automatic reactions / and restored him to his true freedom.”<sup>27</sup> The Body without Organs could almost be conceived as an astral or subtle body. In Deleuze and Guattari, it is characterized as either “empty” or unproductive, “cancerous” or repetitive, or “full” meaning healthy and productive. We are told a BwO is a collectivity: “assembling elements, things, plants, animals, tools, people, powers, and fragments of all of these;” Although the Body without Organs is an intentionally ambiguous concept to interpret, it contradicts their caution towards experimentation, since all of the figures they prize have done so intensively in different forms, and often, intoxicated, in healthy and unhealthy ways.

Art objects like the transitional object form a heteronomous relationships with human beings. That is, like tools have done, they are an extension for the development of thought. They stand in a rhizomatic relation-

ship between mental and physical life. Art is this point of kaleidoscopic contact between different disjunctive and conjunctive fields. Precisely because it includes the material, the speciality of craftsmanship and its entanglement and play of matter, precisely because it includes the visual, the aural, and infinite interdisciplinary connections, all this is relied upon in a heteronomous relationship, which nonetheless provide the vital play required for thought.

Like the pharmakon, they remain fundamentally ambiguous. Like the pharmakon, they include and participate both in profane forces of capitalization, on which they are dependant and addicted. The art object is 'something which makes life worth living'. Art can also endanger and pathologize, and it is not clear always when an art practice is therapeutic or pathological. The self-destructive artist clear examples of art which is limited in its development but allows a therapeutic space which mitigates a mental disorder. On the other hand, it can also allow a pathological or ambiguous desire flow to be expressed.

Peta Malins in her article *The Ethico-Aesthetics of Drug Use* tries to move beyond the mixed conception of the 'drugged body' as described by Deleuze and Guattari, offering instead an alternative idea using the concepts from ATP as a toolkit to rethink drugs in several ways. She argues that a body should "ultimately be valued for what it can do (rather than what it essentially 'is')" and that assemblages of any kind should be assessed in relation to their "enabling, or blocking of a body's potential to become other." In the 'ethical'

event, a body should not be diminished in its potentiality, and ideally each assemblage should strengthen a body's potential.

The rhizome, a structure like the mycellial mat of fungi, is a structure in which everything relates to each other on the same "plane". Often pitted against the arborescent or tree-like hierarchy in ATP, in a rhizomatic structure a body has a potentially infinite lines to connect to other bodies, in multitude of directions. Rather than a binary logic of self-other, subjectivity can instead be a conjunction (and ... and .. and ). The drug-assemblage, as Malins notes, is rhizomatic. They "connect bodies up with other bodies, affects, and social formations in many different directions."<sup>28</sup> Stratified subjectivity is in a rhizomatic understanding of the body an illusion for Malins, as it refuses to limit a body and its relations by tracing it back to a root cause.

Plants are subjected to a similar reduction to unity as are bodies, the mind, etc. Plants contain a multitude of organic and chemical compounds. While the western view of drugs is focused on indentifying the prime suspect and single chemical agent, modern scholars of botany remind us that a plant itself is a compound entity of many different active alkaloids which resist the interpretation that one chemical is the sole mover of its action. A synthesized drug will have a profoundly different effect than the plant itself. Smoking the classic shamanic tobacco mapacho (*Nicotiana rustica*) will not only give you nine times more nicotine than normal tobacco (*N. Tabaccum*), but also contains harmala alkaloids (harmane and norharmane), a class of hallucinogenic

substances called beta-carbolines. They are part of the infamous monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) class of drugs, used by modern medicine for anti-depressants and parkinsons.

The idea of the mind has long been conceived as a supreme symbol of unity, but this idea is loosing foothold. More and more the mind is seperated from the monotheistic status the Self or individual has had, and substituted for a more fluid polytheistic model. The theory of assemblage works in multiplicity, and can be brought down to the micro level of the mind and its other micro and macro assemblages in which it situates itself. The Jungian scholar James Hillman has argued to dispense of the Self with capital 'S', which he compares to the jealous and iconoclastic Yahweh. Rather than reduce the self to a simple unity, he wishes to return to a form of idolatry.<sup>29</sup> The Jungian scholar develops from the 'psychological monism' Jung himself practiced. Rather than reduce the myriad of images to the same principle of Self, Hillman affirms instead the multiplicity, putting the imagination and its idolatrous production of images central to his practice.

In a similar tone, in discussions of the "One" versus the "Many", Hakim Bey has indicated that the emphasis on the One or absolute unity of reality puts the immanent world in opposition to the "center" or "apex": God. Bey proposes a radical, and he notes, heretical, monism, which demand the unity of One and Many on the level of immanence.<sup>30</sup> As the figure of Abraxas combines both good and evil into a higher sacred, and the body and spirit form poles which are mutually entwined and

interdependent, there is no a bias toward materialism nor mentalism, rather, we form a holistic relationship to both spheres.

It is clear that much of Guattari's thinking points to a form of machinic animism. This is an animism that is defined by the logic of a subjectivity which is not defined by individuals or groups of individuals. Rather, it exists interstitially across and between individuals and groups, plants, animals, peoples, powers, things. In the Amazon, this is how the soul is seen, as spread throughout the entire world, in which humans lose their transcendental status of subject.<sup>31</sup> The drug assemblage, and the following chapter, the Entheogenic Drift, is one strategy which I suggest to plunge beneath the subject/object and refresh the real with new possibles and impossibles.

## The Entheogenic Drift

In this chapter we will look at the drug assemblage in relationship to travel. The origins of this text stem from a project done with mushrooms in Greece. This chapter includes the text which was the result of that work. It was written as part of *The Wandering School: Part 2*, a project which took the form of a 230 km walk from Delphi to Athens over the period of nine days, and in Athens over the course of four months generated multiple actions, situations and exhibitions together with members and friends of the Dirty Art Department.

In Athens, I cultivated *Psilocybe Cubensis* in the nursery room of the location we were staying: an old hospital which was in the process of being rebuilt to a hostel and refugee center. The research led to a month long residency at the Lesvos Plant Medicine Center in Athens which culminated in an exhibition called *Architecture of Mobility* at the space.

*18th of April, 2018, Athens*

The word entheogen was coined in 1979 by a group of ethnobotanists and scholars of mythology, to acknowledge the ritual use of psychoactive plants while avoid-



ing the questionable connotations of terms as “hallucinogens” and “psychedelics”.<sup>32</sup> As suggested by its Greek etymology *entheos* (ενθεος), substances can be called entheogens (adj:entheogenic), if they bring about unusual states of consciousness where those who use them believe to be “filled”, “possessed”, or “inspired” by some divine presence or force.

It's important to note that the term entheogenic, while invented with specific reference to the religious use of psychoactives, if taken literally, does not imply the use of substances at all. More broadly speaking, any practice which inspires an *enthousiasmos* (ενθουσιασμος), or rising up of the spirit can be said to be entheogenic.<sup>33</sup> Enthusiasm, in general, is a much needed antidote against the spiritual malaise of the contemporary condition, and the greatest efforts should be made for us to remain playful, and if it our playfulness has been deadened by daily alienation it is necessary to create strategies to allow it to be reborn.

One such strategies is the drift is derived from the 1950s technique from the Situationists called the *Dérive* or “drift”.<sup>34</sup> It is a response to break through the veil of the Spectacle out of their realization that they'd never seen Paris. The drift is suggestive of a meandering stream which flows down a mountain and flows through the landscape, and inherently becomes the landscape, at the interface where the meandering stream and landscape reach their poetic fusion.

The aesthetics of Atheneian urban geography and its contemporary situation are especially fruitful for us travellers and wanderers or outsiders to negotiate ideas

of “travel” versus “tourism”, whether anarcho-tourism or refugee-tourism, or tourism in general. To modulate and transform, hopefully, dissolve, the relationship between the “self” and “other”, guest and host (beyond the parasitic relationship which these terms entail).

The Entheogenic Drift is a playful practice through which to break up the ruts and pathways of our habit-driven lives. To undergo the drift under the altered stated of entheogens does not imply a religious ritual context, since the intention is from the outset its use as a radical tool by which to dissolve the boundaries between psyche and the urban geography, to break out the mental chrysalis to experience a wider sense of possibles and impossibles. We still welcome the intrusion of a mad divinity.

Through the Entheogenic Drift we aim to push our imperialist touristic status to a breaking point, out of which our wandering becomes intoxicated with the living fabric of the present. As Hakim Bey writes in relation to his intimately resonating notion of the sacred drift in his essay *Overcoming Tourism*, it “opens up our own tight world to the *terra incognita* of suburbs, slums, gardens, adventures”<sup>35</sup> and to the encounters such as a striking face in the crowd of a Metro station or the fire at night on Exarchia square, the mix and blurring between ruins archaic, ancient, and contemporary, to the very living and screaming ruin of the Spectacle, encountered in shopping streets as Hermou and Aiolou, and further at the foot of the Acropolis where the evil eye fractalizes over a multiplicity of tourist traps (which feed us the images that we as tourists predate in all forms of arcane

commodities).

The goal of the Entheogenic Drift is to experience the world as a living relation, to break its forms of mediation, and to use entheogenic substances as a critical lens through which to warp the present into communions with the city, the world, or kosmos, with all its abjections and sublimities, its sacred filth and profane beauties.

The Atheneian urban geography and its situation is fruitful for us travellers, wanderers or “outsiders” to negotiate ideas of “travel” versus “tourism”, whether anarcho-tourism or refugee-tourism, or tourism in general. To modulate and transform, and hopefully dissolve, the relationship between the “self” and “other”, guest and host (beyond the parasitic relationship which these terms evoke).

We approached Athens by foot from Delphi, which from the beginning had a relationship to the Eleusinian Mysteries. The mysteries were prominent in ancient Greek religion as an initiatory walk and festival which culminated in an entheogenic ceremony in the Telesterion (Initiation Hall) with the consumption of the sacred sacrament called the Kykeon. Scholars have suggested that the psycho-active fungus that grows on barley (containing ergotine, a precursor to LSD) was used as a key ingredient.<sup>36</sup> This year we as well (tomorrow at the time of writing) celebrate the 75th anniversary of Albert Hoffman’s 1943 discovery of LSD and the bicycle ride that followed his accidental absorption.

The Entheogenic drift, like the traditional drift, can be done by yourself or with a small group of 3-4 like-

minded individuals. The suggested substances are such as LSD, Psilocybin or Mescaline, each of which equips the observer an completely different gaze. The difference between these cannot be easily classified, as the experience will differ per person. Then it is a matter of dose, so as not to incapacitate the individual immediately on a field of grass (although, of course, this is also a perfectly valid drift). With a small dose very little visual distortion and hallucination will be present, although an intensification of the entire inner experience and of the urban landscape will occur. This would not be too intense for it to hinder the activities of “everyday life” and allows chaos to meet order half-way in a manageable madness. The problem with the “medium” to “high” dose is that it hinders the functions of everyday realities. The Entheogenic Drift has as its intension to enhance and intensify the everyday. The intensification of “everyday life” through the drift will reveal the otherness in the ordinary, it reveals the structures of psyche we normally do not consider as their ever present buzz is relegated to the unconscious. The drift is per definition without structure and without guide. The group could decide to change location before starting by way of a cab, or do their drift motionless, in a room or location. Attentioniveness, intuition, chance and play are the key elements, and one should follow all of their senses in making their decisions. One can climb a hill out of the desire to liberate oneself out of the constricting suburban sprawl, or wander its labyrinths. One should get the sense of the abstract totality of the city which naturally has a theatrical absurdity. Other examples would only

dampen the imagination.

Following the drift is a process of integration, which can take many forms. It is however important to let feeling and experience flower into action. Actions leave traces and traces can be insightful reminders. This is, in the end, the aim of the drift. To inspire and refresh our daily actions with new energy, to heal us from daily alienation and humiliation, and to strengthen our resistance to the ever-present domination of the individual.

*What follows is a reflection on the Entheogenic Drift 9 months later*

A group can fail to break its self-determination, that is, it can act in a way that is completely predictable and even on entheogenic substances, do not transform in a remarkable way. This would be fine, the entheogenic drift can be compared to a chemistry experiment. Some people can catalyze each other into different beings. The amount of people I have suggested is 3-4, but in all honesty a duo is just as valuable, sometimes more. It has been mentioned that environments can be threatening. There is a difference between perceived threats and immanent danger. It is not good to be in stressful situations, as that can be worsened. Some psychedelics allow you to deal with fear calmly, allowing you to see it without fighting it. This allows problems to be considered without immediately repressing them because of negativity. However, the opposite can also happen, anxieties can be intensified and they can impede a positive becoming.

In the beginning I have mentioned the psychedelic as a tool. I have shied away from the idea of ritual. Now I disagree, and I do see the drift as a communal ritual, inherently shamanic, although not necessarily religious. Therapeutic, yes, but in an intensive, active sense. Like any other activities, however, the Entheogenic drift is ambiguous.

One of things in the entheogenic drift I felt I did not pay much thought to is the group agency or assemblage. It does not get much treatment in the text. The suggestion is of “like-minded” individuals but there is a little more to it than that. How much can we determine ourselves through the agency of others? How can we let our own intuition be affected by this group assemblage of drug, bodies and environments? How can we become aware of the exchange of subjectivity which occurs between us? How do you assemble for a body the most ethical assemblage? This is really the elementary aspect of the drift now that I look back.

## Color Terror: White

Once, while near NDSM harbor in Amsterdam, I saw the Disney cruise-liner depart through the IJ canal. It was an unusual sight, its grand white surfaces moving steadily through the waters. It recalled Baudelaire's description of the ship as "a vast, immense, complicated, but agile creature, an animal full of spirit, suffering and heaving all the sighs and ambitions of humanity." I felt, in addition to this, a sense of the sacred, the *mysterium tremendum*, in the ship, a sense I share with certain architecture, but especially animated machines, such as planes, or trains and ships, which for me came to signify power beyond myself. I felt attracted to these vessels, and simultaneously afraid. Is it not that something so beyond oneself, something so vast, which moves in us? When we are faced with the unknown in ourselves, is it not logical that we experience that through immense objects as the cruise ship, because they exist as nearest possible representation of the encounter with alterity, in the shape in which it exists in the mind? The white surfaces spoke of something excessive, something exhilarating. And while the image of the ship comes with its own signification, the whiteness is harder to analyse.

Herman Melville eloquently reminds us of the sub-

lime terror inherent these objects, in the Whiteness of the Whale, he recalls that what appalled him in the whale was specifically its whiteness. First he goes on to list a rich amount of associations to white from different cultures and symbolic uses of white. But for all these accumulated associations, he writes, 'there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul, than that redness which affrights in blood.'<sup>37</sup> The cruise ship and the aircraft have their blinding white surfaces impress in a totality on the observer. Beyond the signification of these symbols, the white exceeds this power. He continues: "This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds." He speculates whether the indeterminacy of white is what brings us close to an immense universe, an immensity which endangers us with annihilation (like the Kantian sublime), or whether the color, which is not so much color as absence of color, and simultaneously the concrete of all colors; and for these reasons there is "a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows – a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink?"<sup>38</sup>

The medium which excels at color, is poetry. In poetry, color is invoked, rather than directly experienced. 'Blood red rubies shimmered across the carapace', 'The passing vermilion sky streaked with light cumulus', Here the reading affects an active response from the reader, where those colors come alive in the evocation of ob-



jects with red qualities, blood qualities, vermilion qualities, shimmering qualities, carapace qualities. There is a becoming of color, a becoming-white or becoming-red, all these becomings lead to a wider sense of subjectivity. The imagination is central in this becoming, or rather again to return to the notion of participation, 'active' role-playing. There is the terror, like Melville notes, in red and its relation to blood, something which is deeply physiological and primal.

Yet white is the opposite of physiological, white is a pregnant absence, full and empty simultaneously. White is spiritual. We are obliterated by its meaning which we cannot at any length apprehend. There is something in color which exceeds discursiveness, which cannot be approached by the written word. As the poet Henri Michaux affirms, detailing his experience with mescaline:

"And 'White' appears. Absolute white. White beyond all whiteness. White of the coming of the White. White without compromise. Fanatical, furious, riddling the victim. Horrible electric white, implacable, murderous. White in bursts of white. God of 'white'. No, not a god, a howler monkey. (Let's hope my cells don't blow apart.) End of white. I have the feeling that for a long time to come white is going to have something excessive for me."

## Conclusion

In my own art practice, drawings and other artworks the notion of mobility and immobility is a common theme. Motifs of transportation are brought to a pause. The process of an artwork in my work takes on a deliberate slowness and materiality in the process of craft, and a deliberate speed in assemblage. Although the sculptures themselves refer to movement they often do not embody it, and instead are frozen in a static aura. As Anselm Franke in the introduction to the catalogue of the seminal *Animism* exhibition writes:

“Art, it is understood, derives from the need to resist time and triumph over death. The desire to bring time to a standstill, to conserve and fix, is as much at the root of art, as is the desire to animate, to re-create life, to gain access to the forces of creation. These psychological universals are inextricably linked to motion and stasis, and their negotiation and dynamics in works of art.”<sup>39</sup>

Incomplete action, stasis and inaction stand in relation to timelessness and death. Franke argues that art tries to resist time by fixing things, like the butterfly which is pinned and put on display. The desire for a standstill a method of petrification itself, the urge to conserve. Her text explores two key processes in aesthetics — of

animation and conservation, movement and stasis. The museum, she notes, animates “dead” objects and de-animates the animate.<sup>40</sup>

My assemblage sculptures relate to objects like signposts, trafficlights, lightboxes, etc. These refer to spaces as airports, waiting spaces, which are “liminal zones”. They stand at the edge of our known world, the airport which is our modern “threshold”, a space of “crossing”. The notion of the “crossroads” is evoked here. It suggests the place where a choice must be made. In ancient Greece, the roads were marked with a *herm*, a pillar mounted with the head of Hermes and a healthy phallus. Hermes, the Greek god, would stand at these intersections where the flow of commerce, information, and strange faces with different languages from distant countries would come through. Since Hermes is the god of information, the lightning fast courier and trickster, it is fitting that he would stand at the nodes which form the points toward the boundary of people’s cultural maps. Not only is he the boundary figure of our physical space, but also for the psyche, that is, the trickster and messenger and guide at the mediating edges of our conscious life. Hermes can be claimed to be the metaphorical, archetypal bridge between our conscious and unconscious worlds.

The relationship between my own body and the world has brought me to consider the alchemical mix of individuals and environments. An overemphasis on ideas and conceptual practices leads us to ignore the material underpinnings of our reality and our reliance upon them. There is a necessity for thought to become

visual. Even the invisible, transcendental and spiritual needs a tangible presence in the world. Pure spiritual experience is inexistent, we are entangled in matter and social formations.

Pervasive through this entire writing has been the idea of subjectivity and where that is located. For me this has never been in isolation and often escapes out into the world. For me the drive to desubjectify is not to distance oneself from the world, it is rather to allow the world into the subject, and where these moments of union and communion can occur. Where can I get a larger conception of the world through, and how much of that can I carry? Art making is a strategic and controlled form of disassociation which allows this to happen. There is always the second question which is how do you stage that situation and allow it to happen for others, how do you include others in that experience, if you can facilitate that experience somehow? Can that practice transcend it's status as an almost Art Brute-ish style of self-indulgent, therapy etc. It will if it takes the exhibition space rather than the isolated studio as a challenge to enlarge the boundaries of the work.

I am fascinated with the notion of departure, arrival, and return since in this cyclical movement we have a repetition which can increase in intensity, it has a transformation within itself but there is also the return where we come home. There is this concept called pagan rotary-image thought which I encountered in a text on D.H. Lawrence The text argues that this technique is used throughout his poetry with consisting of a pulsing, repetitive and rhythmic movement, primordial and

ancient, in a way closer to how nature operates, a movement which is constantly increasing and altering itself, with centrifugal and centripetal energies, which aim to unify outer and inner life. For D.H. Lawrence it is the necessity to balance the oppositional energies in man which is at stake. His poetry is characterized by the kinetic flows, a rocking to-and-fro wave, which mixes the primal experience of the body with mental life. In the same drift I would aim to mix the environment with the body and the psyche.

Part of this text has been to argue against the problematic status of any notion of the unitary today, which is why much of my research has led me to authors which deal with multiplicities, differences and ambiguities of subjectivity rather than clear isolation. How do we experience life as a living relation opposed to the modern split between subject and object, culture and nature, nature and artifice? This is one of the questions I would like to continue, by creating situations in which these artifice and nature come into tension with each other. Unity is the ideal but this unity is always still fraught with disparate energies and tensions. In the world we can experience different kind of “I’s”, and much of my work, I have come to realize, has been about celebrating the alterity of the other “I’s”.

If there is a politics of ‘ecstasy’, the politics lies exactly in difference rather than sameness. If the ‘drug assemblage’ shows us anything, it is different speeds, different slownesses, molecular becomings which escape the molar environments and instantiate new beings. These should happen virtually and actually. Difference!

That at any point where there is stasis, to start disarticulating it into mobile parts again. All parts of consciousness as tables and tools on wheels, nothing fixed, move move, 'even in place, motionless voyage, desubjectification'! Voyage voyage.

## Endnotes

- 1 De Botton, *The Art of Travel*, 13
- 2 Eliot, cited in Underhill, *The Problem of Consciousness in Modern Poetry*, 172
- 3 Ibid. 173
- 4 Ibid. 172
- 5 See D. Houtman & B. Meyer (eds.), *Things: Material Religion and the Topography of Divine Spaces*, Fordam University Press, 2011
- 6 Augé, *Non-Places*, 94
- 7 Ibid. 95
- 8 Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 72
- 9 Ibid. 83
- 10 Ortega, 'An Essay in Esthetics by Way of Preface', 143
- 11 Foucault and Le Bitoux, *The Gay Science*, 399
- 12 Ibid. 400

- 13 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 13-14
- 14 Venturi et al. *Learning from Las Vegas*, 136
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid. 135
- 17 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 101
- 18 Ibid. 103
- 19 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 138
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Guattari, 'Socially Significant Drugs', 202
- 22 For an excellent narrative on the enchantment and religious/enchanted undercurrents of technology throughout history up until today see Erik Davis' *Tech-Gnosis: Myth, Magic, Mysticism in the Age of Information*
- 23 DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 129
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 285-6
- 26 Ibid. 161



- 27 Artaud, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, 1947
- 28 Malins, 'The Ethico-Aesthetics of Drug Use', 95
- 29 Adams, *Golden Calf Psychology*
- 30 Bey, 'The Information War'
- 31 See Joshua Ramey's writing "Deleuze and Guattari's Machinic Animism", *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Religion*, Lindsay Powell-Joines and F. Leron Shults (Eds). And Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato's research project "Assemblages: Félix Guattari and Machinic Animism", *e-flux.com*, Journal 36, accessed online at "<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61259/assemblages-flix-guattari-and-machinic-animism/>"
- 32 A.P. Ruck et al, 'Entheogens'
- 33 Haanegraaff, 'Entheogenic Esotericism', *Western Esotericism*
- 34 Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive'
- 35 Bey, 'Overcoming Tourism'
- 36 Ruck et al, 'The Road to Eleusis'
- 37 Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 204-212

38 *Ibid.*

39 Franke, 'Much Trouble in the Transportation of Souls, or The Sudden Disorganization of Boundaries', 11

40 *Ibid.* 11

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