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## **Bodies within affect. : on practicing contaminating matters through bioart**

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# Chapter 4

## Living Within a Multibody

Each multiplicity is symbiotic; its becoming ties together animals, plants, microorganisms, mad particles, a whole galaxy.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1 Contaminant O like Organs of Multibody

And who is alive? The one is alive whose existentially indispensable organs are living. The place where those organs live has no significance. Here or there – this has for us no difference – the fact that they are alive. And if they are, so does the insured – in the corresponding percentage proportion, to be sure.<sup>2</sup>

It all starts with laughter, more silly and goofy than hysterical or scary. It sounds a bit like someone choking, and one cannot really be sure whether the laughter belongs to a woman or a man. It is non-human, creature-like and yet human, and the voice, while laughing, screams: “bunch of weirdos.” The short movie *Layer Cake* (1968, 35 min.) directed by Andrzej Wajda, with a script by Stanisław Lem, is the grotesque story of Richard Fox, a rally driver, who undergoes multiple organ transplantations after numerous car accidents [Figure 21]. With each accident, he gets a new body part that becomes with him, imperceptibly for Richard himself, yet uncannily expressed within his body movements and style of talking. Man, woman, dog – he becomes all of them. Any attempt to distinguish where one body ends and another starts becomes meaningless – s/he/it becomes multiple.

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London [etc.]: Continuum, 2004), 275.

<sup>2</sup> Quote from the movie *Layer Cake* (in Polish *Przekładaniec*) 1968, directed by Andrzej Wajda [all quotes from the movie are translated from Polish by A. A. Wołodźko from the script of the movie: Stanisław Lem, *Przekładaniec* (Warszawa: Agora, e-book, 2012)].

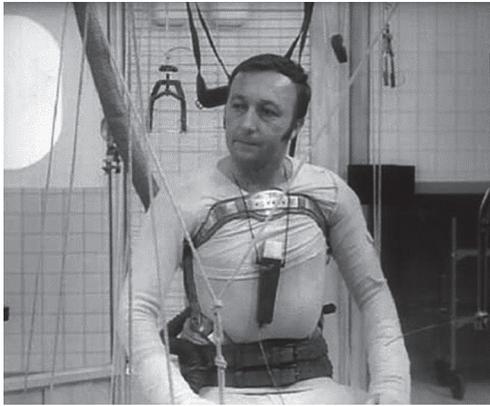


Figure 21. *Layer Cake*, 1968, film frame; Richard Fox after the first transplantation.

However, because each organ is donated from an already “dead” body, Fox is subjected continuously to increasingly complicated insurance claims. The families of the victims, whose body parts Fox now has, can only receive the compensation for parts that were actually buried and were not subsequently “used.” The families demand maintenance payments from Fox, who is now the owner of the organs. Fox seeks help from a lawyer. Unfortunately, as long as medical science “sees” it simply as a matter of “humanitarian help,” the juridical and insurance law cannot be adjusted. As the doctor conducting the transplants explains to the lawyer looking after Richard Fox’s case: “In the face of an unusual number of patients we cannot simply waste these surplus [of body parts]. I guess you understand that? Humanitarianism commands sharing. It is one of those complicated situations that comes with progress.”

How can the rules belonging to fixed identities be applied to multiple and dynamic subjectivities? The lawyer struggles helplessly to solve the multiple claims directed towards Fox. There is a widow of the brother whose body parts Fox has received demanding money for her children; there is a fiancé asking for the return of the gold and platinum transplanted into Fox’s mouth. Finally, there is a claim demanding Fox take responsibility for the children of a woman whose legs he now has. Confused, the lawyer asks for some advice from the doctor who conducts these transplants. Yet the doctor, pressed by urgent medical matters, just states that there are much more complicated cases:

In the last week, Doctor Gregg from Ciminati got eighteen patients simultaneously. The bus transporting those people, fell from a bridge. Eighteen people stepped into the bus, but after the operation it appeared that there are nineteen of them. And now, please imagine the problem of the identity of that nineteenth person! The papers for her.<sup>3</sup> Where is her father? Her mother?

<sup>3</sup> In Polish, the pronoun for a noun ‘person’ has a female form.

From this conversation, it is clear that, for the doctor, bodies are plastic, mutable and in a state of possible transformation. Such matters as personhood and legal identity are secondary and hinder rather than help his work. The lawyer is thus forced to turn to the spiritual point of view held by Fox's psychoanalyst. This seemingly dualistic approach in the story, between physical and material, body and spirit, becomes permanently blurred. As the story unfolds, what is material and spiritual cannot be distinguished, since both levels seem to express each other simultaneously in Fox's multiplicity.

The psychoanalyst demonstrates a discrepancy in his method of loose associations practiced on Fox. Before the accident, "the whole Freud symbolism came down to a vehicle for Fox," the psychoanalyst explains. He would relate darkness with fuse, blood with a red traffic light, the trinity with second gear. However, after the accident, the symbols have changed into flowers, rings and weddings. Yet, as the psychoanalyst assures the lawyer, Fox is not a woman, only partially – like a layer cake. Nevertheless, for the lawyer it becomes gradually incomprehensible who Fox is as he cannot represent the layer cake in court. The psychoanalyst retorts: "Why not? New times – new customs. You will adapt!" The lawyer insists that there must be some leading agency, one that is at the top of the multiple layers of Fox. The psychoanalyst reminds himself that, in the last session, Fox had been slightly aggressive; indeed, he had even bitten him. Therefore, when the lawyer reveals that a dog had been found at the location of the recent car crash, the psychoanalyst calmly decides that he should get a vaccination: "You think that Fox may have rabies?" – the lawyer asks. "Not Fox, the dog," the psychoanalyst replies.

Neither the medical doctor who specializes in the carnality of the body, nor the psychoanalyst who is focused on what is considered as spirit can give a satisfactory answer to the lawyer. Both the doctor and the psychoanalyst approach their patient united by their function multiplicity. It is difficult for the lawyer to analyse Fox's case according to the law, since each layer of Fox never stays on top long enough to take absolute control over the others. The multiple layers of Fox mingle, mutate and grow according to what becomes important for each part. The relations of significance drive them and control the generated agency of Richard Fox, whoever s/he/it might be. In the script, Lem seems to emphasize that there is no logical split between her/his/its spirit and body and, moreover, exactly what is the body stopped being an issue a long time ago. Now, the major problem is how to act as multiple within the old criteria of law and custom that the lawyer personalizes. Can we change the old criteria in a way that responds to the material realities of multiplicity?

The movie ends in the lawyer's office with another visit from a multiple body of Fox. The advocate is glad to see Fox as he has been waiting for him for some time now. Yet, Fox expresses surprise, since he was not even sure if he will choose this lawyer that morning. From the conversation, it becomes obvious that Fox is not Fox, but rather Arie Stevens, Fox's co-pilot. Stevens' laugh, however, coming out of the mouth with golden teeth, is a goofy, slightly hysterical, almost non-human one, screaming: "bunch of weirdos!"

## 4.2 The Laughter of Multiplicity

So what if this new nomadic subject looks,  
feels, and sounds unusual? S/he is monstrous,  
mixed, hybrid, beautiful, and, guess what . . . ?  
S/he is laughing!<sup>4</sup>

Lem begins and ends his speculation on multiplicity with a particular kind of laughter. This laughter is not laughing about something or at something. It is not a clear, resonant sound, one that is easily recognized as belonging to someone or something. Rather, the laughter becomes an expression of the intensity of its becoming. Fox's laughter, contaminated by multiple encounters with bodies, signals transformation, continuous change and further mutations. Through the laughter, we can sense the movement of the changing Fox, who, paradoxically, is not Fox, but Fox becoming another. It is as if, through laughter, we enter the ongoing multiplication and transformation of Fox's body into something both human and non-human. In Lem's story, laughter creates tension, a vibration of intensities that allows us to encounter equally intensive and multiple in their mutations body.

The multibody, or as Deleuze calls it – multiplicity – is an assemblage, a temporary composition of bodies (carnal bodies, thoughts, particles, bacteria, plants, animals, chemicals) in their relationality. Although the multibody, the multiplicity, is a composition of elements, it is not driven by them separately. What constitutes the multibody is the relations in alliance, continuously mingling and changing and driving the multiplicity. Importantly, as Deleuze argues,

The multiple is no longer an adjective which is still subordinate to the One which divides or the Being which encompasses it. It has become noun, a multiplicity which constantly inhabits each thing. A multiplicity is never in terms, however many there are, nor in their set or totality. A multiplicity is only in the AND, which does not have the same nature as the elements, the sets or even their relations.<sup>5</sup>

In that sense, there is no unity of the multibody, as Deleuze with Guattari would argue,<sup>6</sup> but only relations of transformations, relations of AND that disrupt unity, any hint of totality and identification. Each added relation, each AND, already mutates and sets a new flow

<sup>4</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press E-book, 2011), chapter 1.1. "Transposing Differences."

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 57.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 2004, 9.

of change and transformations – each AND becomes a new *affectus* that creates a new multibody.

How are we to encounter a continuously changing multiple that does not have a fixed identity? Does it make sense to recognize it? Is each moment of identification prone to failure? In other words, how should we live within a multibody? How can we practice multibodies within affect? As Deleuze writes: “In a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what there is “between”, the between, as set of relations which are not separable from each other.”<sup>7</sup> In *Layer Cake*, the laughter is a method to signal how elusive and dismantling the encounter with multiple is. And yet, it is through laughter that we sense the multibody of Fox. The laughter becomes the conduit for the multibody to enter in the middle of the multibody’s transformations – movements that cannot be grasped, identified, but only sensed. Deleuze saw the expression of difference in this kind of laughter; that is, of that which cannot be subsumed into a given, fixed identity. In order to understand how we can express the multiple through laughter and, how, in turn, the multibody emerges and functions, we must linger a little longer on how Deleuze conceptualized laughter. Lem’s “bunch of weirdos” is the ongoing differentiating multiplicity that we now have to learn to encounter.

For Deleuze, laughter is a movement of the intensity of those relations that generate bodies. As such, laughter expresses affect – an encounter that is both dynamic and tense in character. Importantly, laughter understood as affect neither belongs to irony, nor to humour.<sup>8</sup> It rather remains between them, as a movement that produces them. Laughter is “This play of levels of intensity controls the peaks of irony and the valleys of humour.”<sup>9</sup> As Deleuze further explains, “You cannot help but laugh when you mix up the codes. If you put thought in relation to the outside, Dionysian moments of laughter will erupt, and this is thinking in the clear air.”<sup>10</sup>

Laughter becomes an expression of intensity, of difference emerged from the experience of the multiplicity. Interestingly, in his book on Foucault, Deleuze writes that laughter becomes not only an experience of multiplicity, but also a way to resist or even destroy what endangers this multiplicity:

The Divine Comedy of punishment means we can retain the basic right to collapse in fits of laughter in the face of a dazzling array of perverse inventions, cynical discourses and meticulous horrors. A whole chain of phenomena, from anti-masturbation machines for children to the mechanics of prison

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, viii.

<sup>8</sup> See Claire Colebrook’s historical analysis of irony within philosophy, where when analysing the notion irony in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, she argues that they prioritize humour over irony: Claire Colebrook, *Irony*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London/ New York: Routledge, 2005), 129–49.

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands: And Other Texts, 1953–1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Mike Taormina (Los Angeles, CA/Cambridge, MA: Semiotext, 2004), 258.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

for adults, sets off an unexpected laughter which shame, suffering or death cannot silence. The torturers rarely laugh, at least not in the same way [...] Provided the hatred is strong enough something can be salvaged, a great joy which is not the ambivalent joy of hatred, but the joy of wanting to destroy whatever mutilates life.<sup>11</sup>

Laughter is what bypasses mutilation in favour of mutation. Mutilation presupposes the sense of a closed, perfect whole from which a part is removed, deconstructed or castrated.<sup>12</sup> Laughter becomes rather a mutation and waste – something that has been cut and become waste in the process of mutilation. However, we should not understand waste, here, as something that is at odds with the status quo, what we can manage, arrange and manipulate without consequences. For Deleuze, laughter as waste is not what contradicts, what has failed, what demonstrates lack, since to define waste as such would demand memory. When, in turn, memory fuels laughter, it transforms it into that what is lacking. For instance, when Fox's multibody laughs, s/he/it does not refer to what they are not, to the lack of something. S/he/it – the multiple of Fox – laughs, bringing about yet another dimension. S/he/it multiplies while laughing, laughs while multiplying. Instead of lingering on what is missing, trapped within the dialectical logic of creation through exclusion and lack, laughter becomes a path of affirmation. It emerges and embraces the waste of the cut bodies as “active forgetting.”<sup>13</sup> The laughter of waste is negation of negation by affirmation.

Moreover, unlike memory, which works by means of recognition and representation, the active forgetting of laughter does not signify. It is through waste that these bodies transform into multiplicity allowing us, in turn, to think differently from within this multiplicity. Multiplicity forces us to think in terms of affirmation of the unrecognized, unactualized, non-representable and non-communicable. For Deleuze, this embracing of waste operates as the eternal return of that which is cut. What returns in laughter is “neither the default, nor the equal, only the excessive returns.”<sup>14</sup> Laughter of waste is not a friendly, agreeing, white-men-patting-themselves-on-the-back laughter. It is rather a laughter of a dark precursor, of convulsions and rolling – the multiple Fox laughing at the “bunch of weirdos” while multiplying.

Lem's imagination of the implications of organ transplantation, although grotesque, exercise the dilemma of the multiple subjectivities of today. He actualizes thinking about bodies, their becoming and generation in terms of relationality, which leads to questioning of the old, fixed concept of identity. He creates situations of tensions expressed in laughter where multiple bodies demand new thinking about dynamic subjectivity. In that sense, in

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand, 1st edition (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 23.

<sup>12</sup> “Mutilation, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/Entry/124329>, accessed 31 May 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 55.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

order to practice the multiple, not only the acknowledgment of multiple must occur, but most importantly, a different logic of thinking.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze argues how thinking of the multiple, which would force a new practice of self, cannot start with the dominant dialectical negation – logic driven by opposition. The multiplication itself follows a different logic. It is not a simple copying *ad infinitum* of what is there, for instance, numerically multiply what is given. As Deleuze argues, “multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organisation belonging to the many as such, which has no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system.”<sup>15</sup> The organization of such an understanding of multiplicity is an open system of possibilities that may be actualized, and which may mutate, like genes, Deleuze argues.

Before the widespread acknowledgment of the field of epigenetics, which overcomes the nature-nurture opposition by considering genes and environment both crucial and inseparable in the processes of development,<sup>16</sup> Deleuze describes genes as a relational rather than essentialist fixed given. He explains that, depending on the environment and on multiple relations, genes may or may not be actualized in the incarnation of a particular body. His notion of multiplicity takes shape in the continuous relations, intensities and determination that occur at the level of genes, and the level of species and their environment. In these multilayers, the organization of multiplicity actualizes its transformations:

the double aspect of genes involves commanding several characteristics at once, and acting only in relation to other genes; the whole constitutes a virtuality, a potentiality; and this structure is incarnated in actual organisms, as much from the point of view of the determination of their species as from that of the differentiation of their parts, according to rhythms that are precisely called ‘differential’, according to comparative speeds or slownesses which measure the movement of actualisation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>16</sup> “Epigenetics is a term that Conrad H. Waddington (1942) coined to refer quite generally to developmental processes (i.e. how we get from genotype to phenotype), and we have known for a long time that such processes involve far more than DNA. In this sense of the term, epigenetics is not a new field. Also not new is the recognition that the various factors involved in development—nucleic acids (DNA and RNA), metabolites, and proteins; nuclear and cytoplasmic factors; genetics and environment—are so deeply intertwined, so profoundly interdependent, as to make any attempt to partition their causal influence simply meaningless [...] What is new today involves an altogether different reference of the term epigenetic. The ‘field of research called epigenetics’ in the NIH newsletter refers primarily to the discovery that not only are changes in various extra- (or epi-) genetic factors affecting phenotype routinely passed on in cell division, but also such changes can often be transmitted through the generations, despite the fact that they do not involve changes in DNA sequence. Examples of epigenetic inheritance might involve changes in methylation patterns on DNA, or changes in chromatin structure, metabolic requirements, feeding patterns, or even modes of symbolic communication. These alternative “systems of inheritance’ are of immense importance to development; they radically change our understanding of inheritance; and they can also have a profound effect on evolution.” Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Mirage of a Space between Nature and Nurture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010), 4–5.

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 185.

The laughter expresses nothing but itself, a sheer affirmation of its transformation, of the bunch of weirdos, mutating and growing. In order to laugh, one first must dismantle the priority of identity. Rather than negating identity, we must simply multiply it to the point where we cannot trace back who/what one was/is, as in the case of Fox's multiplicity. It is not about focusing on identities of the bodies whose parts were transplanted into Fox, but encountering what cannot be traced back. It is about touching the simulacra, which results from an ongoing repetition of the multiplication process itself:

All identities are only simulated, produced as an optical 'effect' by the more profound game of difference and repetition. We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative.<sup>18</sup>

The laughter that expresses multiplicity thus follows the logic of what Deleuze described as pure difference. In the prevailing understanding, the notion of difference is immediately subordinated to the sense and presupposition of identity – we think about that what is different already with relation to something that it differs from. This false understanding regards difference as already in a relation with resemblance, where the perspective of the viewer, the one who judges, must be present. As Deleuze puts it, "In other words, we do not think difference in itself."<sup>19</sup>

In this way, the way to think difference for its own sake, independent of the logic of identity, of the Same, becomes through relation itself – through what we now call laughter, but which carries the characteristic of affect understood as *affectus*. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze does not yet use the word *affectus*, he rather defines this phenomenon as intensity. Intensity becomes the relation without relata, the movement of itself that oscillates between the horizons. It does not mean that intensity presupposes horizons, the relata, but rather it is a pure movement, it produces those relata:

Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse. Difference is not phenomenon but the noumenon closest to the phenomenon. [...] Every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned. Every diversity and every change refer to a difference which is its sufficient reason. Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, *difference of intensity*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 222 (original emphasis).

In the waste of mutilation, the expression of laughter is the flow of intensities. Here difference escapes identity, here, Deleuze finds the logic that drives the multiplicity – the logic of change. Significantly, difference must be thought of as a value in itself and without any teleological resentment of returning to what is or was – to habits of identity. Moreover, the abandonment of the logic of identity does not lead us into the non-semiotic realm. The phenomenon of difference is the phenomenon of emergence and production of significance. We are in a different logic now, one that, rather than being governed by agreement and confirmation according to what is given, such as the logic of signification, is induced by tension. This logic of multiplicity is driven by the tension of an encounter with what is different, rather than its identity, i.e. it is driven by what escapes identification. As seen in *Layer Cake*, laughter becomes an encounter with darkness, with that which does not signify and what cannot be grasped. It is the dimension of the body where drives (for Deleuze intensities, affects) have no fixed foundation and, as such, the body interprets itself as the enigma of plurality: “The body is a multiform process and is therefore obscure to the conscious spirit, which does not oversee its continual plurality.”<sup>21</sup> The body is the darkness understood not as invisible or impossible to see, but as multilayered multiplicity that cannot be universally grasped.

How, then, can thought be possible in such a space of impossibility of sense and cognitive capture? How can “the logic of intensities” that moves multiplicity reshape the understanding of self, of subjectivity or agency? How, in the dissensus, the waste that drives the movement of differentiations, can we practice this new sense of multiplicity? These are the questions that resist signification through the practice of the politics of differentiations of significance. Mind you, subjectivities of multiplicity are not the solution to the problem of significance, of identities.

When writing about multiplicities and their agencies, I am not interested in the metaphysics of subjectivity, i.e. what the subjectivity is. As I argued earlier, the question of subjectivity is already a question of relationality, encounters within material and discursive entanglement as discussed in the previous chapters. When thinking about multiplicity, once the logic of laughter has been established as the affirmation of difference, which drives this multiplicity, what becomes crucial is how to act as multiple? Following the question that pervades *Layer Cake*, I am focused on how, through laughter, pervading the dark path into difference from which multiplicity emerges, we can function politically and socially? This is a pragmatic question about the possibility and shape of multiplicities’ politics within affect. It is a question posed by Fox’s lawyer, willing to find a way out of the categorical mess our bodies found themselves in. Unlike the lawyer, however, we are not to overcome this categorical messiness of bodies by searching for a perfect law that would subsume and govern them all. Instead, we are to change the categories themselves, so that they can respond to the dynamic and processual character of multibodies.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Blondel, Nietzsche: *The Body and Culture: Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 211.

In the next section, then, I will discuss what happens when we try to implement the logic of difference, of dissensus, in politics. In other words, how can we actually create the spaces of laughter, of tension through which bodies, in their multiplicity, can emerge? How can we practice laughter as the politics of multibodies?

### 4.3 The Impersonal Within Affect

In *Layer Cake*, the body, its partiality and mutability, is directly juxtaposed with the law and customs. Confronted with the dynamism of the body, and the growing acknowledgment of its multiplicity, the law, based on a presupposition about fixed and autonomous identities, becomes insufficient, unable to exhaust all the realities of this multibody. In the “eyes of law,” the body is something to be managed and categorized according to the given rules. Therefore, under no condition can these rules of law be changed, even if the concept of what the body is has changed. In the story, Lem captures the tension not only between the body and the law, but primarily between the body and its practice, its politics. When thinking about *Layer Cake*, our questions gain a sharpness: how should we move from the politics of rights, which is dominated by signification, to the politics of the relation of significance? In other words, how can we maintain the continuous state of laughter? How should we practice bodies within affect? And finally, how should we practice the affirmation of waste that is a feature of multibodies?

For scholars such as Roberto Esposito and John Protevi, who are occupied, implicitly and explicitly, with the political and biopolitical understanding of affect, the strategic point of thinking about politics differently, one that can respond to a collective and dynamic comprehension of subjectivities, is rethinking the notion of personhood.<sup>22</sup> After all, it is the idea of personhood within politics that helped to manage and control bodies throughout the history.

Whether a life is declared to be personal from the act of conception, at a certain stage of embryonic development, or from the moment of birth, its entrance into the regime of personhood is what lends it unquestionable value. It hardly matters whether one becomes a person by divine decree, through natural means, all at once, or in a series of stages: what counts is the threshold beyond which something generically living takes on a significance that radically changes its legal status [...] Only a life that can provide the credentials of personhood can be considered sacred or qualitatively significant [...] Personhood is seen as the only semantic field that can possibly overlap

<sup>22</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Cambridge/Malden, MA: Polity, 2011); Roberto Esposito, *The Third Person*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

the two spheres of law and humanity, separated as they are by the national ideology of citizenship. This means that a concept like that of human rights is only conceivable and viable through the lexicon of personhood.<sup>23</sup>

The notion of personhood has been a political and juridical determinant of who has rights and who does not. For this reason, the Fox's lawyer in *Layer Cake* is in a struggle to establish his client's identity in order to determine the borders of s/he/it's personhood. Only by establishing borders, can the lawyer legally resolve Fox's case. As the movie explores, however, multiplicity escapes legal categories, it functions according to different norms, if any at all. Hence, in order to form a politics of multiplicity, one that is able to capture and live with Fox's multibody, the possibility of thinking beyond the logic of personhood becomes crucial.

In order to be able to think otherwise than according to the demands of personhood, it becomes imperative to consider what enforces the idea of a person. Giorgio Agamben's distinction between *bios* and *zoë* can be considered as the entry point for grasping the vast implications of what the notion of personhood entails. Agamben argues that since Ancient Greek thought, these two terms have shaped our understanding of what is considered as life: *zoë*, which denoted a simple "fact of living common to all living beings" and *bios*, which stands for a "way of living proper to an individual or a group."<sup>24</sup> In this distinction, *bios* is the sphere of *polis*, the domain of logos and language and, as such, it was used to describe human life, its agency and subjectivity. Only in the sphere of *bios* can the notion of personhood be developed and practiced. *Zoë*, on the other hand, denoted the sphere of non-human, bodily nature. This implied that, even if humans share *zoë* with other beings, *zoë* must still be excluded from the sphere of social *bios*.<sup>25</sup> Within *zoë*, in other words, there was no possibility of becoming a person and practicing personhood.

Within the sphere of *bios*, carnality and law can be united through the concept of personhood, life and logos. This distinction between *bios* and *zoë* thus had an influence on the performative character of the notion of personhood, shaping the management of bodies. As Esposito argues, the understanding and practice of this *bios/zoë* schism "is based on the assumed, continuously recurring separation between person as an artificial entity and the human as a natural being, whom the status of person may or may not benefit."<sup>26</sup> The notion of person was thus not inherent to all human beings, but only to those endowed with political and social rights. Importantly, Esposito explains that those rights belong to

<sup>23</sup> Esposito, *The Third Person*, 2–3.

<sup>24</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Agnieszka Anna Wołodźko, "Between Bio(s) and Art – Intensities of Matter in Bioart," in *Innen - Außen - Anders: Körper im Werk von Gilles Deleuze und Michel Foucault*, (eds) Ann-Cathrin Drews and Katharina D. Martin, (Edition Moderne Postmoderne. Publisher, Transcript Verlag, 2017), 221–236; in my article, I develop this differentiation between *zoë* and *bios* in the context of bioart's practice and Braidotti's understanding of biogalitarian thinking.

<sup>26</sup> Esposito, *The Third Person*, 9

the idea of personhood and have been given with regard to the demonstration of possession of rational capacities and spirituality.<sup>27</sup>

Through the notion of personhood, human beings can exercise the power over their “animal being”. This involves that, when deprived of personhood, one is not the owner of one’s body. At the same time, in order to own your body, the body itself must be deprived of the personhood. In that sense, personhood becomes something beyond carnality and, moreover, it is something shaped by the possibility of control over the body.

On the grounds of this fundamental exclusion of non-human *zoë* from the sphere of human *bios*, Western thought and politics is said to construct its relation to the non-human – to the body – as a simple biological life, “disposable matter in the hands of the despotic force of unchecked power,”<sup>28</sup> as Braidotti warns. *Zoë* has been considered to be a threshold of moral, social and cultural values, shaping the politics and practices of how subjectivities are constructed and managed. *Zoë* is a reminder of the bodily possibility of humans to become dehumanized and de-personalized. Furthermore, deprived of *bios* as a linguistic, social and moral realm of human existence, *zoë* marks the “human body’s capacity to be reduced to non-human.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, when any form of egalitarian approach to *zoë* and *bios* emerged, implementing the dynamic and collective understanding of multibody, for some, it was a sign of a reductive phase.<sup>30</sup> According to Agamben, for instance, *bios/zoë* egalitarianism is characterized as a time of decadence, revealing “the abyss of totalitarianism that constructs conditions of human passivity.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, when the separation between *bios* and *zoë* has been abandoned, it is considered to cause humans’ continuous regression to the non-human.

However, as Rosi Braidotti argues, instead of treating the sphere of *zoë* in terms of negative dialectics about what threatens de-personalization and regression, exactly the sphere of non-person *zoë* promises a new kind of politics concerned with multibodies.<sup>32</sup> Since the problem that the notion of person promised to manage – that is, the formulation and guard of rights and dignity – is continuously blurred and broken, the notion of person should be dismantled as it induces inequality and divisions. On the grounds of sustaining the logic of rights and dignity, the notion of personhood gives premises to decisions about who has rights and who does not. Furthermore, contemporary discourses around personhood and ownership of the body, regardless of the politics, end up treating and presupposing the body to be a thing, focusing on who deserves life and who does not.<sup>33</sup> As Esposito argues,

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 120.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> See Braidotti writing on Agamben’s radical opposition between *zoë* and *bios* in Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Esposito, *The Third Person*, 92.

“personalization and depersonalization are nothing but different flows of the same process, one that is ancient in origin but whose effects are far from being exhausted.”<sup>34</sup> Either the notion of the person or the pursuit of going against personhood as de-personalization channels the same logic of relation of exclusion governed by separation and subordination not only between humans, but also between humans and other species’ bodies and lives.

Multibodies demand a different politics, one not based on the dialectical relation of negation, but rather on affirmative co-dependence. In the specific relation between *bios* and *zoë*, rather than focusing on the dialectics of exclusion that marks the commodifying practices over the bodies, the politics of multibodies can be shaped in a more affirmative way. Esposito’s analysis is crucial here, since, as he argues, what is shared by *bios* and *zoë* is not mutual opposition, but rather the shared dimension of impersonality. I argue that this notion of the impersonal, when acknowledged as an affirmative phenomenon generating rather than excluding bodies, can have a transformative impact on the politics of multibodies within affect. In order to grasp the scope of this impact, Lem’s notion of the multiple as a dynamic collective of Fox, which contaminates the habits of the logic of identity is crucial in this regard.

Fox is a temporary assemblage. The multiples of Fox are the mutating elements and materials that “uproot” their specificity within the encounter in favour of becoming-one-with.<sup>35</sup> Fox’s multiplicity does not aspire to culminate in or reach some desired form or identity.<sup>36</sup> If they – the collective of Fox – have a goal, it is to continue the movement of laughing: “bunch of weirdos” the laughter laughs. Laughter as a movement that escapes containment and being pushed into a fixed state, is chaotic and contingent. The laughter of a mutating multibody is a nomadic movement that is about “blurring boundaries without burning bridges,” as Braidotti argues.<sup>37</sup> In this way, the collective is produced and producing. To establish when one part begins or ends is impossible. The multiple slips in the very moment when one tries to point to or measure it. In the moment of measurement, the apparatus and what is being measured mingle into “complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices”<sup>38</sup> – into an intra-action movement of laughter, to use Karen Barad’s words.

In thinking about an already multiple body, the notion of the collective is transformed from a sense of property into dynamic and relational phenomena. The agency of that collective is not something given or something that belongs to the nature of the body. Rather, it is a practice and an event of a continuous material and discursive encounter. In that sense, multiplicity is not a metaphor, but an actual, material socio-geographical

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 285.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>37</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>38</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2007), 140.

happening.<sup>39</sup> The multiplicity that we already are demands a rethinking of agency in terms of what we discussed in the first chapter along with Barad's intra-action:

the primary ontological units are not "things" but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurings I entanglements I relationalities I (re)articulations of the world. And the primary semantic units are not "words" but material-discursive practices through which (ontic and semantic) boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world. The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming.<sup>40</sup>

Lem's creation of the multiplicity of Fox, played by the actor Bogumił Kobiela, generates the imperceptibility of the continuously mutating layers using gestures, voices and the body's movements [Figure 22]. In this way, the movie generates the dynamic play of mutation within multiplicity that is not linear and singular – it is not simply a matter of the problem of transplantation itself. It is not only the surgical cut that causes Fox's body to become multiple, but also its multiple discursive and physical enactments, which play a role in generating this multiplicity. In other words, multiplicity as the event of intra-action happens on many layers, in the many folds of the impersonal – s/he/it.

The impersonal, what I shall now call s/he/it (in subsequent sections I will reveal the importance of the sound of its pronunciation) is already situated in the personal, rather than outside of it. It is neither de-personal, it does not oppose the person, nor should it be presumed in terms of a personal pronoun such as "we," which implies, after all, generalization and appropriation according to a given identity. The point is rather to change the logic that dominates the understanding of personhood – a logic and language that cannot actually talk about the body without presupposing the opposition between animal and vegetal dimensions and spiritual, rational ones. Multiplicity, rather than species and amounts, regards the dynamism of phenomena.

Esposito proposes that the impersonal ought to be thought of in terms of the third person, which "means creating an opening to a set of forces that push it beyond its logical and even grammatical boundaries."<sup>41</sup> Notably, he stipulates that the third person should not be understood as another person. Unlike phenomenology, which, despite its claim to overcome the hierarchy between relating agents, thinking is driven by the logic of a

<sup>39</sup> "A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self—it's no metaphor. It fulfils the purpose of finding suitable situated locations to make the difference between different locations. Being nomadic, homeless, a migrant, an exile, a refugee, a tourist, a rape-in-war victim, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant, an expatriate, a mail-order bride, a foreign caretaker of the young or the elderly of the economically developed world, a global venture financial expert, a humanitarian relief worker in the UN global system, a citizen of a country that no longer exists (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union)—these are no metaphors, but social locations." Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, chapter: "Introduction."

<sup>40</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 141.

<sup>41</sup> Esposito, *The Third Person*, 14.

constant opposition and reference between the first and second person, the third person initiates a different perspective. For Esposito, the third person “extends out of the logic of the person in favour of the different regime of meaning.”<sup>42</sup> The impersonal is thought of in terms of the singular that, rather than operating within the system of rights, calls for a sense of responsibility and obligation.



Figure 22. *Layer Cake*, 1968, film frame; the lawyer is on the left, the multiple Richard Fox “is/are” on the right, <http://www.iluzjon.fn.org.pl/filmy/info/1200/przekladaniec.html>, accessed 17 March, 2017.

The new logic of the impersonal requires us “not to think the neutral [...] but rather to think in the neutral.”<sup>43</sup> However, while providing ways to think differently about the concept that can change politics, Esposito does not really explain how this different logic would work in practice. How would responsibility and obligation work differently from the system of rights? In other words, how, considering the changed logic and non-dialectical sense of relationality, would the notion of the impersonal work? What kind of implications would the impersonhood paradigm have for biopolitics, politics concerned with living bodies?

John Protevi seems to go further than Esposito, suggesting that implementing affect in the politics of political physiology will allow us to break with the tradition of the radical split based on hierarchy and relation of exclusion between what is carnal and what is political. By implementing affect in political practice, we can find new strategies that, rather than being based on moral laws, are based on relations of significance. As he argues, if affect is

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

“the ability of bodies to form assemblages with other bodies”<sup>44</sup> where one body becomes a co-constitutive part of other body, affect allows us to think about the body in a political way, outside the regimes of personhood. Protevi described affect as being already political, giving a particular ethical shape to politics that is organized according to questions such as: “Does the encounter produce active joyous affect? Does it increase the *puissance* of the bodies, that is, does it enable them to form new and mutually empowering encounters outside the original encounter?”<sup>45</sup>

I argue, therefore, that, through affect as the onto-epistemological understanding of bodies coupled with the impersonhood logic of thinking about their agency, we can construct, as Protevi signals, not only a new shape of politics, but also new practices. My approach responds thus to the multiple character of bodies, where it is not comparison and application as a means of treatment that is practiced, but the mapping of relations of significance according to what stimulates the power of multibodies to multiply. In this way, what is important for the body to continue its conatus is the measure of politics. As Braidotti argues, such politics would focus on the increase in bodies’ power (here understood as *potentia*), rather than exercising the law and rights over them (power as *potestas*). It is thus politics that sustains relations, by keeping the processes of change and transformation floating. As such, affective politics is not about maintaining the status quo, but about “feeding” the multiplicity with more relations that accelerate s/he/it’s capacity to have more relations.<sup>46</sup>

Overcoming the *bios/zoë* dichotomy requires creating strategies for multibody politics and practice. For Braidotti, the *bios/zoë* egalitarianism of co-construction has deep ethico-political consequences. It gives way to a non-anthropocentric shift in thinking, which she calls “bio-centred egalitarianism.”<sup>47</sup> However, this egalitarianism should not be understood as a lack of difference that subsumes all into the one category of “we”. What the concept of multibodies forces us to encounter goes beyond the notion of belonging to something. Its relational, impersonal dimension hints rather at the notion of belonging-with that is beyond species division. Moreover, as Braidotti argues, such bio-centred egalitarianism would lead directly to a new relationship with the non-human through the multiplicity of the body; and, as she further argues, this capacity seems to be already embedded in the practices and discoveries of the life sciences: “Contemporary scientific practices have forced us to touch

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<sup>44</sup> John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Affective politics “[...] has to do with the capacity to endure, to “sustain” the process of change or transformation. Duration and endurance are also ethical categories to do with sustainability, not just aesthetics one. Sustainability emerges (again) as the guiding principle of these intensive methods of analysis.” Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, chapter 8: “Complexity Against Methodological Nationalism.”

<sup>47</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 37.

the bottom of some inhumanity that connects to the human precisely in the immanence of its bodily materialism.”<sup>48</sup>

In the next section, I will discuss how the scientific findings in life science already expose the fact that multiplicity is not only discursive and conceptual, but, rather awkwardly, a physical phenomenon that we still need to confront. In order to grasp the challenges and possibilities of practicing multibodies, we will look at today’s biotechnological multibodies. Even Lem could not predict the physical dimension of multiplicity that is the multiplicity of the microbiome that we already are.

#### 4.4 Contaminant S like S/H(e)/It

In February 2016, Leiden University Medical Centrum opened the Netherlands’ first faecal bank, *Nederlandse Donor Faeces Bank* (NDFB).<sup>49</sup> Since 2012, when the first stool bank *OpenBiome, The Microbiome Health Research Institute*, was launched in Medford, Massachusetts (United States), faeces banks had only opened in France and the United Kingdom.<sup>50</sup> Although institutionally in its infancy, the first documented faecal transplantation, used to treat food poisoning and severe diarrhoea, took place over 1700 years ago, in China, and was performed by someone called Ge Hong.<sup>51</sup> Known in the sixteenth century as yellow soup, a euphemism designed to distract from the origin of the medicine, faecal transplantation was employed to treat abdominal diseases, fever and vomiting.<sup>52</sup>

However, despite the reach and long medical history of the treatment, the procedure has only recently been standardized in Western medical practice, resulting in the growing presence of donor banking and commodification of the “healthy” stool.<sup>53</sup> Known today as faecal microbiota transplantation [FMT], it is the transplantation of filtered stool from a healthy donor into the gut of the patient with a particular disease, for instance,

<sup>48</sup> Rosi Braidotti, “Locating Deleuze’s Eco-Philosophy between Bio/Zoe-Power and Necro-Politics,” in *Deleuze and Law*, (eds) Rosi Braidotti, Claire Colebrook et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2009), 96–116.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Nederlands Eerste Feces-Transplantatiebank Geopend in Het LUMC | LUMC’ [First Netherland’s Faecal Transplantation Bank opened in the LUMC - Leiden University Medical Center], <https://www.lumc.nl/over-het-lumc/nieuws/2016/februari/Nederlands-eerste-feces-transplantatiebank-geopend-in-het-LUMC/>, accessed 18 June 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Tina Amirtha, “Banking on Stool despite an Uncertain Future,” *Science* 352, no. 6291 (June 9, 2016): 1261, doi: [org/10.1126/science.352.6291.1261](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.352.6291.1261).

<sup>51</sup> Faming Zhang et al., “Should We Standardize the 1,700-Year-Old Faecal Microbiota Transplantation?,” *The American Journal of Gastroenterology* 107, no. 11 (November 2012): 1755, doi: [10.1038/ajg.2012.251](https://doi.org/10.1038/ajg.2012.251).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1755.

<sup>53</sup> If you live in the US, provided that you are healthy, not obese and under 50, your faeces can be worth 40 dollars per sample. In the Netherlands, payment for any organ donation is banned, but the faecal bank charges the patient 145 euros per faecal dose. See Amirtha, “Banking on Stool despite an Uncertain Future,” 1261–62.

Clostridium difficile infection.<sup>54</sup> The procedure, which aims to restore the balance of the gut microbiome can be carried out using a nasogastric or nasoduodenal tube (insertion through nose), a colonoscope or enema (insertion through the rectum), or by ingestion of capsule (insertion through mouth).<sup>55</sup> Since its standardization, it has proved successful in treating the Clostridium difficile infection, and is considered to be a promising option for treating other diseases. However, the indecisiveness of the results and the vagueness of the policies relating to this method is simply due to the fact that studies of the microbiome have only recently adopted a non-pathogenic focus, revealing a more symbiotic understanding of its role.

Most importantly, the procedure of faecal transplantation reveals not only the multiple character of our bodies, that we are already multiple, but also that, within our practices and ways of living, we are highly dependent on the multiple that we are. The multiple does not only occur through the transplantation of bodies as in *Layer Cake*; indeed, the multiple is a way of our being. This shift in approach has not only started to change medical practice, but also our thinking about who we are, and how our bodies may live within multiple socio-cultural spheres.

Since 90 per cent of our cells are said to belong to these microbes,<sup>56</sup> which are basically bacteria, archaea, fungi, viruses, protists, and microscopic animals,<sup>57</sup> the researchers now induce a new image of the body, suggesting that we have always been multiple. Their early findings raise serious questions regarding the *bio/zoë* politics of exclusion. While destroying the old autonomous and hierarchical image of bodies and the idea of health, the researchers also consider the gut microbiota to influence and shape our emotion and thought,<sup>58</sup> blurring comfortable boundaries between reason and emotion, between mind and body.

The “newly” discovered lack of distinction between our faculties and organs, between human and non-human, which grant microbiota a great influence on our way of thinking, renders Lem’s speculation to “come true.” With each transplantation, we not only get new microbiota, but, as some researchers argue, we become that microbiota<sup>59</sup> – we appear

<sup>54</sup> Faith Rohlke and Neil Stollman, “Fecal Microbiota Transplantation in Relapsing Clostridium Difficile Infection,” *Therapeutic Advances in Gastroenterology* 5, no. 6 (November 2012): 403–20, doi.org/10.1177/1756283X12453637.

<sup>55</sup> Hyun Ho Choi and Young-Seok Cho, “Faecal Microbiota Transplantation: Current Applications, Effectiveness, and Future Perspectives,” *Clinical Endoscopy* 49, no. 3 (2016): 257, doi:10.5946/ce.2015.117.

<sup>56</sup> Janice Dietert and Rodney Dietert, “The Sum of Our Parts | The Scientist Magazine,” *The Scientist*, <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/43379/title/The-Sum-of-Our-Parts/>, accessed 23 May 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Vanessa Rivera Amill, “The Human Microbiome and the Immune System: An Ever Evolving Understanding,” *Journal of Clinical & Cellular Immunology* 5, no. 6 (2014): 1.

<sup>58</sup> There is “growing realization that the gut–brain axis, the bidirectional communication between the digestive tract and the brain, plays a key role in maintaining brain health and the stress response.” Timothy G. Dinan and John F. Cryan, “Mood by Microbe: Towards Clinical Translation,” *Genome Medicine* 8, no. 36 (2016): 1.

<sup>59</sup> Rosamond Rhodes, Nada Gligorov, and Abraham Paul Schwab, (eds) *The Human Microbiome: Ethical, Legal and Social Concerns*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

to have much in common with the multibody of Fox, always in a state of becoming and transformation.

Nevertheless, when closely considered, there is a tint of old presupposition in the new discoveries of our multiple microbiomes. As if we were enacting the *Layer Care* ourselves, the old categories of identity, ownership and personhood continue to be applied, despite their inability to grasp the multiplicity and collectiveness of microbiome. The transformative capacities of multibodies that we are, seem to be wasted. In order to understand how the practice of multibodies is possible, we must critically analyse the present medical discourses on microbiome, which seem unable to grasp the radical political and cultural shifts caused by their findings.

## 4.5 Facing Superorganization

The research on microbiome beyond antiseptic aims has its grand beginning in the Human Microbiome Project (HMP) founded in 2008. Similar to the Human Genome Project (HGP), a previous project on this kind of extensive and interdisciplinary scale, the HMP aims at “comprehensive examination of microbial communities” in human bodies and “analysis of its role in human health and disease.”<sup>60</sup> Since its establishment, the awareness of the vast implications, not only for medical, but also environmental, social and simply humanistic (ontological) understanding of the human and self, has been thus expanding. The first major conclusion of such an awareness is the propagation of a new image of a body. Analogous to the revelation of the HGP, whose researchers proudly announced that we can put the information about humans on one CD, scientists are now talking about human bodies as “superorganisms.”

The conceptualization of our bodies within the frame of a “superorganization” seems to reflect an understanding that bodies not only construct parasitic relationships, but also non-pathogenic, mutually symbiotic alliances.<sup>61</sup> The necessary entanglements of microbes with the immune system has been recognized as making microbes not only as other bodies residing in our body, but rather an “essential part of ourselves.”<sup>62</sup> Such mutually symbiotic

<sup>60</sup> “Human Microbiome Project DACC - About the HMP,” <http://hmpdacc.org/overview/about.php>, accessed 23 May 2016.

<sup>61</sup> The symbiotic nature of microbes has been researched by Lynn Margulis since the late 1960s. However, her work on endosymbiosis, which shows that all organisms derive from symbiosis with bacteria, blurring the established boundaries not only between species but also disciplines, has not been without contestation, and was often declared to be “the botanical myth;” see Antonio Lazcano and Juli Peretó, “On the Origin of Mitosing Cells: A Historical Appraisal of Lynn Margulis Endosymbiotic Theory,” *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, The origin of mitosing cells: 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a classic paper by Lynn Sagan (Margulis), 434, no. Supplement C (December 7, 2017): 80–87, [doi.org/10.1016/j.jtbi.2017.06.036](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtbi.2017.06.036). See also Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look At Evolution*, revised edition (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Richard L. Gallo, Thomas Hultsch, and Lauge Farnaes, “Recognizing That the Microbiome Is Part of the Human Immune System Will Advance Treatment of Both Cancer and Infections,” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 74, no. 4 (April 2016): 772.

relations between our bodies and microbes leads to the conclusion that “microbiome not only affects us but is in fact ‘us.’”<sup>63</sup>

Regardless, however, of the conceptual potential to unsettle the given human boundaries, from which we can deduce that we have actually never been human, many scholars continue to follow the old logic. The potential of contaminating multiplicity for transformation seems to go unnoticed, since contamination is seen according to the logic of purity. In their persistence in writing about our bodies as forms of a super organization between different species, they call for the necessity to rethink the sense of personhood and self with regard to the criteria of personal medicine. Rather than focusing on a dynamic approach to health, there is a tendency to look for individualization of treatments that would be better equipped for treating such a complex “super” organization. As a result, in 28 mostly medical publications on microbiome ethics, funded by HMP, the authors point out the “dramatic implications for how we think of ourselves because it [the microbiome] challenges the view of ourselves as atomistic individual organisms.”<sup>64</sup> As they notice, the growth of bacteria is dynamic and highly interactive with the surroundings, which render our bodies equally dynamic and interconnected with them.

Human evolution is not just human history, but the story of our interaction with the viruses, fungi, and bacteria that inhabit us. Learning more about the microbiome is likely to change the way medicine is practiced. It may also have implications for our social and legal systems.<sup>65</sup>

With such a strong co-relation and co-existence, there are problems of personhood and identity, property and privacy that need to be rethought.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, these problems, which result from the newly discovered and hypothesized roles of microbiomes, may appear even more profound than the implications of biobanks, biopiracy, life commodification and gene patenting combined. Although the understanding of microbiome is still in its infancy, it has already been indicated that the microbiome of, for instance, our faeces, “may tell the story of where I have been and with whom I have associated.”<sup>67</sup> Such findings pose a challenge to the growing demand for stool banking and faecal transplantation, which renders the stool yet another commodity. After all, your own stool holds much more information on and have an actual material influence in shaping who you are than a DNA sample. Moreover, since microbiome is inheritable, it also carries information about our parents, families and previous generations. Such a relational understanding of microbiome should radically change our focus from an essentialist and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Rhodes, Gligorov, and Schwab, *The Human Microbiome*, 1–2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6–8.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 9.

identity inquiry into what the body is, to the Spinozian question of what it does and how we should practice bodies. From our Spinozian perspective, the urgent question is thus how may politics and habits radically change their relevancy in the face of such ongoing mutating and relating multiplicity?

In recent decades, we have concentrated on preventing the manipulation of the genome. Any attempt to transform the body on the genetic level has been fiercely debated and monitored. The fear of an irreversible mutation has been heightened following the invention of “cheap, quick and easy” CRISPR technology for gene editing.<sup>68</sup> CRISPR has reinvigorated not only the discussion on designer babies and human enhancement,<sup>69</sup> but also the fear of heritable changes in the genome that this technology implies.<sup>70</sup> However, with the new findings on the role and function of microbiome we are already susceptible to cross-generation modulations. Focused on the “bio-technological,” we have neglected the everyday contamination and generation of our bodies by such factors as our lifestyles, what and how we eat, our hygiene and even with whom, human and non-human, we associate. Each encounter renders material modulations and structural changes. Contaminations happen already imperceptibly, without a surgical intervention, a dose of medicine or gene therapy. We are already multiple, mutating and transforming without the scalpel. The HMP scientists raise the spectre of losing what, after all, was never there, namely the fixed and autonomous body. Does this mean further restriction of not only biotechnological practice, but also our everyday socio-cultural life?

Imagine how life might be if we insist on applying the old categories of identity and autonomy as our standard of ethics and understanding of law and politics? We might wake up one day in a world where there are obligatory microbioscans before you are allowed to enter a building, or before you are accepted to some institution, granted insurance or simply served in a shop. However, it can be otherwise. The multibody that we are may foster different ways of thinking and practicing multibodies. We could live in a culture where each house has an in-built pet microbiome garden as standard, as common as a running water or having a bathroom in Western societies. Future generations of pupils may take animal care classes and have obligatory lessons not just in maths and languages, but in gardening. The entire system of education might be designed in a way that could implement knowledge of how to practice and generate new microbiome relations and alliances, rather than fostering neoliberal self-care and autonomous self-improvement.

<sup>68</sup> CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats) technology allows for the quickly editing and modelling of the DNA of any organism in accordance with a desired aim. It is particularly appropriate for use in gene therapy. See Heidi Ledford, “CRISPR, the Disruptor,” *Nature News* 522, no. 7554 (June 4, 2015): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1038/522020a>.

<sup>69</sup> With CRISPR, the implications of gene editing may be close to those depicted, for instance, in the movie *Gattaca* (1997), where social inequalities are enforced by the economic and cultural demand for human enhancement. See, for instance, Antonio Regalado “Engineering the Perfect Baby,” *MIT Technology Review*, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/535661/engineering-the-perfect-baby/>, accessed 22 June 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Ledford, “CRISPR, the Disruptor.”

However, the scholars of HMP, instead of initiating new conceptual thinking that would allow for relational scenarios and habits, seem to want to examine whether the multiple relationality with microbes “will influence our conception of who we are.”<sup>71</sup> Their worry regarding the influence of microbes on the concept of self reveals the actual power of existing categories. To put it differently, their concern is how to adapt the multiplicity of our bodies to the given categories of identity and law. Instead of asking how we can change those categories, which have proven insufficient for grasping the complexity and plasticity of the impersonality of multiplicity, the trend is now to come up with new policies of control and management. In the face of their findings, the HMP researchers are unable to think other than within the laws of personhood and identity. In other words, they prefer to expand what Agamben distinguished as *bios* on what is left of *zoë*.

The quest to adjust the multiple, rhizomatic, non-hierarchical way of life of microbes into the logic of identity upholds the existing opposition and hierarchies of *bios*. By strengthening given identity schemes, the patterns of practices are also strengthened and enforced. The ideas that urges us to take responsibility for maintaining the health of the super-other that is the microbiome is just one example.<sup>72</sup>

Heather Paxson described the practice of a continuation of the status quo within biopolitics regardless of the new findings a “pasteurian practice.” As she argues, “pasteurian practices configure microbes as elements to be eliminated so that human politics might be cultivated.”<sup>73</sup> Today’s calls for the care of your microbes as the care of self is inscribed in antiseptic societies driven by the presupposition of autonomy, demanding protection on the basis of clear identification of the excluded other. Paxson thus signals a post-pasteurian move, particularly in the dairy industry, that goes “beyond an antiseptic attitude to embrace mould and bacteria as allies.”<sup>74</sup> The creation of new alliances, rather than protection of the old autonomies, is thus a growing trend in the way of thinking about bacteria. What is more, such practice of an open relationality with the microbiome will not only change the food industry, but, as Paxson argues, has deep ontological consequences for the way how we think and act as humans. The final acknowledgment of multiple alliances of bacteria may change our already distorted view of humans and the social world:

Pasteurianism is a biopolitics predicated on the indirect control of human bodies through direct control overmicrobial bodies. It contributes to the production of rational risk-minimizing subjects and to a governmentality devoted to managing public risk.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Rhodes, Gligorov, and Schwab, *The Human Microbiome*, 55.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>73</sup> Heather Paxson, “Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (2008): 17.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Post-pasteurian practices urge working with the microbes rather than against them. Yet, as Paxson warns, the post-pasteurian emphasis on working with bacteria may become a new trend in terms of industries driven by profit, which, rather than changing politics, will only strengthen the neoliberal belief in the right to individual autonomy. The discovery of the crucial role of microbes for our existence, regardless of the intensity of the relation that actually makes what it means to be human, may ultimately lead to even more self-centred biopolitics of governance. If the care of the self is to care for microbes, the economic and industrial applications of obligatory microbiome scanning may be just the start in the era hyper-biopolitics.

The future of omnipresent scanning, under the premise of care of self, may not only deny the relational character of bodies, it may also control and govern those very relations in the shape of “superbiopolitics” for our “superorganisms”. These futuristic visions might not be as dystopian as they seem considering recent findings about the inheritability of microbes. We inherit microbes’ deficiencies and diversities just like we inherit our genotypes.<sup>76</sup> It is also said that we release a particular microbial cloud that is distinct for each “individual.” For some scientists, these findings lead to such disturbingly short-sighted conclusions as easy invigilation: “individual personal microbial clouds clearly suggest a forensic application for indoor bioaerosols, for example to detect the past presence of a person in an indoor space.”<sup>77</sup>

Microbiome researchers tend to be unable to grasp the potential of their findings for the philosophical conceptualization of bodies, which may actually change legal and political practices and, consequently, our lives. The radical gap between philosophy and life science is compounded by the need and demand for ready-made applicability of new scientific findings onto existing practices. The inability to understand the dynamism of both thought and the materiality of bodies leads to a continuously expanding gap between those two spheres of multibodies. How can we not only practice, but construct ways of practicing multibodies that would allow for the open spaces that enable the further growth, mutation and flourishing of multibodies? In other words, how can we construct the conditions for practicing bodies within affect – practicing relations of contaminations for the multibodies that we are? We need to consider methods of actions that would be applicable and understandable not only for philosophical discourse, but also for a scientific one. In the next section, I will discuss the mechanism that drives multibodies and which itself can be considered to condition the unconditioned – the immunity of the multibody.

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<sup>76</sup> Eric C. Martens, “Microbiome: Fibre for the Future,” *Nature* 529, no. 7585 (14 January 2016): 158–59.

<sup>77</sup> James F. Meadow et al., “Humans Differ in Their Personal Microbial Cloud,” *PeerJ* 3 (2015): 17.

## 4.6 The Immunity of the Multibody

While medical researchers are focused on personalized medicine for the superorganism, in our concern with bodies, the body's dynamic and its multiple character, the microbial relationality triggers a new spark in terms of thinking beyond personhood and the mechanism of biopolitics that drives it. Having considered a different logic, mapped by Deleuze as difference or Karen Barad's understanding of methodologies of diffraction, we already have the tools to conceptualize the politics of multibodies. From the dissensus, understood by Rancière as "not a confrontation between interests or opinions [...] [but as] the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself,"<sup>78</sup> we can think beyond the polarized politics of exclusion. The question is whether we dare to think with rather than against the microbiome?

Haraway has long claimed that understanding dissensus as a dynamic gap that is a performative feature of multibodies evokes the character of the immune system. Her writings became almost prophetic with the discovery that our immune system is a microbiome: "the immune system is an elaborate icon for principal system of symbolic and material "difference" in late capitalism."<sup>79</sup> She argues that there is a powerful and dynamic language of biomedicine that is never stable and yet it can shape the socio-politics of bodies and selves. The dynamism of biomedical language has the power to generate multiple understandings rather than representations of particular ideas and imagination:

The immune system is a historically specific terrain, where global and local politics; Nobel Prize-winning research; heteroglossic cultural productions, from popular dietary practices, feminist science fiction, religious imagery, and children's games, to photographic techniques and military strategic theory; clinical medical practice; venture capital investment strategies; world-changing developments in business and technology; and the deepest personal and collective experiences of embodiment, vulnerability, power, and mortality interact with an intensity matched perhaps only in the biopolitics of sex and reproduction.<sup>80</sup>

Such a wide and relational understanding of immunity, which crosses disciplines, bodies and times, has a material grounding in the complexity and relationality of the carnal body. "The immune system is everywhere and nowhere,"<sup>81</sup> Haraway notes. Its physical characteristics are that of an open system, which, although dynamic and mutable, functions in order

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran, (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 38.

<sup>79</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 204.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

to maintain coherence in the necessary ongoing relationality. As Haraway concludes, immunity is, in that sense, “shared specificity.” It is:

semi-permeable self able to engage with others (human and non-human, inner and outer), but always with finite consequences; of situated possibilities and impossibilities of individuation and identification; and of partial fusions and dangers. The problematic multiplicities of postmodern selves, so potently figured and repressed in the lumpy discourses of immunology, must be brought into other emerging Western and multi-cultural discourses on health, sickness, individuality, humanity, and death.<sup>82</sup>

Esposito, although inspired by Haraway’s argument that, through looking at immunity as a relational open system, we can change our understanding of self, signals the historical contradiction of that pursuit. Immunity, after all, carries a highly dialectical understanding of bodies. Common conceptualization of immunity system is based on the exclusion of the other, which it is necessary to be immune from. The relationship with the other that immunity is about is not based on distance, but rather on reciprocal determination and condition. It has “the dialectical figure [...] of exclusionary inclusion or exclusion by inclusion.”<sup>83</sup> Such a relation, inscribed in the understanding of immunity, is based on negation; it is driven by negation and succeeded by it.

How, then, would a relation that is not based on exclusion actually work? Esposito finds an answer by comparing the socio-political function of community with the biological understanding of immunity of a living body as discussed by Haraway. He asks, how can we adopt Haraway’s biological understanding of immunity into biopolitics while avoiding the most violent and military symbolism that immunity carries? How can we understand immunity that does not work for the centre, identity or community that it is designed to protect, but rather works for the non-personhood of the multibody? As Esposito points out, the biological understanding of immunity that emerged with the discovery of vaccines and medical bacteriology between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries is characterized by the sense of reaction. Immunity does not exist as its own force, but rather it presupposes “the ills” that it is about to fight or respond to.<sup>84</sup> Can we think about immunity in a non-dialectical way? Can we re-shift its negative management in a way that would remain political? As he argues: “The route to be taken can only pas through the same object that it intends to deconstruct; not by negating it, but rather by deepening the internal contradiction.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>83</sup> Esposito, *Immunitas*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 16.

Esposito sees the change in our understanding of the immune system not in the relation of negating the negation, but rather in affirming the negation, similar to Deleuze's understanding of waste, which affirms the forgetting. The difference, negation, and heterogeneity is what drives the immune system:

the immune system must be interpreted as an internal resonance chamber, like the diaphragm through which difference, as such, engages and traverses us. As we were saying: once its negative power has been removed, the immune is not the enemy of the common, but rather something more complex that implicates and stimulates the common.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, once we overcome the view of the body and self as a closed system, the notion of immunity changes its function. While within a biopolitical understanding of bodies everything accumulated within the boundaries of closed systems, the understanding of a much more relational and open character of bodies addresses the process of "technicization of life."<sup>87</sup>

The body is no longer a philosophically given concept or a biologically given phenomenon. To reiterate Spinoza, we literally do not know what the body can do. The polarization of biopolitics, grounded in an immunity-community dialectical understanding, cannot be the method for grasping the explosive and dynamic character of the multibody. As Esposito argues, the old polarization of outside-inside, in which understanding the human and self required protecting it from outside, has shifted. Now, with research on the non-pathogenic role of microbiome, we have realised how the outside penetrates the inside at the ontological level, rendering the inside-outside distinction meaningless. The multispecies bodies establish a multi-layered, bio-socio-historical ecosystem within which the constant encounter and contamination with each other guarantees the formation of 'self'. The immunity of the body that is already multiple thus becomes its relationality and capacity for transformation. In other words, we can now say that affect is the body's immunity: "this is an interaction between species, or even between the organic world and the artificial world, implying a veritable interruption of biological evolution by natural selection and its inscription into a different system of meaning."<sup>88</sup>

The actual methods of practicing the multibodies include creating relational spaces that have a particular character – they must allow the collective assemblage of the multibody to continue to mutate, to continue to grow and to transform – and that continue to contaminate. In practice, the approach that results from affect combined with the logic of impersonhood would mean implementing the logic of immunity. The immunity of the multibody requires us to keep adding relations while caring for the multibody's capacity to continue to multiply.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

It is a difficult and brave method. It would involve, for instance, caring for the health of the body by multiplying s/he/it's many relationalities, rather than protecting it by any antiseptic means. Understanding how the immunity of the multibody may be practiced can be seen by examining how this tension between multiplicity and identity is present within the works of bioart.

Today, many bioartists directly tap into the layered materialities of microbiome. The imagination of that which is invisible to the naked eye became the most intriguing aspect of multispecies alliances for many artists. Often, however, in an affirmative approach that celebrates the admiration for our multiplicity, the works with bacteria exercise the radical processual openness and mutability of bodies. Julia Lohmann and her *Co-existence*, 2009 [Figure 23 a, b], which systematizes and classifies the bacteria of our body in Petri dishes, forming a complete portrait of the human body, seems to be a representation of multiplicity, an affirmation of its discovery, rather than its exercise. Although important for raising awareness about the multiple character of the body, the illustrative nature of the work cannot initiate the multibodies' practice. It seems insufficient to only represent the multiplicity, one should also think and create with the multiplicity.

Sonja Bäuml's work with bacteria, for example, is an ongoing practice of finding the new possibility of relationality with that which is imperceptible, but which constitutes our way of being. She persistently searches for new conditions of relations by securing spaces of bacterial growth, mutation and the appearance of multiplicity. In her work, she creates the space not only for the visualization of the bacteria, but for their growth. By securing the space for transformations, she makes tangible the encounter with the tension between the habits of self and the experience of multiplicity. Her *Expanded Self II*, 2015 [Figure 24], a project to grow your own bodily microbiome self – basically a huge petri dish filled with agar – onto which the artist imprinted her whole body – becomes a way of encountering the struggle to confront and live within multiplicity.

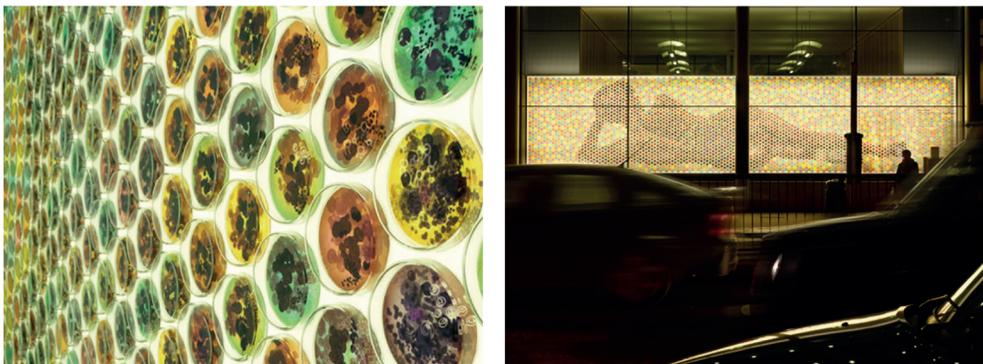


Figure 23 a, b. Julia Lohmann, *Co-existence*, 2009, <http://www.julialohmann.co.uk/work/gallery/co-existence-wellcome-trust/>, accessed 17 March 2017.



Figure 24. Sonja Bäümel, *Expanded Self II*, 2015, <http://www.sonjabaeumel.at/work/bacteria/expanded-self-2>, accessed 17 March 2017.

The fascination with the newly discovered symbiotic nature of bacteria and the relational character of our bodies has exploded into numerous artistic projects and designs for textiles, clothing, tools and furniture made from and with bacteria. A number of bioartists and biodesigners have produced a disturbing confirmation of the commodification of the premature readiness to apply newly discovered materialities. Some seem to perpetuate the old ideas and categories regarding life matter, i.e. that in order to be encountered, life must be commodified, turned into a sphere of understandable *bios*.

Projects such as *Biocouture* by Suzanne Lee [Figure 25] and Aniela Hoitink's *Mycelium Textile* [Figure 26], which use bacteria to literally grow garments, or Jalila Essaïdi's *Mestic* that transforms manure into materials such as plastic, textile and paper<sup>89</sup> showcase a new generation of artists and designers that are already working with an understanding of the relational character of bodies, of how bodies' sustainability is grounded in an ongoing need for new alliances and transformations. Nevertheless, while expanding and generating new material relations in their approach to bodies, such projects might also prompt a new industry of commodified species. Rather than becoming our companions, microbiome may be granted the status of low-cost labourers.

Multibodies demand the creation of relations of tensions and of an open system of stimulations. Importantly, following the method of non-dialectical immunity, those relations must be of a particular kind. They cannot destroy the s/he/it multiplicity, but rather, through multiplication and openness to new relations, they must enable further multiplication, transformation and mutation. The creations of spaces of tension, while enabling further transformations, is the immunity method of multibodies politics – microbiopolitics.

<sup>89</sup> Jalila Essaïdi, *Mestic*®, <http://jalilaessaïdi.com/cowmanure/>, accessed 10 July 2017.



Figure 25. Suzanne Lee, *Biocouture*, 2012-, <https://www.dezeen.com/2014/02/12/movie-biocouture-microbes-clothing-wearable-futures/>, accessed 17 March 2017.



Figure 26. Aniela Hoitink, *Mycelium Textile*, 2016-, <http://neffa.nl/portfolio/mycotex/>, accessed 17 March 2017.

## 4.7 *Contaminant A* like the Agency of Microbiome Security

This is not a project about dystopian tomorrow.  
The MSA is interested creating options in the world.<sup>90</sup>



Figure 27. The Microbiome Security Agency, 2015, <http://welcometothemsa.com/>, accessed 17 March 2017.

Instead of following the logic of exclusion, which fosters the fear of losing the autonomy, control and mastery of the body with the conviction that, without biopolitics we will enter a total chaos of dehumanization, the *Microbiome Security Agency* (MSA), 2015 [Figure 27] project affirms the multiplicity by multiplying the encounters. “We’re interested in a proactive approach to creating a future we want to inhabit by creating options to work with in a complex world filled with unknowns and promise.”<sup>91</sup> MSA formulates its practice in the context of ongoing research on microbiome, such as that of HMP, where the extent of the mutually symbolic nature of microbiome and “our” body is such that it is impossible to distinguish or separate them. MSA’s work is thus a direct response to the scientific findings, albeit in a unique, non-dialectical way. They do not negate or criticize, but rather expose the multiplicity by multiplication and transformation itself.

The MSA imagines ways of creating paths of responsibilities with regard to the multiplicities that we find ourselves embedded with. Although the name of the group might indicate some form of security action that has a military and dialectical character, the actual

<sup>90</sup> Emma Dorothy Conley, *Bio Art & Design Awards*, <http://www.badaward.nl/tag/emma-dorothy-conley/>, accessed 19 May 2016.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

practice is quite different. Rather than keeping laws and old categories that express the historical role of immunity, MSA creates ways of acting within an open system. They use methods driven by the non-dialectic logic of immunity. They explore three possibilities that might be applied when working with the microbiome, but one method seems to be the most appealing. Imagine that instead of the antiseptic trends that have dominated our biopolitically governed cultures, we obscured the convenient borders with an omnipresent multiplication.

MSA's experiments involve three ways of investigating microbiome:

1. TRACKING the changes of the skin microbiome over time.
2. DESTROYING the DNA of bacteria in faecal samples using household products.
3. OBSCURING the skin microbiome by creating an "Obscuration Solution" from a diverse selection of bacteria.<sup>92</sup>

The first, tracking experiment works on the presupposition of identity. The consideration that once you know what to look for, you can point it out, distinguish it and extract it. The second experiment is about the most effective ways to destroy particular bodies. In the catalogue that accompanies the project, the group provides diagrams detailing the amounts and intensities of treatments for each body and the results of each destruction. Nevertheless, only the third experiment, "obscuring", seems to respond to the actual character of the multiplicity of microbiome and our mutual relationality.

Rather than struggling to identify bacteria in order to destroy them using the most common antiseptic products, such as acetone or alcohol, we can work with them. Thus, the MSA proposes a process of anonymization:

The bacteria in and on our bodies is useful and necessary for many health reasons. Therefore, it is better to obscure it than to destroy it. In addition, we found that DIY destruction of bacteria in faecal samples proved less effective than we predicted. In this experiment we aimed to create an "obscuration solution" that would anonymize the bacteria on your skin by essentially adding noise.<sup>93</sup>

The process to obscure the data involved collecting bodies known to be rich in bacteria, such as faeces, kefir, époisses cheese, kombucha, and soil. All these bodies were then blended together and, from this multibody, the DNA mixture was "extracted, amplified, and then added to mediums to be applied to the skin."<sup>94</sup> Whether such an obscuration works when applied to the skin is still being researched. Yet, as the MSA argues, the more bodies in

<sup>92</sup> MSA, exhibition catalogue, *Bio Art & Design Awards*, 2015, 42.

<sup>93</sup> MSA exhibition catalogue, 52

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

the mixture, the more likely the effect of obscuration. Instead of destroying and keeping clean what is given, conforming with what Paxson described as a “pasteurian culture” that is dominated by antiseptic politics,<sup>95</sup> MSA introduces noise. They multiply according to anonymity, or better, non-personhood. We are not disappearing, but only multiplying our non-personhood, our s/he/it, rendering the very sense of identity meaningless [Figure 28 a, b].

The scattering of self to the point of anonymity, the protection of anonymity to the point of obscuration and scattering, proposed by the MSA project, becomes a method of resistance. This resistance is not a dialectic that makes one “stand opposed to the order of things, but simultaneously avoids the risk involved with trying to overturn that order,”<sup>96</sup> as Rancière describes it. Rather, MSA’s notion of resistance actualizes Braidotti’s nomad – resistance generated from within the system. MSA performs an obscuration for the sake of protecting difference, sustaining the messiness and noisiness of multibodies:

In ecosystems, there are always winners and losers. There are always negotiations and exchanges of power. As we understand our human bodies as a multi-species, yes we will need to adapt our human politics to encompass our multi-species selves, and not just our individual selves. But more importantly, I hope the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a paradigm shift in the way we consider “the self”: I hope we start to understand that we, as humans, are part of (and not somehow outside of) the ecosystems that we contribute to and that support and sustain our lives.<sup>97</sup>

In this way, MSA creates ways of practicing microbiopolitics for multibodies. Without dialectical negation and within the system of multiple relations, they create spaces of continuous tension.

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<sup>95</sup> Heather Paxson, “Microbiopolitics,” in *The Multispecies Salon*, ed. Eben Kirksey, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2014), 115-121.

<sup>96</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 177.

<sup>97</sup> Personal communication with the MSA artist Emma Dorothy Conley, 13 July 2016.

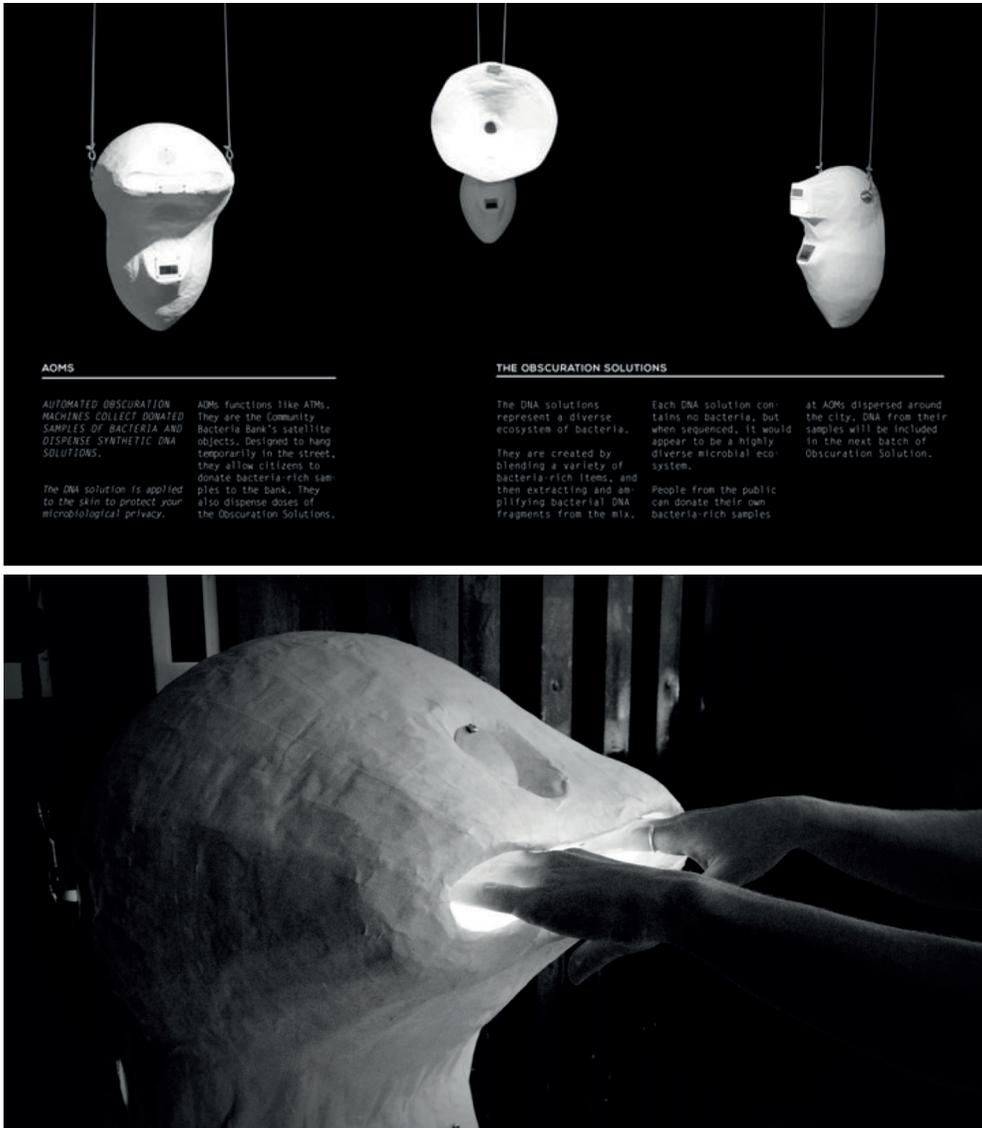


Figure 28 a, b. The Microbiome Security Agency, AOMS - *Automated Obscuration Machines*, 2015, <http://welcometothemsa.com/>, accessed 17 March 2017.

## 4.8 Agonistic Microbiopolitics

In order to exercise the lack of given boundaries, in order to resist the logic of negation, but also to simply affirm the negation of negation, a different logic of practice of multibodies is necessary. Rather than operating within dialectic and binary structures, we can simply make the multibody excessive. It requires the affirmation of differentiation itself, the multiplication of differentiation and intensities it produces. Simple, yet dynamic and continuous multiplication might be the new model of immunity that affect implies. Immunity as the multiplication of encounters, where we add, not in order to destroy what is there, but rather continuing adding to the point of creating a strength by alliance with difference. This is the logic of acceleration that Deleuze and Guattari introduced when thinking beyond advanced capitalism.<sup>98</sup> The acceleration of difference, which rather than producing new identities, transforms them into anonymity. In this way, such an acceleration would sustain transformation by inducing change and creating a resistance to the logics of identity.

The multibody of us, of multispecies alliances that generate our bodies, prove to foster not only conceptual imagination and ethical and political urgency, but a reality that is gradually proliferating new bodies and discourses. Through MSA's production of affects, the artists generate new relations and encounters in a way that, rather than adjusting to old categories, modulate and transform these categories. The MSA induces and sustains contaminations to the point that what was, can no longer be traced. In this way, through their problematization, situating the multibody in actual material practices, we can now outline what living with multiple might be – what the conceptual premises and material realities of the microbiopolitics of multibodies living within affect are.

The character of this microbiopolitics, exercised in the work of MSA, has the dynamic and open character of relationality that affect implies. It is reminiscent of the politics described by Chantal Mouffe as agonistic spaces. For Mouffe, affect can be used to overcome politics based on a dialectical sense of relation, on identity and rationalism as the only means of constructing society. Like Protevi, she calls for embedding the relation and encounter in politics. I argue, however, that her affective understanding of how politics should function is even more consequent for the understanding of affect when taking into account the MSA's practice of microbiopolitics.

Like Esposito, Mouffe's understanding of community goes against the logic of consensus that works on a belief in a rational agreement between seemingly opposing parties. The politics of consensus, which for her constitutes a threat to democracy, privileges a reason

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<sup>98</sup> "But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process," as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 275–76.

and priority of agreement based on a sense of identity. It simultaneously strengthens the non-rationalistic, emotional and *ressentiment* values that drive the need for given identity. As such, politics based on consensus fosters movements based on affections, which disregard everything that does not fit into the logic of “we,” into that which is already given. Similar to Braidotti’s nomadic theory, which pleads for a relocation of the centre in order to diminish the unitary vision,<sup>99</sup> Mouffe describes the act of prioritizing the centre as extremism. The privilege of centre that drives consensus politics, where rational subjects blur any antagonisms, becomes the perfect feed for the politics of resentment. Instead of actively mobilizing by shaping new identities, these movements of affections (based on affection alone) actually strengthen those that are old and given:

By limiting themselves to calls for reason, moderation and consensus, many democratic parties are showing their lack of understanding of the functioning of political logic. They do not understand the need to counter their adversaries by mobilizing affects and passions in a progressive direction. What they do not realize is that a democratic politics needs to have a real purchase on people’s desires and fantasies and that, instead of opposing interests to sentiments and reason to passions, it should offer principles of identification which represent a real challenge to the ones promoted by the right.<sup>100</sup>

By diminishing any role for passion – affects that originate outside of our bodies – in the political process, we construct a false understanding of politics based on a singular, unified image. By implementing the mechanism of affect as “moving forces of human conduct”<sup>101</sup> in politics, we implement the multiplicity of encounters. This understanding of the politics of affect is based on dynamism and temporary alliances (rather than on consensus) that would sustain transformations.

Depending on how affect is implemented, politics can take the shape of democratic pluralism. Rather than seeking to falsely diminish the hostility and tension that affect embodies, by subsuming everything into the “we,” democratic pluralism works based on the inscribed dynamic relationality. In such democratic pluralism, or what Braidotti calls *bios/zoë* egalitarianism, the existence of “we” depends on continuous encounters with the “outside”. In other words, the aim is not to overcome the antagonism and differences of affect with universalization and identification, but to transform it into what Mouffe calls agonism, and what we can now see as close to an open understanding of immunity as described by Haraway and Esposito.

Importantly, like the open sense of immunity, agonism should not be understood in the dialectical way, as the practices directed towards overcoming that which is opposite.

<sup>99</sup> “Having rejected the model of liberal individualism, in the form of a nonunitary and vitalist vision of the subject, nomadic theory does not enhance multiculturalism, which positions “others” as minorities to be tolerated at best. The emphasis falls instead on the necessity to relocate the center—the dominant subject position—in a process of becoming-minoritarian that also repositions the center-margin relationship. A becoming-minor of Europe.” Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, chapter 9: “Nomadic European Citizenship.”

<sup>100</sup> Chantal Mouffe, “Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy,” *Ethical Perspectives* 7, no. 2–3 (2000): 148.

<sup>101</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, revised edition (London/New York: Verso, 2006), 140.

Rather, Mouffe calls for maintaining the state of tension without pursuing its resolution. Each overcoming of tension is, for her, the construction of hegemony, which, despite its claim for priority on the basis of rational consensus, is always temporary and unstable. What is thus stable, what becomes the same, appears to be the constant flow of difference as tension, the flow of intensity as encounters – of affects.

For this reason, namely the necessity of affective politics, for Mouffe, art's practice already becomes a possibility for realizing the agonistic spaces of her pluralistic democracy. In step with Deleuze and Guattari, she defines art as producing affects and percepts that make art immediately political.<sup>102</sup> Art can, of course, fall into a capitalist machine, the possible effects of which we have seen in the previous section when discussing the representational approach to multibodies of the microbiome. A way out of the neutralization by capitalism is art's affective power; that, rather than perpetuating the ideas of the present hegemony, that is the present practice of sustaining the habits of identification, transforms and speculates on the new one, thus introducing spaces of tension and contaminations within encounters.

Mouffe sees a total resistance to capitalism in art's initiations of encounters, or what she calls, agonistic spaces. Such resistance, rather than taking the form of a more radical critique, that would, after all, only perpetuate the dialectic mechanism already embedded in the capitalist machine, works on the level of multiplication of intervention: "What is needed is widening the field of artistic intervention, by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism."<sup>103</sup> Importantly, such multiplication of spaces is not driven by the logic of looking for the common. As exercised in the work of MSA, multiplication is rather about initiating the chaos of encounters, to multiply that which can never be subsumed within the logic of identity.

In this way, as Mouffe argues: "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. Rather, it is to 'tame' those passions by mobilizing them towards democratic designs."<sup>104</sup> Although she uses the word "tame" when writing about the role of passion, evocative of Descartes' understanding of the necessity to control and govern passion, her explanation reveals the dynamism of her project. Mouffe wants to embed the dynamic and risky relationality that passions embody in politics. Rather than establishing consensus, in other words, rather than aiming at harmonious agreement, which, despite its claims, still works on the basis of exclusion, she calls for maintaining the very sense of encounter: "In a democratic polity, conflicts and confrontations, far from being signs of imperfection, are the guarantee that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism."<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> See Chantal Mouffe's lecture gave at *Staging Democracy, De Balie, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 3 June 2016*, [http://www.debalie.nl/agenda/podium/staging-democracy/e\\_9782252/p\\_11766021/](http://www.debalie.nl/agenda/podium/staging-democracy/e_9782252/p_11766021/), accessed 27 June 2016.

<sup>103</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *ART&RESEARCH A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, no. 2 (2007): 1.

<sup>104</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy," 149.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Yet, considering the work of MSA, which embeds its practice of multiplication of encounters as a means to resist the hegemony of our Pasteurian, antiseptic society, it seems that such microbiopolitics is only possible through art's practice. Can we think and practice the microbiopolitics of our multibodies outside art? Is art the only space where agonistic encounters are still possible?

What the contaminants of *Layer Cake* and of MSA have taught us is the necessity of constructing spaces of tension, of combining affect with impersonal logic, if we want to come close to the understanding and practice of multibodies that affect implies. Most crucially, however, what the discussed artistic contaminants of multibodies have been practicing is not only the need to change the practice, but also to change the logic behind that practice. What these two contaminants share and what is crucial in our analysis is their ways of practicing bodies within affect – through speculation, fabulation and the creation of spaces of tension driven by the logic of immunity.

Speculation is not a futurism of the impossible, but rather a multiplication, an acceleration of the possible, of connecting that which has not yet been connected and what might be. Such a speculative approach presupposes the porosity of bodies and their readiness to be affected, to encounter at any point, in any way, purely for the purpose of experimentation: to find what the body can do in a way that does not destroy s/he/it. Such a speculative approach calls for an ethical stand – for infectious ethics – for the ethics of contamination.