

An abstract painting with a vibrant, multi-colored palette. The top portion features a dark, horizontal band of green and blue, suggesting a horizon or a distant landscape. Below this, the composition is dominated by large, expressive brushstrokes in shades of green, yellow, and orange. A central, somewhat indistinct figure or form is visible, rendered in darker green and blue tones, appearing to emerge from the surrounding colors. The bottom half of the painting transitions into a warm, fiery red and orange, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall style is gestural and expressive, with a focus on color and form over realistic representation.

Immediation I

Edited by Erin Manning, Anna Munster,
Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen

Immediation I

Immediations

Series Editor: SenseLab

“Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains”

– A.N. Whitehead

The aim of the Immediations book series is to prolong the wonder sustaining philosophic thought into transdisciplinary encounters. Its premise is that concepts are for the enacting: they must be experienced. Thought is lived, else it expires. It is most intensely lived at the crossroads of practices, and in the in-between of individuals and their singular endeavors: enlivened in the weave of a relational fabric. Co-composition.

“The smile spreads over the face, as the face fits itself onto the smile”

– A. N. Whitehead

Which practices enter into co-composition will be left an open question, to be answered by the Series authors. Art practice, aesthetic theory, political theory, movement practice, media theory, maker culture, science studies, architecture, philosophy ... the range is free. We invite you to roam it.

Immediation I

Edited by Erin Manning, Anna Munster,
Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen



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Stamatia Portanova

Is Research for Humans Only? A Study of Waste and Value in Two Fab Societies

What was Hegel's ultimate project? According to Jean Hyppolite, it was the fusion of being and sense, without the intercession of any intermediate element (Hyppolite 1987: 4-5). This project led his whole philosophy to disclose the identity existing between the being of the world and human sense, a revelation constituting for him the highest form of experience.

The philosophical project of this article is to think beyond the dialectical union of the world's immediacy and human mediation, conceiving instead the possibility to blend both the rigidity of being and the limits of the human into a "becoming of the non-human." This blend will be achieved through the concept of 'immediation', a notion whose precise definition will be the aim of the whole article.

Introduction

Revealing the non-human elements and forces that run alongside and inside human beings is a recurrent aim of many theoretical and practical projects, most of which directly aspire to completely demolish the monolithic ontological partition standing between the passivity of raw matter and the agency of "vibrant life" (not only human life). In these projects, the definition of the non-human therefore aims at resolving the even larger dualism that still opposes inorganic matters to living organisms, a dualism promoting the biological predominance of the living over anything that "does not breathe." In fact, "the quarantines of matter and life," Jane Bennett writes, "encourage us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations" (2010: vii). These powers are for example suddenly brought to the foreground when the

trash generated by our production and consumption activities does not stay “away” in landfills but generat[es] lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane” (Bennett 2010: vii). So, she continues, “How to describe without thereby erasing the independence of [these] *things*?” (2010: xiii, emphasis added). First of all, if we really want to give back to matter its autonomous vitality, it would be best to question any residues of a Hegelian human mediation, not least the very notions of “thing” and “object” so densely populating Bennett’s and many other contemporary theories. Matter is composed of things, of objects (and therefore, inevitably, of subjects), but only in “our” objectified subjective picture of the world. It is thus an intention of this article to accept the neo-materialist suggestion of Bennett and others, and take seriously the vitality of non-human bodies, their capacity not only to intervene on human trajectories but also to develop trajectories of their own. At the same time, it will be indispensable to introduce and develop “immediation” as a concept that can start questioning the perception of these material bodies as lively (and, in the case of trash, potentially dangerous) “objects,” while disrupting the metaphorical relation (sometimes a fight) established on equal terms between “us people and them things.” Through immediation, the humanly limited understanding of experience as an elaboration of data (or “objects of perception and knowledge”) will be amplified by putting data in relation to feelings, as “It is by reference to feelings that the notion of [immediation] obtains its meaning.”¹ Feeling, in its turn, will not be simply considered as an emotional human content (joy, sadness, etc.) but, as Alfred N. Whitehead suggests, as that quantum of energy, that vectorial transfer of energy which physics exemplifies as a material mediation between bodies (Whitehead 1967b: 116). The material mediation of feelings between occasions of experience is a very different concept from the epistemological mediation of objective perception conceived by Hegel as a way to affirm the human predominance in the world. It is, in fact, a mediation which ultimately does not mediate between preexisting entities but “immediates” their constitution. Under this light, the aggressively democratic knowledge of the “trash-thing” as an objective datum or a matter of fact in life, and the accompanying emotions of fear or disgust elicited by it in the human subject, can be complemented by an “immediated feeling” of waste as energy in excess: as Georges Bataille would put it, not a danger for humans but a “luxury” in nature. In the light of the environmental emergency that is affecting the Earth, such luxurious and excessive definition of waste certainly offers itself to many criticisms. For this reason, an ethical explication of this idea will

be developed in the chapter. But the final outcomes of this conceptual turn should be: first, a capacity to think these issues without putting the human point of view at the centre, which still dominates questions of sustainable production and consumption, and then, as a consequence, the theorization of a different ecological sense.

This enterprise will be undertaken in what could be defined as a “con-fi” (or conceptual fiction) scenario: without preoccupying ourselves too much with distinctions between a scientific, an artistic and a philosophical point of view (at least for the present moment), let us imagine a research lab, equipped with test tubes and all the other usual paraphernalia, extending its activities over a time span of almost two hundred years, from the 19th century to our present. This setting might appear somehow awkward to the reader since spaces devoted to research in the Humanities are usually not conceived as labs inhabited by people wearing white coats and peering at colourful tubes. Instead, such spaces are often envisioned as populated by respectful browsers of printed pages that, for the majority of humans, are the functional equivalent of waste. A possible way to explain this unexpected lab scenario might be to consider waste as a substance for thought, a mental compound composition deriving from a basic “conceptual molecule.” The idea of a conceptual molecule, in its turn, transposes Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s notion of a “conceptual persona” into our times. Conceptual personae, the two thinkers explain, are points of view that set the conditions for a philosopher’s thought and introduce their concepts. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 51-75). Accomplished movements of thought can only take place through the acrobatics of these personae which, moving like crystals or germs of thought, become a thinker’s agents of enunciation. Adapting this idea to the present time, we can conceive immediation as a thought molecule (rather than a persona) to be synthesised, and from which it should be possible to generate a different feeling, perception and concept of waste. This adaptation allows us to leave the theatrical conception of philosophy as an animated plane populated by personae, transferring the very conditions of thought into a lab.

The whole experiment happens in three phases, which could also be thought of as the main moments characterizing the duration of philosophical research and writing: 1) collecting the informational specimens and synthesising them into a conceptual “immediation” molecule; 2) using the molecule to generate an “immediated” concept of waste; 3) immediately testing the results.



Figure 16. Verbal petri dish Image by Anna Munster

Phase 1: The Immediations Molecule

Our lab has several test tubes disposed on its sterile tables. Each tube has the name of a different "researcher" written on its label, and is filled with a not so rare, and yet quite precious material: they contain bits and pieces of information, conceptual and factual specimens ready to be analysed and synthesised into a complex molecule. The data, as soon as the tubes are opened, quickly pour out in the shape of volatile word assemblages resonating through the whole room. Now let us imagine ourselves in the act of collecting the verbal material from these tubes, and of inoculating it on a verbal petri dish (the blank page).

Once put on the dish, the informational fragments appear logically disconnected and stylistically dissonant, as they certainly do not reflect whole ideas or systems of thought. After analysing them, we

understand that the best reagent to be used in order to synthesise them into a coherent “immediation” molecule is the notion of “value”.

“Wikipedia tells us that waste is a human debt, towards nature and towards other humans. From Friedrich Nietzsche, we know that the first mental product deriving from debt-based modes of human relation is “value”, as the repayment of debt has always been the precondition for the determination of value. (Deleuze 2006: 135). Only Zarathustra, the personification of the “overman” (the one who goes beyond man) is able to donate his knowledge freely and to distribute it without asking anything in exchange. Therefore, he creates an infinite immeasurable value and no debt. (Nietzsche 2008: 54). For Marcel Mauss, on the other hand, every gift received (for example the matters that the Earth puts at human disposal for production and consumption) has to be repaid and becomes a debt (for example, in the form of waste); nevertheless, this compulsion to repay is felt by virtue of a “force” which is not humanly determined but contained in the thing given, a force which compels the recipient to make a return (Mauss 2011: 9-10). From its human determination through debt, value becomes a material energy coming from the gift itself. But, according to Nietzsche, there is a moment in human history when debt becomes unpayable, and this moment coincides with the birth of Christianity and the invention of “guilt.” In the Christian conception, guilt is the requirement of an infinite suffering by the human, which is only able to pay the interests on the new incalculable and transcendental value of debt (Nietzsche 2008: 157). In contemporary societies, the transcendental nature of the god-creditor (but also of the “planet-creditor,” the “society-creditor” and “the State-creditor”) has been acquired by money itself, or capital, the economic surplus value in the name of which, as Maurizio Lazzarato and David Graeber argue, debt becomes inextinguishable, and guilt is internalized (by individuals, but also by whole societies and States, or sovereign powers) (Lazzarato 2012; Graeber 2012). The moral basis of the debtor-creditor relation, as the most fundamental form of human mediation, is thus definitely put into question. The sharing economy or sharing culture, as a culture of the gift, on the other hand, is starting to delineate a new socio-economic model (or, as Matt Mason defines it, a “punk capitalism”) where the capitalist compulsion to profit is combined with higher moral values such as creativity and altruism (Mason 2008: 8). In fact, one of the features of this new environment (the “anarconomy,” as it has also been defined) is actually represented by so-called “innovation ecosystems,” a new business ecology which

replaces the old concept of the private firm, and in which the value of the company increases by including other companies, but also groups and individuals sharing their own products (Newfield 2013: 7). According to political theorist Michael Hardt, productive value is indeed maximized through sharing (Hardt 2014: 349). This maximization, though, can only happen through a considerable lowering of costs, thanks to the free work of many and despite the preoccupations of some (such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation) with the right way to find a value and compensate collective work (Mason 2008: 4). Beyond the evident confusions, beyond the differences of approach and even the superpositions between those who support free sharing in order to exploit and make a profit, and those who believe in its revolutionary potential to do away with capitalism itself, the main idea that sustains this system is that of the "commons." A common property (such as air, water, information, or Zarathustra's freely bestowed wiseness) has values of subtractability and excludability that can vary according to different social dispositions and needs (Verhoeven 2015). Since pre-capitalist antiquity, in fact, the Commons have been mainly conceived as non-excludable common goods (more specifically, "common lands") appropriated by autonomous self-managed collectives of land workers. It is interesting that the land of marginal value, not officially claimed by anyone and cultivated by landless peasants, on the other hand, has usually been defined as "waste land."

After the synthesis, the conceptual molecule, which in the end has emerged as a molecular concentrate of the "commons", seems to strangely reveal contradictory qualities: it is too densely packed with facts, ideas, concepts, from the measurement of value through debt, to the sharing culture as a problematization of value, from the birth of Christianity to land enclosures. At the same time, the molecule appears to be quite diluted, the notion of "waste land" as common unclaimed property of no value, for example, being too far from Nietzschean disinterestedness. The outcome of the first experiment phase is therefore not positive, if tested for the creation of a coherent and innovative conceptual molecule that can change our conception of waste: from a dangerous thing (Bennett's landfills), the latter simply changes its status and becomes a useless and recyclable piece of the environment (the waste land). Perhaps as a consequence of this conceptual limit, the sociopolitical and economic practice of the commons still conceives and produces trash as a valueless substance to be either discarded or put to new use (even if only in the form of "data

trash"). The commons, in the end, are not immediations, as they seem to be still motivated by a Hegelian desire to make the world coincide with human sense (or, in the same way, with human need).

What are the dominating aims and desires of scientific, cultural and economic research in contemporary societies? Running the risk of oversimplifying, we can recognise two tendencies that (as the sharing economy is showing us) are not necessarily oppositional but contrapuntal. On one hand, we see the constant urge to make more money and extract a surplus profit from all available resources, as a way to honour the divinity of capital. This is "capitalist desire." But on the other hand, as Tiziana Terranova writes, there is a parallel, increasingly spread-out tendency towards "acknowledging that growing food and feeding populations, constructing shelter and adequate housing, learning and researching, caring for the children, the sick and the elderly requires the mobilization of social invention and cooperation" (Terranova 2014: 388). We could call this "common desire." A consequence of this second social tendency is that all the main biological and inorganic materials (water, land, air, or "matter") are defined as collective human property, something to be well disposed of in order to avoid the current situation of resource shortage and distribution inequality, which are among the biggest problems faced by our species of human proprietors. In this process of material redistribution, "the many redefine what is necessary and valuable, and how to achieve it" (Terranova 2014: 388). Economically re-evaluating waste into a new source becomes then another necessity for the contemporary human.

In fact, to these two tendencies it is possible to add (at least) a third one: immediated desire. What if the above issues were addressed from a non-human-centred point of view, one where the universal man, the natural owner of matter and of the inalienable right to its property, was finally put into question? As already mentioned, many contemporary research projects are inspired by this kind of desire. An example, as we have seen, is certainly Bennett's aspiration to "highlight the active role of *nonhuman* materials" in our life, and her conceptualisation of a desire which is not simply of the theorist or of the researcher but of things themselves: thing-desire or, as she calls it, "thing-power" (Bennett 2010: 2). Going much beyond the recognisable identity of an object as being inextricably coupled to a subject, the thing appears when the object reveals its otherness, that never objectifiable depth from which, for example, a credit card suddenly looks uncanny to its

possessor, or a sardine can buried in a trash heap loses its muteness and says something to us. The ontological operation accomplished by such theory is, in other words, the equation of things to bodies, on the basis of their common tendency to persist (a definition which Bennett obtains from Spinoza's "conatus"). It is in this sense that Bennett's things stop being objects of human knowledge and begin to show what they can be and do by themselves: the independence of the "it" is not an epistemological effect of the human's cognitive failure or of the object's recalcitrance, but is an ontological definition of the thing's active capacities. Under this light, the world can be seen as a giant deposit of more or less useful, more or less dangerous, more or less powerful things (a vision in line with the whole conception of the "common good," which in its turn resonates with Mauss's anthropological analysis of things and their force or capacity to make us indebted ourselves). And yet, this "thingy" vision does not really free itself from a real anthropocentric tendency to affectively, cognitively and theoretically appropriate, economically exploit, use or reuse the world at will. In order to at least tend towards such liberation, we should question the very existence of such a thing as a sardine can, for example in the perceptual sphere of the fly quickly covering the trash heap with its little legs.

If we look more closely at these pre-supposed things through the lens of a speculatively materialist philosophy, we find that, as Whitehead writes, "The most general term 'thing'—or, equivalently, 'entity'—means nothing else than to be one of the 'many' which find their niches in each instance of concrescence" (Whitehead 1967b: 211). A thing is always part of a collective "concrescence," a term whose etymology comes from the Latin *concrecere*, to "grow together," and which is used by Whitehead to indicate process, or the way in which experience reaches its unity as "the many become one, and are increased by one." (Whitehead 1967b: 211) What all this means is that each instance or moment of experience is an individual thing, and ultimately there are no things but only concrescence, or acts of growing together. And what is it that grows together in experience, if not things? Recognising the abstract metaphysical nature of such analysis, Whitehead nevertheless argues that the apparent singularity of an entity (the vision of "this" or "that" sardine can) presupposes a plurality of components (physical and conceptual data, emotions and purposes, affective tones, a subject and object that emerge and do not preexist), none of which are to be exclusively attributed to the human or to the material element of the experience, but all belonging to the experience itself. At the same time,

these components are indistinguishable from their growing together, as they constitute not a thing but an actual occasion of experience, the real atomic entity in Whitehead's philosophy. In this sense, the overcoming of the human point of view is not given by an overlapping of human being and thinghood, or by the horizontality of the "us-it" relation. Rather, this overcoming coincides with an operation that transforms a multiplicity of objective data into an experiential complex "which is concretely one." According to Whitehead, this operation is performed by feeling, the latter being defined by the philosopher as a transference of quantitative emotional energy from cause to effect, or from past to present. In this way, Whitehead's cosmology makes the objectivity of materialism shift into an "organic realism," a point of view where a world of "fluent energy" finally replaces one of "static stuff." This fluent energy is constantly in transfer or, which means the same thing, is always felt, but this does not imply the existence of preexisting subjects and objects of feeling, but only a mutating energy, from which sentient subjects and objects emerge. It is important to remember here the non-anthropomorphic nature of feeling, at least in the Whiteheadian sense of the term: feeling, or prehension, is a non-human affective response, the immanent affective ground of all perceptions (physical prehensions) and thoughts (conceptual prehensions). The stone feels the water it falls into, and shifts its temperature and texture accordingly.

Returning to the conceptual specimens collected on our verbal dish, we can follow again the process of value-production which, from the notion of debt as a primordial human form of value measurement through to the necessity of repayment, goes through the accumulation of capitalist surplus value, and then through its redistribution in the sharing economy, to arrive to a commons-based idea of value re-production (in the sense of a production or creation of new values). This process of "valuation" (value creation) appears now, under our new organically realist lens, as a selection or a filtering of forms of energy, or feelings (from the preference for economic calculation to moral obligation) that shape the relational space between giving and receiving humans and given things. The same fluent energy takes on always different forms while flowing across that relation, progressively morphing from a feeling for money to a sense of community. At this point, we are finally able to synthesise a possible new definition for our philosophical molecule: immediation as the energetic metamorphosis, mutation or modulation, the shift in feeling that creates different occasions of experience, without the need for any human means but

only for that capacity to feel which is proper of matter itself. Conceiving the world as a process or a continuity of occasions linked through the energetic modulations of feeling, our immediation molecule can thus do away with the rigid Hegelian conception of the world as the historical evolution of a Pure Being perfectly coinciding with human consciousness and reason.

Phase 2: The Substance of Waste

One of the main examples of how immediation, or immediated desire, can be experienced, is found in Bataille's writings. In particular, his reconsideration of the problems of human production and consumption (or the economy) inside the larger framework of matter and its energetic expressions seems very much in line with our reflections so far (Bataille 1991: 20). As Bataille writes, the energy transmitted by the sun to the planet Earth is always in excess, as the most perfect embodiment of a disinterested donation. This energy is in any case too much, and "It is [only] to the *particular* living being, or to limited populations of living beings, that the problem of necessity presents itself" (1991: 23). Wealth, or energetic excess, characterises what Bennett calls "vital matter." This material vitality is deployed by living beings to feed their own growth and, Bataille explains, once this process is completed, the remaining energy is simply dissipated without any profit. The act of dissipation, which is performed by nature in several ways (for example through reproduction), seems to go against the basis of any rational economy and against the continuous implementation of productive forces. According to Terranova, in fact, "what characterizes a capitalist economy is that th[e] surplus of (...) energy is not simply released, but must be constantly reabsorbed in the cycle of production of exchange value leading to increasing accumulation of wealth by the few (the collective capitalist) at the expense of the many (the multitudes)" (2014: 387). And yet this cycle, she continues, leads nevertheless to the periodic widespread destruction of accumulated wealth in the form of psychic burnout, environmental catastrophe and war, the creation of hunger instead of satiety, food banks next to the opulence of the super-rich. Against these energetic blockages, what needs to be reclaimed is therefore not merely more power to produce and consume but also to dissipate, to waste energy, a luxury to be extended, or returned, to all beings. A democracy of waste, a luxurious

commons without any subjects and objects, and therefore without any residues of production and consumption.

But how could this possibly be realised, without falling back into the vicious circle of capitalist consumerism and recycling? How could new forms of experimentation work with the notion of dissipation but from a different, non-human and organically material, perspective? At this point, it would be interesting to try to understand whether the classical notion of economic value and productivity still enchainning all forms of research in the scientific, artistic and even philosophical fields (their possibilities and outcomes) to the imperial mechanism of utility (and debt) can dissolve itself into and through the notion of waste as a necessary luxury, without implying the squandering of quantities of fossil-fuels or solar power or of any other resource. Let us think for example of dance as a form of energy research. In dance (or, as Erin Manning describes it, the relational movement of at least two bodies), the energetic excess economically described by Bataille as material luxury and biological fuel, is intensively felt, as Manning writes, as a “preacceleration,” the feeling of the imminent motion waiting to take a direction, the body’s way to already and still vibrate in unison with the world created by each of its steps (Manning 2009b). This intensive flow, always active in the stillest of bodies as a not-yet motion, a motion on the verge of expression, passes between bodies, and is aesthetically modulated, or “wasted,” into the movements of a dance. In such research processes as tango, contact improvisation or even ballet, subjective utilitarian or functional consciousness is at some point postponed and all the elements involved (humans, clothes and shoes, floors, music, air) let themselves be simply instructed by the movements of energy, rather than by a predetermined aim. A different individuation of living and non-living ecosystems emerges, where the research activity acquires a lived and felt, rather than a merely performed and evaluated, nature. For the researcher, this implies beginning with a question that is a real opening, an interval that will activate and compose the process, and using that space to let the energy of bodies and movements take its own trajectory. Only in this way can research compose an infra- and trans-institutional ecosystem, an ecology of human and non-human experiences that are never externally informed but always immanently in-formation. The ontological and ethical presupposition of this conception is, indeed, that events have a privilege over products, objects and goods,

and experiential ecosystems have precedence over established economic systems.

Phase 3: Testing in the Labs

But the final aim of our research experiments, as already anticipated, is to contrapuntally examine two research labs, testing them against the immediated concept of waste as a common luxury, while also verifying the latter's ethical sustainability. In order to do this, it is now necessary to get out of the lab and direct our theoretical point of view onto some concrete examples. First, we will pay a visit to the Biohack Academy, an education programme of the Waag Society in Amsterdam that teaches its participants how to use biological applications and grow their own bacteria or fuels, food, filaments, fragrances, pharmaceuticals, and fungi "at home," using only Open Source hardware, a FabLab (Fabrication Laboratory) or a Maker/Hackspace.² With this kind of personalized biofactory, it becomes possible to experiment with the production of a biogas or the purification of water, realizing various potentials that diffuse the gift of biotechnological knowledge across an ecosystem wider than the institutional and corporate bio-industry, and beyond the capitalist logic of debt. In this open fabrication environment where information, tools and life are shared, we are curious to explore whether the materials themselves, air and water and information, are not simply put to use (or re-used) as commons or, in other words, as passive objects endowed with an economic or productive value, but become, with their properties and their energies, actively involved in the process.

In a bio-hack lab, the routine procedure comprises the gestures of thinking, testing, watching the results and sometimes, inevitably, failing. When we get to the lab, we meet a citizen scientist who is thinking about calorie restriction as a form of biological stress that could be used as a method for prolonging life. The scientist decides to test his thought on a colony of worms but, as it can often happen, the experiment fails, which means the death of the worms. Some other researchers would certainly burst into tears for such an event, since as we are told, they tend to do so even at the unexpected death of their pet bacterium. Nevertheless, once dead, the worms are disposed of in the appropriate containers and become waste.

After a few days, we attend an international Bio-Commons Lab organized by Rural Hub in Salerno (Italy), where a group of bio-hackers is discussing the important issue of the Bio-Commons (to be intended either as a potential institute or simply as a license to be designed, or as both), in which digital commons (hardware and software) and biological knowledge are combined as free material to share in a legally protected way.³ The digital infrastructure of the Bio-Commons, it is collectively agreed upon, needs to be open source, democratic, efficient, universal, decentralized, convenient, and accessible to everyone, while also being safe and secure. But at some point, someone shifts the direction of the discussion, and starts to talk about patents as weapons, or as a form of protection against multilateral corporate and competitive interests: not willing to take risks and be exploited, they support the idea of decreasing the openness of the whole project. We do not understand: is all this about market survival, or about undermining the system and providing free bio-technologies for everyone? This kind of lab environment (Salvatore Iaconesi, who is also present at the meeting) explains, is in fact often inhabited by a population of practitioners such as makers and the new digital craftsmen of the DIY, hackers and collaborative innovators, engineers, designers, artists, scientists, all people that gravitate from the world of corporate business to that of alternative organisations. A whole creative class which has already been absorbed by the industry, as "Creatives are transformed in precarious research labs (startups, incubators, fablabs) [that] typically promote optic fibre, sensors, robots and all of the other products, services and approaches of the industry financing the initiative" (Iaconesi 2015). Despite the increasing usefulness of bio-tech hacking, the people involved in the research fall into the ambiguous in-between zone of the capitalist start-up and in the too human logic of value expressed by open source culture.

In another room, Ruediger Trojok from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology is talking about the bad management of the antibiotics distribution by corporate pharmaceutical companies, and about the issue of increasing bacterial infections. It is prospected that, with a Bio-Commons license protecting and regulating the private use of wetware, hardware and software, (almost) everyone should become able to grow their own personalized phages (antibiotic cells) at home. At this point, we remember the dead worms left in the bin as victims sacrificed to the health-war: even in a bio-hack lab, it is still an issue of "us" against "them with a biological status proportionate perhaps to their size." A

neo-materialist war between bodies, objects, things that are more or less frightening and dangerous to each other. When looked at from this point of view, bacteria therefore seem to be operating a rebellion or “a revolution without politics” in labs, a revolution without subjects and without principles of decision. We are increasingly surrounded by bacteria, we are told, and “[I]n the moment of right/s the commons [the universal human right to health, as the justifying foundation for research and experiments of all kinds] is already gone in the movement to and of the common that surrounds it and its enclosure” (Harney and Moten 2013: 18). In this situation, the main preoccupation will need to consist in avoiding (and potentially curing) that thing which is an illness or, in other words, the attack of a collective aggregate of bacteria.

The inefficacy of such an objectivist vision in the biotechnological research on illness is well identified by a more general statement by Latour. According to him:

It is generally accepted in the various sciences dealing with complex collective behaviour [such as biology] that there exist some fundamental differences between the individual and the aggregate levels.... In 2-LS social theory, the most current approach to handling the distinction between macro-structures and micro-interactions consists in establishing a first level of individual entities, then adding to them a few rules of interaction, in order to observe whether the dynamics of interaction lead to a second level, that of aggregation, which has generated enough new properties to deserve to be called a “structure,” that is, another entity for which it is possible to say that “it is more than the sum of its parts.” (Latour et al. 2012: 2, 6)

Taken individually, bacteria are things without rights, easily transformable into waste, and not even easily recyclable. Collectively, they become a dangerous object to be fought without wasting any time. And yet, “By presupposing that there exist two levels, [biologists, like all “social” scientists] might have solved too quickly the very questions they should have left open to inquiry: What is an element? What is an aggregate? Is there really a difference between the two?... To dramatize the contrast, we,” Latour writes, “claim that there is more complexity in the elements than in the aggregates, or stated a bit more provocatively that ‘The whole is always smaller than its parts.’ ” (2012: 2). To the scientific approach based on ‘individual-aggregate’ or ‘micro-macro’

object dualisms, Latour opposes Tarde's alternative notion of the monad, neither a part nor a whole but a point of view. Each monad is an envelope encapsulating a content, or a series of properties. In this sense, there remains no real ontological difference between a person, a place, an institution, an event, a society and, we could add, a bacterium and an illness because, "In our model agents do not interact with one another, ... they 'are' one another, they 'own' one another, since they share many attributes or properties" (2012: 7). What we materially share with bacteria, what we lend and borrow from them, is the Bataillean idea of an energetic surplus to dissipate. By recognizing our positioning on this common field, it becomes possible to shift our point of view to an immediated conception of biological research. From the focused visualization of the scientist looking into a microscope to have a clear vision of the minuscule individuals, and then to be able to prevent or fight their collective behaviour, we can deviate our attention towards that energetic flow which runs between us and them, and which (as bacteria seem to know very well) needs to be wasted in some way. For example, through those useless bodily movements we humans call dance. Do any bio-hack labs exist which possess this kind of sensitivity? Are they willing to open another possible future for science? The first test ends at this point, with the idea of the bio-hack lab as a research environment where human conceptions of value and waste are still tied to the notion of the commons, and therefore not immediated enough. The potential for this kind of research to develop new sensibilities is, nevertheless, enormous.

After our bio-hacking incursion, one day we encounter by chance a blog post that catches our interest. The post was written by Paolo Venturi, and discusses some crucial aspects of sharing culture (Venturi 2014). In particular, it explains how instrumentality is one of the main dimensions on which the practice of sharing (such as the information and bio-material sharing of bio-hack labs) is often based, while the possibility for non-instrumental actions becomes increasingly scarce. And yet, the article goes on, what is generally considered as "wellbeing" for the human species appears as directly proportional to the quantity of time employed in non-instrumental activities, a time which, as social research is paradoxically finding out, is constantly decreasing. Corroborated by a series of well documented and referenced sociological studies, the article rekindles our interest in the idea of a non-functional movement and, consequently, of a non-instrumentally spent time. And it comes to our mind that the second location for the

testing of our luxurious concept of waste could be the Immediations event of the SenseLab European Hub.⁴

This event (which is still running) is comprised of a series of micro-events held in different locations and connecting different practices. The micro-events are part of a wider scheme, an international project initiated by the Montreal-based SenseLab. Every SenseLab event, in the words of Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, is a research-creation event in which the coming together of people from different backgrounds happens alongside conceptual work and creative practice.⁵ The event does not have any predetermined goal, but differently from the happening of improvisation as an unconstrained interaction, the experiential format of these events is given by the respective ways of coming together, of people but also of practices, concepts and techniques, all coworking along a reciprocal sensitivity to the properties of what is occurring. In this spirit, at each of the European SenseLab meetings, the preexisting tendency has been to create the conditions, through a series of enabling conceptual constraints (such as thinking the urban fabric in a non-metaphorical way, or working with water from a philosophical and micropolitical perspective), for a new experiential time of the city to emerge through the encounter. Preceding the actual physical meetings, the main activity has always been constituted by skype-facilitated reading sessions. Practical potential and material knowledge have then been woven to the conceptual inputs and to the movements of thought elaborated during these sessions and, once in locus, they have become something more than they were intended for, helping to develop propositions for collaborative techniques. An example: in preparation of the Zurich get together, which was held in April 2014, from the reading of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* we moved to thinking about the rhythm of water and of words, and then to conceiving subjectivity as always being in a fluid state of subjectivation. From the same text, we also learnt about the vital role, in every subjectivation process, of those small moments and tiny events which Deleuze and Guattari define as "haeccities" (1987: 260-265). And then, in Zurich, something happened. Now, since another crucial constraint for SenseLabbers is to remain outside of the logic of reporting and representation, instead of trying to literally describe what happened we will simply sketch one of the little moments or "haeccities" that occurred while we were there.

Walking in a city garden, one day we encounter a red rope sculpture, a big and intricate net catching both the attention and muscles of its



Figure 17. Red rope haecceity. Image, Stamatia Portanova

viewers with an immediated gesture. As soon as we see it, we start climbing, playing with it and taking pictures, putting it all of the different uses that such a versatile object can lend itself to. Apart from its actual usefulness (because entertaining children and adults, and stealing them a smile is certainly not a minor therapeutic task nowadays), the main property gradually emerging is that of an incredible capacity to adapt itself to our various bodies, each with its own size, shape, weight, height, elasticity, training, agility.... All this might not sound like anything of particular value. But let us think of the many motions and postures that could develop from such an encounter, from standing in freeze frame to be photographically captured, to walking and bending and jumping, and then let us think of all the feet and hands and knees and brains mobilized. Let us also look at all this through the eyes of a whole-day-sitting-alone-in-the-lab researcher, and let us imagine their wonder: a lot is actually going on. The mood changes, even the most blocked and immobile ones start to feel acrobatic in their brave attempts at coming to terms with the many hidden possibilities of elasticity. Suddenly, the city is transformed into an experimental motion lab. A choreographic fab(ulatory)lab. After leaving, we realize it was neither the rope nor us, but the whole spacetime woven for the duration of the event that

really bounced and stretched and floated, giving to that corner of the city for that moment a different environmental configuration. The memory, of course, stays with us, inciting many reflections, allowing for the technique of philosophical research and writing to take on new intensities and new forms. Thus, in the second lab society, attention has moved from the observation and handling (and appropriation) of organisms/bodies as isolated things, to a more horizontal relationality that goes through the idea of energetic dissipation and practices of bodily movement.⁶ Would it be possible (and desirable) to connect these two different sensibilities in some way, in a sort of future lab to come?

Conclusion

Our experiment started with a philosophical thought, and with the same tone it must conclude itself, while also continuing our reflection on the philosophical value of waste in research. From the neoliberal pragmatism of the useful, of scientific research that has the production of economic and cultural value as its real final aim, we have arrived to the event of playing with a rope. In this vision, the economically-conceived waste of actions, or of thoughts, or of time (as with philosophy itself, that great time-waster, and the only mode of thought perhaps brave enough to suggest a combination of biotechnological research and choreographic experimentation), does not need to be redeemed or reevaluated. On this point, it is of particular interest to think of Manning and Massumi's idea of a "pragmatics of the useless," giving value to what is not already valued as productive in contemporary capitalist societies (Manning and Massumi 2013). In particular, it is possible to think of the notion of a "wasted effort," and of the delicious Dionysian joy that comes with it. It is of course not a lack of value that is attributed in this sense to actions and efforts, but what is at stake is a rethinking of value in itself, and a questioning of the conventional economic and moral senses we, as human beings, usually give to it. The useless, as Massumi explains, is never passive and nihilistic, but already reveals the value, the force of research as an open, speculative, non-object-oriented and imaginative process. This kind of approach unleashes the intensity of research as a non-human-centred or non-human-mediated process, a process that, like philosophy itself, is only attached to the joy of being moved by thought.

What is important to highlight is the fact that pragmatic uselessness in research events is the plane from which new modes of subjectivation

and of relationality can very concretely and usefully emerge. From this kind of lab society, in fact, comes a significant replacement of the key notion of debt with that of a disinterested gift, which is now intended as the disinterested act of paying the right attention to differences, to the various bodies and properties implied in all our relations, those same bodies and properties that still represent a hindrance for contemporary algorithmic and financial capitalism, and are at best to be simply dismissed, or eliminated as waste (think of the tons of local fruits thrown away each year in the name of profit, and think of all the wasted efforts of unknown artists trying to produce some work and to survive with no financial support). “Waste” is really such, of course, only in markets, where the very notion of value is totally submitted to a logic of quantitative in-equivalence and debt repayment: would it be possible for the unknown dance performer to repay the services of the prestigious doctor with her work? Under this light, all kinds of play with what is excessive and wasted (wasted efforts, wasted matters, wasted ideas), generously bestowing it without expecting anything in exchange, become vital not only for political critique but for creation, and therefore research (intended in the sense of an excessive and Dionysian political economy, as that conceived by Bataille). In view of a radical redefinition, as in Terranova’s words, of what is necessary and valuable. Or, in Manning’s words, “To remain as unintelligible to instrumental ways of working as possible.... In a sense, we have to be our own intercessors, our own free radicals, making sure that we don’t get bogged down in what we think is expected of us, but build instead on the force of what we can barely imagine...”⁷

Notes

1. The original text from which this citation was extrapolated uses the term “immediacy” instead of “immediation.” The term has been replaced on purpose, in order to highlight the semantic conjunction of the two concepts in this context. For the original, see Alfred N. Whitehead’s 1978: 155.
2. This Academy was not attended by the writer in person. All the relevant information and data (such as about the worms experiment) were collected by following the online lectures uploaded on their video channel, available at <https://vimeo.com/channels/biohackacademy>
3. The Bio-Commons Lab was attended personally by the writer, and all the information presented in this article was collected through direct participation and discussion.

4. I attended the Immediations event of the European SenseLab, and all the information presented in this article was collected through direct participation and online discussion.
5. See the video of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi's presentation for Public Humanities at Western "For a Pragmatics of the Useless: Propositions for Thought" (2013).
6. The word "society" is used here in the sense Whitehead refers to: a nexus of entities with a social order, not limited to the human, but even comprehending the physical states of matter. For a definition, see Whitehead 1978: 34.
7. This quote was extrapolated from one of Manning's posts on the online SenseLab hub.