

Dividual Network

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The time we are living in seems to be particularly relevant in terms of our questioning of categorization. Maybe it is because the internet is exposing more and more of the infinite spectrum of life and lifestyles that has been so denied in Western Modern dogmas of thought. It has always been convenient to implement hierarchies and categorization as a way to understand differences, but in effect, this practice has robbed everything that exists within this framework of its right for more autonomous, natural, wild and *enchanted* ways to “be” and “engage”.

Enchant-ment (*n*) a feeling of great pleasure or delight; the state of being under a spell, magic. ¹

In most recent years, anthropologists like David Abram, Nurit Bird-David, Eduardo Kohn, Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, Philippe Descola and Tim Ingold have set out on a journey to re-think and re-frame “animism” as we understand it in the Modern Western world. “Animism” is a name used by Modern Anthropologists to talk about the world view of indigenous peoples, which generally encompasses a relational practice where humans maintain respectful relationships with other *human* and *nonhuman* entities. As a way to “intervene in current debates surrounding capitalist crises, climate collapse, indigenous lifeways and anthropogenic extinctions,” they now have introduced into the practice of anthropology “a *celebration* of the animist worldview as a salutary alternative to the processes of objectification, ex-

ploitation and alienation that characterize humanity’s relationship with nature in the Anthropocene.”²

Animism in its various forms has consistently conceived of the world “*not* as a dualistic, hierarchical relation between ensouled humans and other non-souled beings and objects, but as a *relational meshwork* of variously animated, ensouled, and agential persons...Animism attributes importance to categories of supernatural beings whose individual members are attached to particular places and persons or resident in particular creatures and are *autonomous* in their dealings. In such a system, each human encounter with the supernatural must work itself out as *a distinct episode*.” ³

This effort by anthropologists to bring to light these qualities presents the potential for us Modernists to see our own animistic tendencies. These realizations can allow us to understand Animism not as just something that indigenous people believe in, but almost as if it is something that is inherently part of being a living human; un-shake-off-able. While recognizing our own animistic tendencies, perhaps we can also identify how they shape our world and work to re-enchant that which has been severely disenchanting.

When learning about the efforts of New Animism to re-enchant the Western Modern world, I have found significance in the theory of *becoming* by Deleuze and Guattari to allow us to explore the molecular amoebic nature of our selves and how this again re-affirms, but to an almost anarchist degree, the vast actuality of our social, emotional, psychological and physical states of being, and their ever changing tendencies.

The theory presents a social reality similar to the Animist meshwork, but is referred to as a rhizome; the actors of this rhizome-meshwork are not molar stable bodies but highly influenceable machinic forms. *Becoming* encourages you to *forget you are human, forget you are a tamed Modern human. Instead, you are a machine with a beating heart and*

other functioning organs, and so is your pet dog, and that singing bird... In a block of *becoming*, hierarchy is absent so that relations are closer and interactions are highly transformative. What interests me is this theory's ability to not only speak to the New Animism anthropologist's goals to link the modern persons to pre-modern persons, but to explore the concept of animism's relational meshwork from the perspective of two philosophers who have existed their whole lives in the Modern world, and explain it in a way that is mechanical and at least somewhat understandable through a Modernists lens.

What does it feel like to *become*? *Becoming* was originally introduced in their text *1000 Plateaus* in 1980, and has had the potential to create similar effects to our view of social relations as a bomb would do to any solid structure. It disregards the unit in exchange for the amoeba, it replaces the "individual" with the "dividual". *Becoming* asserts that nothing or no-one is ever complete, that our state of existence is constantly being altered by our experiences, that we are merely a part in whatever relationship (also referred to as a *machinic assemblage*) that we are engaging with at any given moment. As opposed to our usual interactions that are primarily governed by established rules and hierarchies of society, *becoming* is made up of infinite interactions that are governed primarily by the will to surrender and create through desire, impulse and intuition. These interactions are understood less as a distinctly social or professional exchange, and more so as machines made up of parts, that are always affected by each other, working to produce something together. Despite this phenomenon being greatly under-recognized as a common occurrence in the social relations of our species, the implications are undeniably present. They are present in our submission to sadness, to love, to joy, to lust, to anger, to passion, to daydreams...they are present in all that is *undefined* and better yet, *undefinable*. According to this theory, there is an absolute need to detach from our learned behavior and conscious thought processes and submit to the present experience in order to access the creative

capacities of the machinic assemblage. It's a way of tuning in and being sensorially immersed and affected by our experiences. Our species' inventive qualities have always only been realized through moving past the limitations of the structures around us; only by engaging in these *becomings* can something *new* be born.

There is this one text that I wrote in 2016 that I called *The Creative Practices of the Machinic Assemblage*. The text entertained the possibility for this concept of *becoming* to be a more widely acknowledged phenomenon; I chose to apply it to the experiences that come with the production and consumption of art. I guess, when you really think about it though, art does not necessarily need to fit into the confines of painting, drawing, etc. In reality, art is more of an emotional investment for a higher form of whatever you are doing; a striving to push the boundaries. For instance, of course, a mechanic can be an artist, so can a chef...What it comes down to is a willingness to assume a particularly potent level of autonomy and agency. But for the sake of focus, I am zooming in and thinking more about art with a capital A.

I see two main ways to consume art; there is the objective (*expressing or dealing with facts*) consumption run by the material commodity of art, and there is the subjective (*arising out of one's perception of one's own states and processes*) consumption of the works essence. There is the monetary value and then there is the invaluable contribution of experience. The art as a commodity equates to nothing more than any other object of capitalism. Art from this perspective is used as an investment, decoration, entertainment, etc., serving as a backdrop within the sustaining proliferation of things. Monetary is limiting perceptually; it flattens the world to a world of fully conscious, objective consumption, a consumption that can even be quite violent, like factory farmed animals made just to serve the industry; purchased, killed and eaten, just to become a part of the consumers body (of collected work).



Image of an auction house from the perspective of a piece of artwork. ⁴

With art as a commodity, the humans of the Modern world are still in a safe space as the masters in control of the autonomy and agency of material. In this world, they are allowed to remain unchallenged within the comfort zones of the familiar, continuing to be governed by the thing we know best, capitalist value and commodity exchange. The influence of the market on any artists career is unavoidable, and this has spawned very interesting creative positions in its own right, but I find that it could be worth setting aside the status of the work as a commodity in order to investigate the potentials that lay within the experience of art subjectively. Of course, this brings up the complex question: *where does subjectivity end and objectivity begin?* It can be very hard to tell, because these two approaches are highly intertwined in various different ways. For instance...isn't subjective often influenced by objective? Like, yes, a fake Rembrandt still looks and feels like a Rembrandt, but the *fact* that Rembrandt himself stretched that canvas and lay that paint is remarkably important to the experience of looking at the work. One thing that wouldn't cross my mind as a subjective viewer however, is that the object I am looking at is worth however much money it is worth...I guess that would be the difference there, the limited focus of market value...

I believe that through investment and exploration into the more subjective contributions (not focused on market val-

ue) that occur through production and consumption, art can be used to discover and reach new potentials as a device to challenge the hierarchical positions that man continues to maintain over material and nature, and provide more potent avenues for *enchantment* in our Modern societies...

When considering arts relation to autonomy, "the quality or state of being self-governing"⁵ and agency, "the power that is used for something to be achieved by a person or thing"⁶, it would be relevant to take into consideration the four main players. There is the *consumer* of the artwork, the *artwork* itself, the *environment* surrounding the artwork and there is the *artist* of the artwork, each with their own capacity to exercise autonomy and agency over how that work can be read.

Semiological or interpretive theories of art have always assumed that works of art are vehicles that actively present slightly obscure meanings through signs and symbols, which the spectators decode on the basis of their familiarity with the semiological system used by the artist. Somehow, the responsibility is very often in the hands of the artist or the artwork alone to captivate, entertain, and speak with relatively rational coherence to the viewer. But not many have considered the autonomy or agency of the consumer. When viewing a work of art, how important is the autonomy and agency of the consumer? Is the effort put forth mutual between the consumer and the work? Or does the consumer simply assume a more passive role, taking it in, liking it or disliking it, and then moving on to the next one on the wall? I guess that does depend on the role of the viewer; there are many that do engage actively, like theorists, critics, peers, collectors, curators. Those consumers then tend to actively animate the artwork through sustaining conversations after their interaction with it. There are others that perhaps engage passively, and then there are those that for some reason or another become completely and even unexplainably swept up in the experience of being with the work, without any kind of professional or even personal goal in mind.



Madeline sitting in museum with painting of Carlotta ⁷

In the movie *Vertigo* by Alfred Hitchcock, Madeline becomes transfixed by the painting of Carlotta in the museum; Madeline's bouquet is the same as Carlotta's in the painting, and her hair is worn in the same style. It seems as though her relation to the paintings, or the image in the painting, causes Madeline to enter into a block of *becoming*, as if she is under a spell of unnatural participation which leads her to attempt suicide by jumping into the river. But this painting of Carlotta is not particularly special or different in any way; it is Madeline's personal subjectivity that initiates her experience of *becoming* and engage in an enchanted machinic assemblage with the painting.

There of course are movements like Op Art and painters like Albers or Rothko that attempt to play with our senses and logics to create a sort of mesmerizing experience, but they seem to ultimately reach the ceiling as far as engagement by being packaged into the easily consumable boxes of Art history. What if an artwork extended beyond these boxed-in constraints of a "movement of painting" and was able to resist categorization? Or at least deny and one assigned agency...Dada and Surrealism did understand this to a greater degree by assuming areas on the peripheral of the art-with a capital A-world. It was even known that Duchamp deliberately kept the meaning in his work vague, inviting the reader

to take part in in-concludable reflections on its meaning. In this way, they were able to resist some of the limitations of modern categorization and in turn more effectively create the possibilities for *becoming* and *enchantment*, at least until the museum got ahold of them...

When contemplating blocks of *becoming* of the machinic assemblage and applying it to the experience of consuming art, one can assert that in fact, the quality and type of experience that is generated through consuming a work of art, whether it be video, painting, sculpture, installation, performance, etc. is determined by the autonomy and agency of the piece itself, as well as the consumer and various elements of the environment. The enchantment that takes place is a result of the *becoming* of the machinic assemblage, which has the potential to even alter the different elements at play indefinitely.



Dancers of The Rite of Spring, Paris, 1913 ⁸

The phenomenon of the 1913 premiere of Stravinsky and Nijinski's ballet *The Rite of Spring* in Paris, France was particularly telling of how a creative production can bring about a *becoming*. The music was as startling as the strange jerky movements of the choreography, causing an uproar in the audience made up of members of the bourgeois class. The various aspects that made up the experience triggered the audience to fight like animals in ways they could not control. In this moment, the various elements that made up the production of *The Rite of Spring* became animate, influen-

tial matter, with autonomy and agency of its own, capable of communication that in moments was gentle and quiet, and then suddenly loud and confrontational, demanding respect and attention. The audience was not only consuming, it was also being consumed.

The model of the machinic assemblage asserts that it is essentially the interaction between the various components that make up the experience, and without each of these, the machinic assemblage becomes a different machinic assemblage, with new influential factors. This dynamic can certainly be more evident for those who are more conscious of their experiential intake. For instance, say you see a sculpture at its original site in Egypt and then, a few years later, see the same sculpture in the British Museum. The sculpture may be the same, but the two experiences of seeing the sculpture are very different. Many things come into play here: the object itself, the history behind the object, the location that it is currently in versus its original home and your conscious knowledge as well as unconscious feeling of what is behind what you are looking at. Perhaps you are excited to have this object placed within the Western narrative of Egyptian history, or perhaps you feel you are experiencing the result of a kidnapping...

Another example; take the experience of seeing a painting in real life versus seeing an image of the painting in a book. Regardless of it being the same image, dreamed up and created by the same artist, representing the same time period, most of the time, one would typically assume that seeing the work in real life is a more enriching experience. The texture of the brush strokes, the size of the canvas, realizing that the object before you is authentic, are all live components which are absent when seeing a picture of a painting in a book. Reproductions of artworks in books can, however, also present interesting experiences of course, depending on the various components surrounding that particular image at that particular time you are seeing it. In the machinic assemblage,

the work is not the sculpture that you are looking at, the work is the experience generated by you, the artwork, and the rest of the varying components that make up that specific experience, that specific event, and with every change that breaks the continuity of the active machinic assemblage, a new one immediately begins.

I have touched briefly on the machinic assemblages that are generated by the interaction between the consumer and the work of art, but it is not only the consumer who can benefit from the art experience in this way. Of course, there are also the machinic assemblages that happen between the artist and the artwork during the various stages, from concept to production to exhibition. Every machinic assemblage creates a *becoming* which is contagious and involuntary. Being swept up in a *becoming* can take hold of any consumer of a work of art in varying degrees depending on the other contributing factors, however it does differ significantly from the *becoming* of the artist, who imbues the work with its initial form of life. Deleuze and Guattari mention the writer: “if the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a *becoming*, writing is traversed by strange *becomings-insect*, *becomings-wolf*, etc. Many suicides by writers are explained by these unnatural participations, these unnatural nuptials”.⁹ They mention Virginia Woolfe, who “experiences herself as a troop of monkeys, a school of fish, according to her variable relations of *becoming* with the people she approaches”.¹⁰ It brings to mind Jack Torrance in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*, who’s sanity becomes compromised; the film alludes consistently to the process of writing as the culprit.



Jack Torrance at the Overlook Hotel ¹¹

There is also the story *The Fable of Pygmalion and Galatea* of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where Pygmalion, being a gifted sculptor, resolves from women to devote life to his passion, sculpting, only to fall in love with his own sculpture.



The Fable of Pygmalion and Galatea of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* ¹²

With Animism and its meshlike, boundary-less relational plane, and *becoming* with its rhizomatic machinic assemblages, there is the indefinite factor of *detrterritorialization* that takes place. A suspension of what we think to be “true” in order to open our minds to other possibilities. Significantly, throughout the history of art, the aim has always been that of *detrterritorialization* either by the revival of our perception of form, or by a liberation of form, or even both simultaneously. When a painter represents a bird, it is not only a *detrterritorialization* of the artist, as they need to suspend the idea of this bird as a living thing with functioning organs and take up the idea of this bird as a series of forms and colors of which they must copy to the canvas using tools and the same colors. When a viewer sees a painting of a bird

and says “what a beautiful bird”, of course, what they are really looking at is a series of forms of colors that have been put in place precisely enough to represent a living creature endowed with functioning organs. In this case, although the viewer/consumer understands, based on their preconceived knowledge, that this is really just paint on canvas, the viewer chooses to *become detrterritorialized*, suspending what they know in reality to see things differently, to become enchanted, even for just a moment. When one becomes *detrterritorialized*, when one is suspended in a *becoming* between the established values of their origin and whatever values will be effected by the *becoming* after, there is no history. Any real block of *becoming* is an anti-memory with also no distinct vision of the future. In order for Virginia Woolfe or any other writer or artist to *become* through production, in order for the viewer to *become* through consumption, there must first be a severance of oneself from their established values, ethics, prejudices and practices, in order to make room for something new. “There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single assemblage, operating in the same assemblage: packs as masses and masses as packs... how would lines of detrterritorialization be assignable outside of circuits or territoriality? Where else but in wide expanses, and in major upheavals in those expanses, could a tiny rivulet of new intensity suddenly start to flow? What do you *not* have to do to create a *new* sound?”¹³

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