Fungi Media:

A Post-Internet Performance of Bodily Mutations as an Enactment of Alternative Sexualities

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PhD in Media and Communications

I, Piotr Bockowski, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signature:

Date: 21 November 2021

Abstract

This theory-practice PhD project investigates post-Internet performance art, i.e. art which is visually inspired by mutations of human bodies on the Internet, to stage a form of bodily decomposition in real-life spaces. As a framing device for my thesis, I propose the concept of 'fungi media'. This concept builds on the vital role of fungi in the decomposition of individual organisms' bodies to highlight the role of media, including the Internet, in breaking down and reassembling human and nonhuman bodies into complex ecologies. Body performance that engages with fungi on a visual and material level is used in this project to explore the possibility of enacting alternative sexualities and non-normative lifestyles within the present-day context of the decomposing world. Those alternative sexualities are described in the thesis as 'fungosexual'. This formulation repositions queer sexualities in the context of the original meaning of the term 'queer', which is 'rot', and which stands for a fungi-induced process of decomposition. With this, I explore the foundational importance of rot for both breaking down and sustaining bodies, relationships and life as such. Using the mutability of fungal life as a model, I also look at life's mutation beyond sexual reproduction and beyond binary gender roles.

In line with its theory-practice aspect, the PhD has a dual methodology. On the one hand, it uses a humanities framework (drawn from philosophies of posthumanism and new materialism, media theory, and theories of sexuality and the body) to engage, critically and creatively, with bioscience research into microbes and fungi. On the other, it mobilises the concept of 'fungi media' for my own performance art and curatorial work. The performance space used for my research, which is a London squat inhabited by both artists and fungi, serves as an important actor in these performances. My overall aim with this thesis is to position bodily mutation unfolding on and off the Internet as a performative form of dark vitalism. This philosophical-artistic approach offers strategies for urban dwelling, which transcend normative family and sexual life to embrace a hybrid fungosexuality.

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Introduction: Key Concepts and an Outline of Practice

Mediation, Mutation and Decomposition

My research in this thesis examines how our understanding of human sexuality and human body changes through the processes of mediation unfolding at the intersection of nonhuman life and the Internet. I analyse performances and simulations of human subjectivity, as well as digital image manipulation strategies that generate novel visions of bodily and sexual mutations, in the context of new materialist philosophies – especially those focusing on dark materialities and posthumanism. Such philosophies employ the concept of the material dynamics of nonhuman life as a speculative tool to engage with technological mediations. There is a radical nonhuman dimension to the performances of bodily mutations on the part of some Internet users. I am interested in examining those mutations as a way of probing various new possibilities of life, in its corporeal and sexual dimensions. With a view to this, I turn to fungi as a conceptual device which offers some crucial insights into the generativity of living matter. Fungi play a fundamental role in the decomposition of ecologies, which is enacted through the breaking down of the bodies of even the most complex organisms – including potentially toxic or polluting bio-compounds. Fungi can process the most complex organic bodily forms, break them down and enable new mutant fusions. In this way, fungi revitalise environments by getting rid of obsolete body structures, releasing bioenergy into circulation and making it available for other life forms. My research aims to translate those fungal behaviours into visual and conceptual strategies for rethinking human subjectivity, in particular human sexuality and the human body, on and off the Internet. The concept of ‘fungi media’ will serve for me as a figuration for articulating those transformative processes.

‘Fungi media’ are thus offered in this thesis as a framing device for my theory of the technological decomposition of human sexuality and the human body, and for my analysis of their mediations on the Internet. Those mediations, actualised by performances of bodily mutations, serve for me as performative speculations about the nonsexual forms of human reproduction. In my doctoral thesis, which involves conceptual speculation enacted with words as well as artistic acts (by myself and others), I am interested in investigating those aspects of contemporary visual media culture that explore the idea of a nonsexual, trans-human reproduction through the processes of bodily disintegration, fragmentation and multiplication. I perceive those ‘mutant performances’ as being supported by the

manipulation techniques of social communication and the extreme body imagery available on the Internet. What I see as the 'mutagenic influence of the Internet' is not just related to the *visual* shapeshifting of Internet users' bodies; it also concerns the integrity of human sexual identities – which become fractured, dispersed, multiplied and fluidly hybrid.

My research is thus concerned with this simultaneous challenge posed to human sexual identities by networked communication *and* by the mutations of human bodily imagery online and offline. Those two phenomena of human technological activity – the dispersion of sexualities by means of networked communication *and* the image manipulation of mutant bodies by means of computer simulation and editing – are related to fungal decomposition not merely via aesthetic correspondence but also, more importantly, through their shared mobilisation of new materialist thinking about the human body. This thinking can take Internet users beyond the Internet and towards some novel forms of involvement with nonhuman life. Commenting on how physical art can convey the mediation of human bodies online, such as the circulation of images with accompanying various distortions, transfers and interactions, post-Internet artist Martijn Hendriks argues that "these issues translate themselves into question of disintegration and contamination"[1] in a direct material sense. My research thus aims to capture the transgression of contemporary philosophy and performance art beyond Internet culture – and towards a nonhuman, fungal life. Human sexuality and the human body serve as terrains on which this transgression will be studied throughout this thesis.

Fungal Figuration

My concept of 'fungi media' can be understood as a conceptual 'figuration' of posthuman subjectivity, in the sense of the term proposed by Rosi Braidotti. Her notion of "figuration"[2] describes the becoming of posthuman subjects who are not defined by universalist or normative models of subjectivity (which are considered to be shaped by 'humanist' assumptions by her), but rather by the 'nomadic processes' of monistic vitalism.[3] My 'fungi media' figuration aims to theorise such subjectivities. Specifically, I look at the technological mediations of the human body on the Internet, in conjunction with the body's mediations by the microbial organisation of bio-life. In other words, the theoretical and

[1] In Martijn Hendriks & Katja Novitskova, 'Post-Internet Materialism', *Metropolis Magazine*, 06.06.2014, http://www.metropolism.com/en/features/23573_post_internet_materialism
[2] Rosi Braidotti, 'A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities', in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 36(6), 2019, p. 34.
[3] Ibid., p. 43.

material conjunction of the entanglement of networked media and microbes in transforming human subjectivities is the specific focus of my research. I call this entanglement 'fungal' because, as explained above, fungi are of vital importance to the life unfolding on our planet. They expose the primal life processes occurring on a microbial scale and present those processes for macroscale perception to humans – the way media technologies do in more than one way.

Braidotti's concept of posthuman subjectivity is based on the monistic and vitalist ontology of radical "material immanence".[4] Her subjectivity is considered 'naturecultural', referring as it does to the deep rootedness of all human activity in biological activity as well as to the inherent intelligence of all vital material processes. By conceptualising media technologies as extensions of microbial bodies and by theorising microbes as inherently intelligent, I corroborate Braidotti's proposition that cultural phenomena are biologically embodied and that all living matter manifests intelligence.[5] In this materialistic and vitalist understanding, subjectivity becomes posthuman as it is defined not only by relations between humans. Instead, it also involves nonhumans, such as technology, animals, plants and other biological entities on our planet: fungi and microbes. This process of transhuman becoming with other forms of living matter involves a conceptual "de-familiarization"[6] of subjects. Braidotti calls this framework "zoe-geo-centered",[7] where 'geo' stands for Earth and 'zoe' stands for the bodies living on it. This framework defines posthuman subjectivity as a dynamic process in the sense of geographical movement (which she calls 'nomadism') as well as in the sense of the transmutation of living bodies, which enter into a variety of assemblages with each other and with their socio-technological context. Braidotti's figuration offers a 'dramatisation of becoming' with regard to a pluralist posthuman subjectivity. Reflecting on the performance of that becoming, my figuration of 'fungi media' focuses on the nonsexual reproduction of human bodies by means of media mutation. As part of my process, I offer a conceptual cross-pollination of the theories of microbes and media studies, using concepts borrowed from microbiology but applied, precisely *as concepts*, to media theory. This transdisciplinary experiment supports my theoretical effort to position human subjectivity as a transhuman hybrid in the process of becoming with microbes and technology.

[4] Ibid., p. 34
[5] Ibid., p. 34.
[6] Ibid., p.46
[7] Ibid., p.42

Post-Internet

Involving microbial evolutions in media theory, my research into fungi media develops the proposition that human technological civilization has to acknowledge and perform a better understanding of life processes in order to survive. To approach this problem, my research proposes, as part of its method, an artistic performance in which the subjectivities of human performers are redefined by entering into degrees of intimacy with nonhuman life entities. This method employs theatrical enactments of bodily mutation within a performance space which is itself conceptualised as a living entity. This conceptual approach allows for the movements of the performers' bodies to be perceived as animated by, and as becoming part of, a nonhuman life that exceeds the limits of human bodies. Importantly, my experiments with performance art are influenced by the aesthetics of bodily mutation. This aesthetics is derived from the severely manipulated digital images of human bodies proliferating on the Internet. That's why I consider those acts as a form of post-Internet practice: they borrow an Internet visuality and aesthetics which is then applied to real-life practices. This corporeal re-enactment of online bodily mutations calls for the examination of the human involvement with Internet-related technological infrastructures beyond the frameworks of screen simulation – and towards a more tangible and comprehensive engagement with life processes.

The term 'post-Internet' was introduced by writer James Bridle in his blog 'New Aesthetics' in May 2011.[8] Since then it has been discussed globally throughout the second decade of 21st century, especially in the art circles. The manifesto of the comprehensive 'Art Post-Internet' exhibition, organised at the UCCA in Beijing in collaboration with Goethe Institute China in 2014, summarises the concept by noticing that "post-internet refers not to a time 'after the internet' but rather to the internet state of mind – to think in the fashion of the network".[9] Post-Internet art reflects on various processes and phenomena related to the Internet, but it embodies them in material practices, seeking new understandings of materiality via thinking about the Internet. Applying this term to performance art, I use the concept of "post-Internet" performance as a strategy involving the remediation of human body – towards the digital body of the posthuman. In my understanding post-Internet bodily performance can reclaim the supposedly 'de-materialised' body of humans who are being mediated by increasingly complex databases and other forms of digital media that are seemingly detached from physiology. Post-internet performance thus offers an

[8] https://jamesbridle.com/works/the-new-aesthetic
[9] Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, *Art Post-Internet booklet,* Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2014, https://ucca.org.cn/storage/public/images/wp/2014/07/PAI_booklet_en.pdf

opportunity to re-materialise the bodies of Internet users, at the same time as harvesting the experience of Internet mediations. The concept also provides an important opportunity to reflect on Internet infrastructures and experiences in relation to the crucial materialities of life. Answering the question: "What does materiality mean in the post-internet era?",[10] Martijn Hendriks notices that there is a very particular "kind of materiality that is produced by processes aiming for dematerialisation".[11] This kind of materiality reveals a strangeness of material objects, which in turn conveys complex subjectivities of non-individual but potentially living entities. In other words, abstract processes of the Internet can also materialise as distributed processes of life. Artist Katja Novitskova adds that, as we realise that "digital image consumes fossil fuels",[12] screen simulations also need to be seen as physiological. Bearing this realisation in mind, my research into fungi media is an attempt to provide an account of the remediation of human sexuality and the human body by nonhuman life.

Conceptually and politically, my research is driven by an anti-modernist approach to technology. It explores the possibility of re-evaluating technological mediations of the human body by directing attention towards nonhuman life as the very basis of the constitution of human technology and human bodies alike. My inquiry is positioned against the uncritical idea of progress or acceleration, proposing instead to explore the narratives of decomposition unfolding across various levels of the biosphere and the processes of the techno-devolution of humans that are entangled with them. I see the importance of offering such a philosophical position which foregrounds media decomposition in being able to challenge the industrialist belief in progress with a view to imagining some more viable strategies of multispecies living in technologically-mediated environments. By doing so, I want to promote aesthetic decadence as an approach to life, an approach that also proposes a withdrawal from sexual reproduction.

The performances of media mutations which constitute the subject of my study and the practice part of the research aim to challenge the cultural narratives based on the productivist and consumerist values of fertile families. One of the main theoretical premises of my research is the recognition of the bodily manipulation unfolding on the Internet understood in terms of a reproduction that is not sexual. This idea of bodily mutation via the Internet is developed from Marshall McLuhan's understanding of media as

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[10] Martijn Hendriks & Katja Novitskova, "Post-Internet Materialism"*, Metropolis Magazine*, 06.06.2014, http://www.metropolism.com/en/features/23573_post_internet_materialism

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

bodily processes. In its pursuit of materialist vitalism, my narrative about fungi media locates human sexuality in the wider generative potentiality of nonhuman life. My overall project is inspired by the conviction that, by recognising the nonhuman nature of thinking and technology, we humans can develop a better quality of life on our planet – one that will be better both for us *and* the planet. Embracing mutant performance as an alternative form of human bodily reproduction can arguably lead not only to decreasing the size of the human population but also to lowering the environmental impact of our civilization, which could possibly turn us away from the consumerist/productivist depletion of the natural resources, and towards an aesthetic appreciation of the decomposition processes of life. My art practice is also intended to explore the possibility of the performative reworking of the issues related to the threat of human extinction through the media-cultural phenomena of mutant body performance.

Fungosexuality

By focusing on the aesthetics of bodily mutation and corporeal decomposition in digital image manipulations on the Internet (traced from their origin in body performance and bioart), I will reflect on the sexualisation of diverse bodily transformations that occur through online activity. Looking at the proliferation of Internet pornography, with its accelerating fetishisms, a rapidly growing number of new non-binary gender identities, the convergence of queer sexualities with technophile subcultures, the fantasies of cybersex and alien abduction, I conceptualise the Internet as a sphere of the transgression of human sexuality. I also propose that humans subjected to, or taking on, Internet mediations can be considered as ‘beyond-sexual’ life entities, which in turn leads me to suggest that the medium of the Internet offers a form of human bodily reproduction that is not sexual. To account for the online transgressions of sexuality I introduce the concept of ‘fungosexuality’. This concept becomes a conceptual device, or another figuration of sorts, that will help me interpret the mutant aesthetics of Internet bodies while opening up onto a more extensive planetary account of the material grounding of different technologies (including the Internet) and their relation to the biosphere. The aim of my research is thus to accentuate the bio-materiality of technological mediations and their multifaceted transhuman corporeality, with a view to outlining a model for a better way of living with

techno-media, one that resists what Rosi Braidotti has called "the commodification of life"[13] and its deadly "overcoding by capitalist profit principle".[14]

Specifically, I ask whether post-Internet performances of bodily mutation can be considered a form of bodily reproduction – offered here as a counterpoint to the 'capitalist' overproduction of sexual bodies which causes global overpopulation and, ultimately, has a destructive impact on nonhuman life. 'Fungosexuality' serves as a name for this possibility of bodily reproduction via mutant performance. Witnessing the proliferation of non-binary sexualities, fetishism, gender querying and asexuality on the social media platforms of the Internet, I am interested in how this proliferation converges around visions of the mutation of the human body. The transgression of the binary understanding of sexuality on the Internet unfolds in parallel to the complex challenges that human subjectivities face online and offline. The interfaces of social media platforms offer multifaceted techniques for the reconfiguration of users' fragmented subjectivities in the form of their multiple 'profiles'. Via social media, the Internet becomes a theatre – and a fitting illustration of what Judith Butler has described as a 'performative construction' of gender *and* sex.[15] Butler initially distinguishes biological sex from a socially constructed gender, which is a script of sexual preferences, sensitivities and expressions. She then suggests that biological sex cannot exist without its actualisation in gender performance. Taking that into account, social media offer a perfect opportunity for performing such a construction of gender, allowing for modifications of sexual expressions that are detached from biological sex determinism but that remain contextualised and controlled by the technology of Internet platforms. Nevertheless, in my view elaborate gender constructs created by means of social media become increasingly disconnected from the idea of biological sex. Internet environments invite sophisticated, hybrid and ambiguous constructs of sexual desire and fetishism that exist within computer databases but that remain separated from the physiologies of Internet users' bodies.

With regard to this latter point, the vital aim of my research is to foreground the very material aspect of the asexuality of Internet users – those who decide to perform mutant aesthetics online and those who do so in physical spaces. I want to examine those mutant bodily forms that are being born at the crossroads of the Internet culture and body performance art as lending themselves to a philosophical speculation about the

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[13] Rosi Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," *Theory, Culture & Society* 2019, Vol. 36(6), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0263276418771486 , p.42
[14] Ibid., p.42
[15] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, NYC, 1990

abstraction of human bodily reproduction which is achieved through the transgression of biological sex but also through a new materiality of the performing bodies. This new materiality is manifested by the intimacy between mutant performers and nonhuman, fungoid life forms. In my study, I take into consideration diverse expressions of gender-bending online, enacted with a view to then translating them into bodily performance *beyond the Internet*. In my own practice of performing a mutant body, I situate the hybrid and fractured subjectivities characteristic of the Internet in the context of material vitalism. Indeed, I want to research those subjectivities not as human social constructs but rather as performative expressions of the primal generativity of matter. Employing the philosophies of dark materialism, I aim to theorise the Internet and the human bodies entangled with it in the context of material processes of nonhuman life. Finally, my concept of fungosexuality encapsulates the possibilities of making connections between post-Internet queer mutants and the extreme diversity of the pre-sexual forms of body reproduction performed by fungi.

My thesis is that performing the above-mentioned bodily mutations on and through the Internet taps into primal (by which I specifically mean *fungal*) vitality via the multiplication of fractured and hybrid subjectivities online first, but also through the explicit reshaping of the performers' bodies. The latter involves erasing the features of their human (binary) sexuality and adding computer-simulated nonhuman features. The fracturing and hybridisation of bodies is inherent to networked communication unfolding on the Internet. The proliferation of such images and tropes introduces a form of reproduction of mediated human bodies which is not sexual. Human bodies online are exposed to the hollowing of human subjectivity through their opening to a mergence with nonhuman entities. I propose that this mergence of human bodies with diverse living entities afforded by the Internet offers a novel form of sexualised expression, which I call 'fungal'. In my research I'm thus focusing on forms of bodily performance which are inspired by this form of Internet visuality and which manipulate the image and concept of the human body to present it as partly nonhuman. Many performers addressing nonhuman life identify as sexually 'queer' or 'non-binary'. They embrace their nonhuman identity as 'mutants' on social media, where they digitally reproduce their mutant bodies by non-sexual (in a binary, reproductive sense) means.

In our biosphere, the material process of decomposition is driven by fungi. This process is of key importance for the creation of new life forms. This is why decomposition becomes important for me as a concept, visual image and – importantly – a set of material

processes in my own performance practice aimed at enacting human sexuality and the human body differently, by breaking them down and reshaping them in a new form. This process is not just mine. The mutant performances of many other Internet users are sustained by the media decomposition of their human bodies and identities, with their body images transformed into weird shapes. The decomposing (i.e. fungal) element of technological mediations manifests itself in various performances of body mutations, offering the possibility of non-sexual forms of reproduction of those bodies via their multiple mutant shapes. Those mutant performances can be perceived as sexualised in a queer way, but at the same time they involve an intense fetishisation of the mutant features of the performers. I introduce the term 'fungosexuality', instead of using non- or a-sexuality, to highlight this very transformation of human sexuality towards various 'beyond-sexual' forms of body reproduction associated with fungal entities. In other words, I understand fungosexuality as offering a shift from humans' sexual mode of bodily reproduction and towards post-sexual mutations by means of media performance. Since sexualised practices of fetishism, queer sex and transsexuality challenge the traditional reproduction of human bodies via the coupling of binary genitals, they arguably can be more prone to reinvesting their actors' reproductive creativity in the media performance of some alternative ways of being together. I conceptualise this phenomenon in terms of a resistance against the productivist and consumerist use of technology, in particular by opposing my concept of the fungosexual transgression of human identities to the sexual over-production of humans on our planet today.

Vitality and Dark Materialism

I ground my theorisation of fungi media in various accounts of the vitality of matter and distributed intelligence within material processes of life, with a view to contextualising the understanding of techno-media environments and exposing their generative potency. My media-theoretical background comes from theories of media technologies understood as extensions and modifications of body processes (McLuhan)[16], of media positioned as environmental infrastructures and circulations of material elements (Peters)[17], and of media seen as life-generating environments (Mitchell)[18]. All these theories assist me in

[16] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 2001
[17] See John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015
[18] See Robert Mitchell, *Bioart and The Vitality of Media*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010

conceptually embedding media technologies in the landscape of discussion around vitalist materialism.

With all this, the aim of my research into fungi media is to contribute to the 21st century academic discussion around nonhuman life and its growing theoretical significance in defining human subjectivity. In other words, my research looks at a variety of concepts at the cross-section between new media technologies and philosophies of dark materialism, in an attempt to examine possible connections between media and processes of biological life. This will in turn help me explain the phenomenon of post-Internet mutant performance, which is framed both by Internet practices and the agency of nonhuman life. To clarify, 'dark' materialisms[19] interrogate material processes defining human life through placing philosophical emphasis on the agency of living bodies that are other than human, and through recognising those bodies as acting beyond the control of, or even the ability to be exhaustively explained by, rational human subjectivity. My aim in engaging with dark materialist philosophies is to account for the deep imbrications of human technologies within the fabric of life on our planet. I am to achieve this by engaging with media theories that shift the conceptualisation of media beyond their traditional understanding as communication devices – and towards their role as mediators of the generative vitality of nonhuman bodies.

The understanding of media technologies in relation to life has been discussed since the introduction of Marshall McLuhan's idea that media were extensions of human bodies about half a century ago. Around the same time, Lynn Margulis started developing her revolutionary theory of symbiotic evolution,[20] explaining how human bodies, as well as all other living macro-bodies, were co-dependent with the dynamic and diverse networks of microbial entities. Now, as much as I'm bouncing off McLuhan's postulated closeness of media to human bodies in my research, my aim is to stress the microbial understanding of the processes of mediations. With this, I propose a philosophical interpretation of human technologies through the microbial context of communication networks and through offering an understanding of media as processes of life.

McLuhan proposed that human media technologies were extending, infiltrating and modifying human bodies. In this perspective all communication methods, symbolic

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[19] This mode of philosophising is represented by thinkers such as Stacy Alaimo, Antonin Artaud, Karen Barad, Hans Bellmer, Donna Haraway, Eugene Thacker, Reza Negarestani, Nick Land, Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton, Anna Tsing and Ben Woodward.

[20] See Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet,* Phoenix, London, 2001

systems and civilizational advancements are presented as life processes that involved in changing human bodies, processes which McLuhan called 'extensions' of bodies. McLuhan's concept of mediatic extensions describes an ecological relation defined by the progression of time, where 'new' media extend 'old' ones as their environments. New media thus create environments that condition and modify old media, according to McLuhan, including the oldest medium – that of the human body. My narrative about fungi media thus starts with questioning the integrity of the human body and with exposing microbial processes as being vital to understanding humans and their media technologies.

Microbes are important in this analysis not only because they precede humans evolutionarily but also because they continuously play a crucial role in making and supporting the life functions of human bodies. Taking this fact into account, human bodies can be described as extensions of microbial entities. Moreover, in a wider perspective, human media technologies can be understood as extensions of microbial entities as well. In my research I am offering a particular interpretation of McLuhan's ideas, one that that connects to Margulis' theory of the evolution of microbial life. With this, I focus on aspects of communication, intelligence and creativity, which are all inherent to the primal forms of life and which are manifested again in new technological forms of human media, represented for me here by the Internet. Significant parts of my research are dedicated to challenging the concept of an autonomous human subjectivity and the unified sense of the human's bodily integrity in order to expose the microbial entities that are constantly at work in supporting what we know as human life and the human body.

Human technologies interfere in processes of nonhuman life. They originate from human ideas about life and change countless multitudes of life forms at the same time. Questions of discovery (via techniques of scientific experimentation and technological inventions) of different aspects of life are closely intertwined with concerns about redefining life. In my research I'm greatly inspired by theories of fungi ecologies, as analysed by mycologist Paul Stamets in his book, *Mycelium Running*.[21] I'm not evaluating the scientific accuracy of his argument here but rather translating his observations about fungi into a theoretical vehicle of my own. I follow Stamets' choice of fungi to theoretically represent the whole of microbial life, as fungi mediate micro-scale life for humans by presenting it for our macroscale experience. They are also the major decomposer amongst organisms on our planet. My reading of Stamets, through McLuhan and Margulis, aims to interrogate *not so*

[21] See Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005

much how human the media are (as extensions of the human body), but rather *how nonhumanly fungoid the media can be* (as framed by processes of decomposition).

Stamets' excitement about the possibilities of improving various living environments, some of which involve significantly increasing the quality of human life, is instrumental for my attempt to ground my philosophical perspective in media such as the Internet, with a view to offering a sustainable understanding of human technology and a sustainable approach to the biosphere. According to Stamets' concept of ecology, the production and consumption of bodies within the biosphere, globally as well as within particular environments, is possible primarily thanks to complementary processes of decomposition. The processes of decomposition are the ground processes performed by fungal and microbial entities, which undo complex life forms and disperse the fragmented bio-particles within the evolutionary cycles of transmutations. Recognising the overwhelming civilizational issues of industrially accelerated overproduction of things and bodies (e.g. in human and nonhuman farming), which are stimulated by the cultural politics of mass-consumption and by so-called 'family values', I seek to understand technological infrastructures and, in particular, media communications, in the context of decomposition processes described by Stamets. Based on the understanding of decomposition as coming from fungal ecologies, I experiment with technologically-mediated mutant body performance, with a view to developing a new theory-practice method.

Bodily Performance as a Philosophy of the Nonhuman

Alongside my theoretical argument, my practice offers a non-linguistic form of engagement with the concept of nonhuman intelligence unfolding behind media processes. In this thesis I reflect upon my own bodily performance by examining it as a sequence of human-nonhuman acts converging with microbial activity. Here, the practice part of my research is strongly inspired by the idea of the visceral decomposition of human thought pursued by Antonin Artaud.[22] Artaud understood all theoretical reflection as a gestural figuration of the nonhuman processes mediated by the human body. He saw the nature of those processes, such as the plague or his guts, as quintessentially microbial. Similarly, Eugene Thacker confronts in his writing "the world without humans,"[23] although conveyed within human bodies by nonhuman microorganisms: "bacteria, fungi, and a whole bestiary of

[22] See Stephen Barber, *The Anatomy of Cruelty*, Sun Vision Press, London, 2013
[23] See Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet*, Zero Books, Winchester, 2010

other organisms".[24] Thacker then effectively proposes "that thought is not human".[25] This suggestion provocatively reminds us that brain processes, just like many other crucial processes of the human body, including digestion and the immune system's performance, are determined by microbial entities living within humans. Moreover, Thacker speculates that intelligence can have pre-human, beyond-human or even post-human material forms. Philosophy, the radical expression of human intelligence, meets here its linguistic limitations as it cannot express certain dimensions of life within its own language, according to Thacker. This diagnosed limitation is also his reason for using figures of poetic description borrowed from science fiction or horror novels in his philosophical writings about nonhuman life. In this way, Thacker offers horror writing as a non-philosophical form of philosophy about nonhuman life. Elaborating on the proclaimed horror of philosophy, evoked by human attempts to think of themselves as transgressing towards the nonhuman, Thacker points out a certain advantage of mediation which is enacted not through abstract concepts but through "impossible life forms – mist, ooze, blobs, slime, clouds, and muck"[26] - or, as Ben Woodard later puts it, "fungoids".[27] Those entities convey certain forms of intelligent performance, which I use as a conceptual tool to map human mediations on the Internet.

My aim with this is not to postulate a fixed ontological relationship between the Internet and fungi but rather to find a more tangible approach to human technologies of communication, one that accounts for the latter's environmental impact. This is why I include in my theory a number of philosophical figurations and speculations around issues concerning the entanglement of the Internet within the key life processes performed by fungoids. Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani goes so far as to propose, in his speculative fiction *Cyclonopedia*,[28] that the whole of human civilization, with its advanced technological infrastructures and abstract media communications, is secretly animated by a mysterious substance of living blobs, pressed into deep layers of the geological biosphere. His work, alongside Artaud's theory of performance and some other dark-materialist philosophies of nonhuman vitalism,[29] have led me to see technological mediations of human bodies on the Internet, such as networked communication and the transformation of human subjectivity, as processes that remain intertwined with nonhuman bodies – and that simultaneously mediate nonhuman forms of intelligence.

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[24] Ibid., p.7
[25] Ibid., p.7
[26] Ibid., p.9
[27] See Ben Woodard, *Slime Dynamics*, Zero Books, Washington, 2011
[28] See Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia. Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008
[29] such as Tacker's philosophy

The practice part of my research develops a performative method of bodily movement, space curation and creative writing that is inspired by Internet phenomena, which are positioned in my thesis as body-media mutations. As mentioned above, those online mutations involve a visual decomposition and a re-invention of Internet users' bodies, processes which are being afforded by the growing accessibility of various editing tools, interaction platforms, exploratory environments and digital scanners. In my artistic practice I re-embody those mutations through my own physiological body performances within a bio-active performance space, conceptualising in this way the scattered processes of fungoid life. This re-embodiment of Internet aesthetics in real-life performances – performances which are then recorded and posted to the Internet in the form of videos – inscribes them in the 'post-Internet' framework, which I outlined earlier.

I had been involved in bodily performance for many years and had also been active in the squatting movement, but my practice and my living situation took a unique turn at the time of commencing my doctoral work. While initiating this research project on fungi media in 2015, I squatted a rotten sewage space, in which I have been dwelling together with a variety of microbial life forms such as slimes and fungi since then. I've also been organizing performance and biomedia events there, inviting humans online to immerse themselves in the living network of urban decay, or partake in 'alien abduction acts'. Performers and participants in the Chronic Illness[30] events, as I have called them, have been drawn from the media networks such as Facebook, through which I encouraged users to move beyond the screens of their computers and meet together at my space (called 'The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan' on social media). By encouraging this move, I don't intend to manifest any naive abandonment of technology with the intention of returning to some utopian pre-Internet past-time of human communality. On the contrary, what interests me in my practice is the mediated, post-Internet reworking of human subjectivity with and through media technologies.

Performers and participants in the Chronic Illness events come together within my fungi-populated space. Here, a new life process that is decidedly less human and much more affiliated with microbial entities takes place. The performers and participants open up to an encounter with the mysterious nonhumans within them and the environment, which is mediated by and with technology. Through this, we could go so far as to suggest that they are no-longer-human, at least temporarily. I perceive these acts as being part of speculative forms of research into nonhuman life, which is being conducted through an

[30] http://neofung.tumblr.com/chronicillness

embodied practice as much as through concepts and written texts.

Summary of Chapters

The written part of my thesis is divided into five chapters: a Methodology chapter, a Literature Review and three chapters that form the main body of the thesis (Chapters 1-3). The Methodology chapter explains my performative approach to media, using my bodily performance. It outlines my perspective on the technologies of communication by presenting them not as mere artefacts (i.e. human tools) but rather as performances of subtle life processes, as inspired by the book *Life After New Media*[31] by Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska. The Literature Review introduces the key texts that the theoretical framework of my thesis is grounded in. It explains why the particular texts have been chosen and what role they serve in establishing the argument of my thesis. Each of the three main chapters of the thesis has a conceptual lead that explores a specific theoretical dimension of the problem of bodily mutation in performance. Chapter 1 focuses on **fungal decomposition** as the key concept and process underpinning mediation. Chapter 2 explains the theme of the **Chronic Illness**, which is the title of the body performance events I have curated and participated in. Chapter 3 brings to the fore my concept of **fungosexuality**.

A narrative about the possibility of theorising media in the context of the philosophies of microbial life and, particularly, the body of fungi, is developed in Chapter 1. In this chapter I experiment with speculative philosophical reflection, applied to probe the extent to which it is possible to trace an analogy between the influence of the Internet and other media technologies on the humans and the networked running of mycelium within the biosphere. I approach communication technologies through an exploration of processes such as the network behaviour of mycelium, the ubiquity of microbiota in the biosphere, the role of fungal rot in ecosystems, interspecies relations amongst microbes, symbiotic evolutions, non-sexual forms of reproduction, immediate mutations, and, last but not least, life organised in the form of trans-individual entities. Exploring parallels between media and fungal ecologies, I open the question of the deep involvement of human communication technologies with the primal forms of life. This involvement enfolds the generative potency of media environments and opens them up to a vitalist understanding. It also prepares the

[31] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012

philosophical ground for framing humans' involvement with the Internet as a process of bodily reproduction by means other than binary sex. Eventually, it leads me to position post-Internet bodily aesthetics in performance art as an enactment of non-binary sexualities, one that fetishizes nonhuman bodily features and the overall decomposition of the human body. This mutant fetishism is explained as offering a deeply ecological reflection on human and nonhuman life forms.

As the meeting point of nonhuman life and human communication technologies, my own performance and bodily media practice is investigated in Chapter 2. The investigation revolves around the conceptualisation of the bio-active performance art space in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, offering a critical reading of the practice unfolding in this space. Drawing on several human bodily acts, I situate them in the context of minute life activity in order to find out what can be said about the condition of human existence through focusing on microbial and fungal life entities – and on the human impact on nonhumans. Specifically, the microbial life activity is considered to be the key performance unfolding in the space, where the human acts, some of them highly sexualised, serve as an environmental context for it. Analysing my own body act *Synthetic Organs*[32] and the bioart installation *Holobiont*[33] in this chapter, I position those acts as performances of microbes themselves. The general aim of this chapter is to examine and explain why it is worth focusing on performing human subjectivity (including human sexuality and the body) with microbial bodies in academic research on media technologies.

The initial question of the embodiment of fungoid bodies in media technologies will lead me in the final part of my thesis to a consideration of those media as a form of 'fungosexual' reproduction. Chapter 3 plays with the idea of the Internet enacting the advent of biotechnologies that revive microbial forms of reproduction, such as nonsexual cloning or other forms of beyond-sexual replication, as analysed by Luciana Parisi in her *Abstract Sex*.[34] The final chapter searches for answers to the question of replication by means of technologically-facilitated androgynous mutations of sex, mutations which transgress culturally-structured notions of sexuality. My exploration of fetishist sexuality in media focuses on what cloning means in the context of the Internet. Is there such a thing as human sexuality without reproduction as its foundational feature – and is there human reproduction without sex? I interrogate the characteristics of accelerated mutability on the

[32] http://neofung.tumblr.com/organs
[33] http://neofung.tumblr.com/aroar
[34] Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex*, Continuum, London, 2004

Internet, touching on phenomena such as the proliferation of digital avatars, queer media, cybersex, genetic engineering and the fragmentation of identities online. Paying particular attention to how transsexual fetishism in media pictures the decomposition of cultural frameworks by means of technologies such as the Internet, I reference a number of body art transmutations developed online. This leads me to a discussion of selected examples of body performance and bioart as strategies for developing new philosophies of technology.

My Body of Practice

The three selected examples from my wider artistic practice have been chosen with a view to demonstrating in a most rounded way my attempt to enact the key concepts discussed in my thesis. Importantly, they all focus on my own work as a body performer (which I justify in the 'Research ethics' section of the Methodology chapter). They also all foreground the activities unfolding within the performance space of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. The fungi-inhabited space of the Dungeons itself becomes an active participant in the performances – and thus also in my research.

1. *3Decay* is an experiment in creating what I call 'fungi media art'. It was conducted at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, a sewage space in North London, which I squatted six years ago and which I have been curating as a venue for mutant performance. The space has also served as a thought laboratory for my speculative philosophy about nonhuman life entities. For the purpose of this thesis, I have documented and reflected upon the fungi-infested abandoned architecture of the Dungeons, mediating the entanglement of human civilization with the life forms that host it. The documentation takes the form of 3D scans of my body, which have been computer-edited, using photographs of fungoid bodies taken within the space and some digital distortions simulating the microbes. The scans have been inserted as separate pages between Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this thesis.

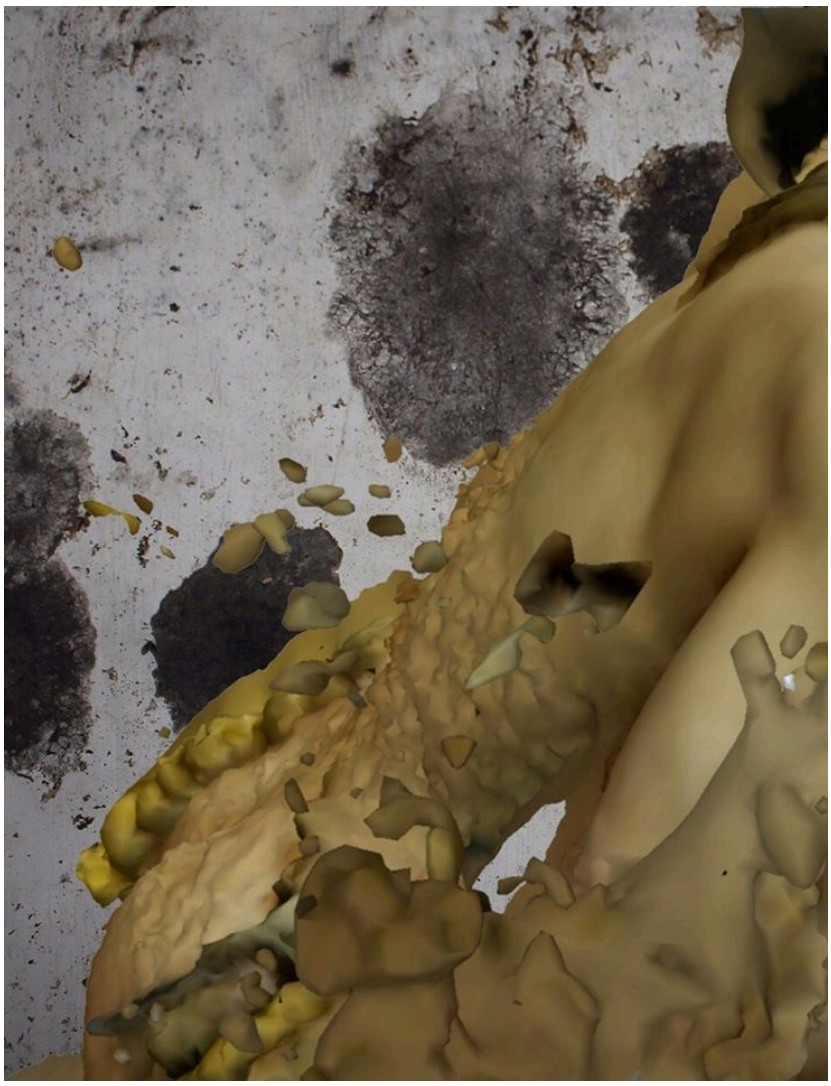

Fig. 1. Image from the *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3

2. *Holobiont* is a biomedia art installation developed in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. It transforms piles of rotten material that has accumulated in the space during the time of its occupation into heaps of living blob matter. The material hosts a diversity of microbial life forms and is fed by various body traces of human participants and performers who enter the space. The video of humanoid body parts is reflected on the surface of biological debris, animating the rot visually. The *Holobiont* video is a compilation of excerpts from a number of bioart installations that took place at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan between 2016-2019. The video is available to view online: https://vimeo.com/431297316

Fig. 2. Photograph of *Holobiont* video projected on a mouldy surface at The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. Photo credit: Piotr Bockowski

3. *Synthethic Organs* is a body act that originated in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. The naked body of the performer is extended with loosely attached amorphous “organs”, made out of fungi-infested synthetic materials. During the act the organs are moving around the performer’s body, provoking a variety of movements, reactions and expressions. Those movements define the performer’s body in terms of its relationship to the fungoid environment of the performance space. The organs had been sourced from a large wound sculpted into the wall of the Dungeons. They mediate the space as a living

entity that hosts the body of the performer, which has been fragmented by the mutability of synthetic organs. The video file is available to view online: https://vimeo.com/191996711

Fig. 3. *Synthetic Organs* (2016) act by Piotr Bockowski. Photo credit: Magda Durka

Fig. 4. *Synthetic Organs* (2017) act by Piotr Bockowski. Photo credit: HTV

Methodology: Performing Fungi Media

Performance as a method to research media while exploring alternative forms of sexuality

My research into fungi media poses a question about the extent to which the mediation of human bodies on and by the Internet is embedded in, and embodies, basic life forms. I propose that human bodies can be described as fungi media, as, on the one hand, they are being shaped and connected by the Internet while, on the other, they remain linked with and by fungi and other microbes (aka 'the mycelium Internet'). As mentioned in the Introduction, the term 'fungi media' serves as a figuration that describes the re-materialisation of the Internet through the performative involvement of human bodies with fungal entities. I study this relation with a particular focus on the field of performance art.

My research method is based the on application of the concept of 'post-Internet art' to my own and other performers' mutant bodily practice, which I deploy in my work to enact what I describe as 'fungosexuality'. Fungosexuality, as explained in the Introduction, is a term I propose to refer to forms of body performance art that fetishise a trans-human presentation of the performers' bodies, meshing bodily mutation with rot. Fungosexuality embraces the aesthetics of androgyny and other forms of sexual ambiguity. I consider it a form of queer sexuality, as it disconnects sexualisation of the body from the reproductive features of binary human sex, linking it instead with trans-human reproduction through performative mutations and decomposition.

I build my concept of fungosexuality from the selected references to contemporary materialist philosophies, media and cultural critique as well as bioscience concepts that have had a key influence on the post-humanist thinking in the humanities. I have drawn on texts that in my view have made an important contribution to shaping the posthuman imagery.

The mutant performance, which I involve in the practice part of my research, references the technological manipulation of the human bodies and their interspecies entanglement by incorporating a variety of imaginary creaturely features and more abstract bio-morphology into their artistic bodily forms. The themes of interspecies entanglement reflect on the symbiotic relations of fungi with humans and other organisms. The hybrid co-

existence of fungi with other species, which I explore in my research, serves as the basis for environmental generativity. It is also linked to another, 'queer' aspect of fungal diversity. Most of the fungi species not only have both male and female characteristics but they also have thousand of different 'sexes', which allow them to reproduce bodies in countless 'post-sexual' forms. This radical proliferation of shifting, sexual multitudes is embraced by post-Internet mutant performers – including myself in my own acts – which helps establish new forms of sociality, or what Donna Haraway has called "fungal shapes of the queer kin".[35] My research project thus positions fungosexuality as a fungal strain of queer identity politics. It entails developing polymorphous and pluralistic strategies for post-sexual body re-shapings and replications, in an intimate alliance with the Internet and beyond it.

In my research, I develop a scaffolding for the concept of fungosexuality in humans by looking at a variety of post-Internet performers in the context of bioart, body art, anatomical anti-dance 'butoh', as well as my own performance practice that was developed from my living experience within London urban decay. My method hinges on a theoretical interrogation of all those forms of body performance as anchored in the contemporary philosophies of dark materialism, posthumanism and media theory. The philosophical perspective that emerges from the theories under examination is necessary for establishing an understanding of the mediations of human bodies on the Internet in terms of generative life processes. This understanding of media and life serves as the general philosophical background against which my mutant performance practice unfolds.

How does life manifest itself to us? And, what can be learned from the spittle of saliva or the dirt under a toenail in the age of the Anthropocene, when life finds itself under increasing threat? I propose that, to engage philosophically with the world as a biosphere operating on different scales is to "redeem crude matter"[36] as it presents itself in seemingly inconspicuous phenomena such as saliva and dirt via the theoretical framework of "new materialism". This approach endows all forms of matter, including primary ones, with meaningful vitality and agency. As Jane Bennett points out in her book *Vibrant Matter,*[37] even the most elusive material entities have to be considered not as passive background to human activities but rather as influential actants. The living tissue of planet Earth consists of myriads of microbial evolutions, which express themselves globally as the

[35] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008, p.10
[36] Joanna Zylinska, *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene,* Open Humanities Press, Michigan, 2014, p.111
[37] See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, London, 2010

mycelial body.[38] Mycelium is the hyper-microbial fungal body that remains invisible for humans as it spreads underground across spaces bigger than the largest metropolitan areas. It excretes soil that it is buried in, creating the primary food source for forests on Earth (apart from the Sun's light). This makes mycelium a key stage in the essential process of life formation that our planet's ecosystem depends on. The micro-biota and the constantly running and spreading mycelium condition the temporary stability of human bodies. They also decompose the human body after its death, with decay being the destiny of every complex organism.

Engaging with media through the concept and matter of fungi, I propose a reading of human technology as a process of breaking down the civilization-extended human body[39] in order to re-use its matter for novel mutations – although not seen in terms of evolutionary 'progress' but rather as explorative devolution. Thus, my method can be described as 'techno-rot sensitive', as it is performed from the position of a techno-mutant who is intent on opening up microbial media embodiments.

As the main strategy of my research, I conceptualise fungal decomposition, or rot, as a performative category within the philosophy of technology. In my theory of fungi media, rot is understood as a cluster of phenomena related to the Internet's undoing of the human body, its collapse, disintegration, dispersion and fractured multiplication, at the intersection of networked communication and biotechnology. The cyber/bio juxtapositions have served as a fertile ground for the Internet-era humanities ever since Donna Haraway's 'The Cyborg Manifesto',[40] published at the dawn of the Internet era. The reading of media through those hybrid biotechnological phenomena exposes the technologies of communication as essentially corporeal processes of the human body. Becoming technological and at the same time reconnecting to its microbial nature, the human body partially ceases to be quite human, I suggest. My own practice of body performance aims to accentuate the physiological nature of media analysed in the fungi media narrative. Reversing McLuhan's theoretical approach to the human body as being extended by media, I position human bodies as extensions of fungi into media communications. I also explore my fungi-human body through media by interpreting technology as offering a human connection with microbial nature. Thus, alongside the reading of media

[38] See Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005
[39] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 2001
[40] See Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, 1991

technologies through the human body, I also aim to foreground the fungal characteristics of media technologies via my performance practice.

Performing practice

The practice part of my research focuses on the body as the subject of both technological mediation and corporeal mutation. The body of the performer is considered to integrate technologies of communication, as well as the microbial entities that inhabit the performance space. The acts and events embody the notion of the no-longer-human body becoming an open-ended technology of life. Essential for the acts / events is the microbe-contaminated space of the squatted sewage that sets the primal conditions for the behaviour of human performers. Due to the pending threat of my eviction from the space, followed by its demolition and, effectively, the extinction of the bio-environments encapsulated within it, I have decided to present my performance practice in a form of a set of online videos and stills. Considering that the live performance space has been the main performer in all the events that have taken place there, I conceptualise the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan not only as a curatorial art project but also as a fungal entity that is a medium of life and a prime companion of humans in the depths of the city sewage.

The presentation of the space itself constitutes an important aspect of my practice. It shows the performance of microbes reacting to and influencing a variety of anonymous humanoid body acts, or being contaminated by their remains. In the aesthetics of my events,[41] I accentuate the 'natural cataclysms' of massive sewage floods, which have been infusing the space with the infamous 'urban-tropical' climate change throughout the whole history of its current squat occupation. Taking into account the squatters, performers and event participants in the space, all the human body acts have been considered only as a context for the dynamics of the microbial occupants. The presentation of the microbial performance at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan exposes its bioactive, urban/environmental, industrial/geological, civilization/historical as well as 'meteorological' features.

As mentioned above, the videos included with this thesis show two of my own body art projects developed in the Dungeons, i.e. *Synthetic Organs*, a performance act using

[41] https://neofung.tumblr.com/chronicillness

glands made out of rotten materials from the Dungeons, and *Holobiont*, a biomedia act involving projections of deformed body parts on moulds and fungi from the Dungeons. The *Synthetic Organs* act is a body performance of hysterical communication with parasitic progeny organs (made out of synthetic materials overgrown with mould). The organs are loosely attached to the naked performer's body and are moved around in close proximity via gestures of contortion, violence, gentleness, embrace, expelling, thrusting, hitting, twisting, or otherwise by employing different strategies for jittery morphing. The organs become defined by the performer's various reactions. They are treated as sickly deformations, tender glands, mother's breasts, swollen genitals, breeding cocoons, disgusting babies, additional limbs, an abnormal rash - if not a violent reaction to body's ongoing mutations. The actions of the performer are choreographed around a face-sized slimy wound or orifice, ingrown into the wall and dripping with synthetic discharge. The wound-orifice was sculpted into the surface of the Dungeons and treated as a body membrane of a living nonhuman entity. The middle opening of the slit nests materials for the synthetic organs of the performer. Prior to being planted inside the wound-orifice, the materials for the organs had been left rotting in the soil inside the space.

The second project, called *Holobiont*, with a nod to Lynn Margulis,[42] examines the relation of the microbial entities in the Dungeons to impaired human bodily acts. Margulis uses this term to name an ambiguous hybrid assemblage of microbial organisms co-existing and reproducing together. The term 'holobiont' originally describes the evolution of life through the mutation of the entanglement of many species that come together as living networks. Yet I understand it as conveying a queer relation of the human performers' bodies to the performance of the bodily entities of microbes. The term 'queer' is used here in the sense of a bio-diverse inclusivity for freak bodies, as recently proposed by Donna Haraway.[43] I also include BDSM practice in this work, following the intuition of Timothy Morton. Morton writes about using fossils for restraint accessories such as hemp ropes or latex, embracing "that shiny, smooth, beautiful, protective BDSM membrane" for the purpose of "the soothing survival mode".[44] For the work, I filmed the human bodies which had been fragmented by restraint and un-humanised by the objectification of the BDSM practice. I also mutated them by means of video editing and then projected them onto the living microbial entities that had been feeding on the rotten materials in the Dungeons. The

[42] See Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet,* Phoenix, London, 2001
[43] See Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, London, 2016
[44] Timothy Morton, *Humankind*, Verso, New York, 2017, p.47

selection of microbe-hosting materials includes, but is not limited to, mouldy fabrics, fungi-growing boards, clusters of detritus merged with taxidermised animals, as well as microbial traces of the partially moving bodies of the performers. *Holobiont* also involves projections of the restrained and abjectified bodies of performers whose body mutations feed the multiple projections of the live space.

Throughout my theory-practice work I aim to embody the fungal aspects of the Internet and perform it as a human bodily opening towards nonhuman entities. All the conceptual explorations I pursue in this thesis are intended as an interrogation of, or even assault on, the humanist understanding of technology. My aim here is to redefine technology as a medium of communication with fungoid decomposers. Reflecting upon a variety of theoretical examinations of the bodily contexts of technology, I'm not so much interested in technological artifacts mediating the corporeal. Instead, I want to explore how humans performatively embody the processes of technological mediation. By searching for the fungal characteristics of media, I also aim to develop an understanding of the post-Internet human, with their mutant body and non-reproductive sexuality, as embedded in fungoid life.

Research ethics

As explained above, my research into the corporeality of media involves my own body performance, in the company of microbes, at my curated space called the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan - to which I dedicate Chapter 2. Although many other human performers and participants of my immersive acts were involved in the acts, the other people are not the subject of my research. The research is rather concerned with the dynamics of the performance space itself, which I consider to be a live fungoid entity. My performance acts are not even completely mine. They involve probing the elusive life environment of the Dungeons in order to develop an exploratory and partial knowledge of it, through the processes of intra-acting within the space, as advocated by Karen Barad.[45]

Thus, the ethics of my research relate to the strategy I've chosen to enter the performance space of alien life, tuning in to the careful perception of the changing intensities of the nonhuman, material processes unfolding in the space. The ethics behind my research

[45] Karen Barad, *Meeting Universe Half Way*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007, p.170

methodology can be understood in terms of a posthuman opening to the radical otherness of dark vitality. Although ethical consideration is not the direct topic of my research, I implicitly develop an ethical project of the human's transgression towards an irrational openness to the unknown other. Nevertheless, I go beyond the humanist concern with other people (as represented by authors such as Emmanuel Levinas)[46] by radicalising the definition of otherness beyond human identity – and by shifting towards fungoid life entities. I draw here on Anna L. Tsing's strategy of the radical openness to the fungal fabric of life, as outlined in her book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.

To avoid raising ethical concerns with regard to possibly inappropriate or excessive interaction of human bodies during my practice research developed for this PhD, I explicitly involve just my own body in the work presented as part of this thesis. My body is used in conjunction with gestural prosthetics, video images of other body parts that are projected within the performance space and the digital tools for image manipulation. In my performative research and performance practice I put on a spectacle of human deformations, an approach which, according to artist Hans Bellmer, demonstrates the primal fascination with chance and playfulness involved in taking apart and re-configuring the body as the ultimate confirmation of life's vitalism. In Bellmer's words, "the body resembles a sentence that seems to invite us to dismantle it into its component letters, so that its true meanings may be revealed ever anew through an endless stream of anagrams".[47] Bellmer describes the resemblance of body parts to each other: mouth, anus, foot, hair, eye, vagina, legs, penis, breast, backbone. In his vision of human bodies many details are multiplying and dividing, or replace each other. Those correspondences of body parts invite mutations. I employ a similar method of generating the multitude of bodies from my own body by means of theatrical and digital manipulation techniques, which assist me in the interrogation of human subjectivity as composed of hybrid multiplicities of life. Following Bellmer, my mutations are "born of division, subtraction and multiplication, but also of that interchange ability that mathematicians call 'permutation' and philologists 'anagrams.'"[48] My research practice doesn't thus impact other people, while being extremely sensitive to the concept of fungal life companionship with my performance space.

Through research practice of my own body performance I focus on environment-creating

[46] See Emanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other,* Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1987
[47] Hans Bellmer, The Doll, Atlas Press, London, 2005, p.19
[48] Hans Bellmer, The Doll, Atlas Press, London, 2005, p.133

mutualistic relations analysed by Tsing in her narrative about fungi networks, and termed, after Stamets, 'the Mycelial Internet'. This concept, which underpins my 'fungi media' figuration, defines my methodological approach to the performing body. It contextualises the body through a mutation-oriented perspective on evolution, which is set beyond the taxonomy of species and organisms adopted in the biosciences. Contrary to the categories that conceptually separate life organisms from each other, and especially from humans, fungi are used by me as sophisticated examples of many species entangled in "genetic mosaics that confused the identification of an individual".[49] They engage my research in the "hologenom" theory of evolution, where all organic development is already a co-development of interdependent species. The species cannot exist independently but only as "holobionts", which are complexes of organisms and their symbionts. "Symbiopoiesis," as opposed to autopoiesis, stands for the co-development of holobionts. It is not a perspective of spontaneous emergence of the body from itself but rather one that sees bodies and organisms as always existing in relation to a variety of different forms. I involve this understanding in my methodological approach to performing the body through accounting for its relations with nonhuman bodies. I aim to reveal these 'relationships' as unfolding within the performance space of the Dungeons, instead of focusing just on the performer's individuality or singular body. As the mutant performance acts mediate the processes of body modification unfolding on the Internet, the grounding proposition of my research is to approach media as performative materialities of ever entangled and excessively embodied life.

To offer some further detail about my practice research, in my process I engage several forms of bodily performance,[50] which are all explicitly embedded in fungal relations. The lens of symbiopoiesis, which involves the co-development of the host (i.e. myself) and the symbiont (the performance space permeated by fungi) offers an ethical understanding of body performance within the Dungeons in terms of a process of life unfolding within a living entity. Thus, even if I am the only human taking part in the performances, I intra-act within the multiplicity of the entangled bodies of fungi, while being able to give an account of that multiplicity. My theatrically- and digitally-manipulated body becomes a medium for those fungal bodies.

Post-Internet mutant performance art at the Dungeons examines human living conditions affected by technological development.. While overpopulated urban societies of

[49] Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, p.143
[50] As described in the 'My Body of Practice' section of this thesis.

consumers hyped on the rapidly growing availability of products probably have in many ways exhausted the idea of societal 'growth', the decrease of production and the re-consumption of waste can be offered as an embracing of decomposition processes, to counter the excessive capitalist push for production and consumption. With this, I follow Felix Guattari's "ethico-aesthetic"[51] engagement with technologies as one possible alternative Blaming "scientific (or pseudo scientific) paradigms"[52] in contemporary culture for the current state of environmental catastrophe, Guattari offers a turn to aesthetic paradigms, which can inspire people to reinvent their lives as performance artists outside of the rigid social organisations that are guarded by the technologies of surveillance and by mass media. This ethos is shared by a philosophy of life that informs my Chronic Illness events. "'Life' as Guattari has said elsewhere, 'is like a performance, one must construct it, work at it, singularise it. It is an ongoing, aesthetico-existential process'. As we weave and unweave our bodies",[53] add Guattari's translators, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. This 'unweaving' of bodies, adopted as part of my Chronic Illness practice research, is also a strategy of corporeal disconnection from the ubiquitous technologies of communication, with an aim to "cultivate a dissensus" of social decomposition processes performed by the "untamed 'dissent subjectivities' rather than a mass movement of like-minded people".[54] Mutant performance at the Dungeons develops such a methodology of dissent, which 'unweaves' the performer's body in its coupling with fungoid life.

Corporeality beyond language

Another way of describing the rationale for my research is as an attempt to understand media through their embeddedness in the bodily performance of humans, a performance that always involves fungoid entities. Merging media theory with performance practice, my research methodology is inspired by dramaturge and actor Antonin Artaud's idea of writing as the spreading of the fungal body. "The body's spore-like trace is spread across the written page"[55] in Artaud, as noticed by Stephen Barber. As Barber suggests, writing for Artaud "is physical secreting, both savage and interrogative in its impact; it glances sharply

[51] Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Continuum, London, 2000, p.22
[52] Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, "Translators' Introduction" to: Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Continuum, London, 2000, p.8
[53] Ibid., p.8
[54] Ibid., p.9
[55] Stephen Barber, *The Anatomy of Cruelty*, Sun Vision Press, London, 2013, p.7

of the body".[56] This bodily perspective towards Artaud's writing has been crucial for my formulation of my methodological approach to studying media. Dealing with concepts and ideas, writing for me is essentially a bodily activity – a gestural compulsion involving a feverish performance of limbic incantations. This is precisely what I mean by the dark-vitalist approach which I have adopted in my research. The key inspiration for my methodology comes from Artaud's interpretation of language as a mediation of body intensities and from his persistent search for performative forms that could re-embody those intensities. In my work I apply the Artaudian method to interpret the Internet as a mediation of human bodies that can be understood through those bodies' re-embodiment in mutant performance unfolding in actual physical spaces.

At the end of his life, before writing anything, Artaud would perform a routine of incantations with a sharp blade thrust into paper pages of his notebooks, accompanied by pencil incisions and cigarette holes. Writing becomes here a performance of respiration, insertion and ejection, piercing through and abjection of the membrane of the human body – which the written page is for Artaud. My own writing about transgressing Internet culture *beyond* the Internet, and about sexual and bodily transgressions *within* various Internet cultures, follows Artaudian intuition to re-translate the mediation of the body back to the tangibility of bodily performance. Artaud's theatrical emphasis on the gestural part of the process of writing accentuates the limitation of language's ability to penetrate the world, which I apply to frame the Internet simulations of the human body. This approach allows me to shift scholarly attention from human intellectual processes and mediatic abstractions, and back to the embeddedness of those processes in the bodily performances that accompany them.

When applying the Artaudian critique of language abstraction to media research, the understanding of the Internet as fluctuations of immaterial code is revealed to be insufficient. In embracing the physiological context for thought, as well as it being a context for the nonhuman life for human media technologies, communication is conceptualised as a live performance – described, after Artaud, as fragmentary and open-ended "stuttering" or "mumbling", always only partly understood and expressed. "Partial sight and limited voice", to cite Donna Haraway, are employed here "for the sake of connections and openings".[57] Mycelial agencies moving within and opening new territorial plateaux within my performance space and my writing remain in a shared conversation with all life forms,

[56] Ibid., p.7
[57] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Routledge, New York, 1991, p.196

thus aiming to create what Haraway calls “the world as a coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse”.[58] Indeed, alongside Artaud, Haraway’s approach to nonhuman life and technology has been instrumental for my research on fungi media. Her writings provide an extraordinary inspiration for me because they acknowledge microbes not only as communication partners for humans and a vital context for the civilization of new media, but also as an essential companion of human becoming.

In Artaud’s self-reflective writing, ideas are presented as emerging from the human body in a form of slimy discharge, as sweaty mucus – which is the domain of microbial life. In this vitalist, fluid figuration, he obsessively emphasises the primacy of the body before the word -- as well as before the world. This urgency is translated in my thesis into my method of analysing Internet processes through the body performance of post-Internet artists. In this methodical approach both language-based concepts and Internet practices feed on intense bodily performance. Artaud proclaims the violent gesture to be a force of repetition that reinforces the obsessive act of formulating ideas. His method oscillates around the urge to understand culture by interrogating the raw material of the human body. This is also the attempt of my research, which aims to explain Internet culture through bodily performance art. My speculative philosophical writing is thus also part of my practice. It could be said that in this thesis I not only *comment on* fungi media but also *attempt to perform them conceptually* via a number of theoretical gestures. The aim is to demonstrate some of the ways in which my language struggles with the idea of nonhuman communication, craving to engage with words as persistent physiological processes.

Creating a theoretical blueprint for the visceral performance art of the past century, Artaud was often seen hissing while taking notes and accentuating the reading of his notes with savage screams. Demon-fighting, violent gesturing, humming and spitting, which he included during his lectures, are examples of over-expressive performative communication, which is energised by a certain sense of the self-annihilation of the medium of language in order to create an outlet for raw bodily acts. The mind’s information, ideas or “data might never have existed if the body, which at least sweated them out, had not been there”.[59] What is inspiring in Artaud for my methodology is his uncompromising urge to re-embody all symbolic mediation and achieve a novel insight into human imagination.

[58] Ibid., p.201
[59] Ibid., p.99

Drawing further inspiration from Artaud, I suggest that, to understand the Internet, we need to examine the intimate acts of performative transmutations of the body of Internet users, as well as various penetrations between their bodies and their media. Artaud concludes his poetic dissection of the body with a realisation that organs and parts "fasten (human) to the rot of life".[60] His morbid obsession with excremental matter is symbolic of the primordial states of human and nonhuman existence. The creation of worlds and the formulation of words are both equivalent for him to the visceral acts of expulsion by the human body of all the entities that always betray the body. The human body also seems to serve as a mask of nonhuman body entities. This obsession introduces the question of microbial organisms that live inside the human body and that create the human from within into his conceptual framework – of which I am making use in my work. The re-embodiment of media in performative encounters with fungal entities is the focus of my research.

Artaud offered an original commentary on the electric media when his written words transformed into screams during the censored radio transmission, "To Have Done with the Judgement of God",[61] at the very end of his life. His offensive shrieking was a self-proclaimed bestial caricature of language, attacking its preciousness as a meaning-making entity. Artaud wished for his screaming language to turn into a plague, infecting others like a virus through the electric wires and electromagnetic waves of radio transmission. This feverish replication, fragmentation and dispersion into new media would become a strategy for making the world grounded in his body – and not separated from it. He wrote about the world as something not yet created but rather as an ongoing process of bodily transformations – which is the strategy adopted today by many post-Internet mutant performers, including myself. Artaud's vision of the world is that of a wound or orifice, openings which abort human or even defecate them. The world is also described by him as the bestial mouth or gland that spurts the human body as alien spittle. All of those metaphors and visualisations have helped me develop my own aesthetic in my practice, while also tracing a similarity between his ideas and the imagination of other post-Internet mutant performers, who intertwine networked communication with the poetics of contagion in their acts.

The Theatre of Contagion

[60] Antonin Artaud, "All Writing is Pigshit!", in: *Anthology*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1965, p.44
[61] Antonin Artaud, "To Have Done with the Judgement of God"*,* in: *Watchfiends & Rack Screams*, Exact Change, Boston, 1995

Artaud's performance-focused bodily theatre provides a crucial strategy for my theory-practice research involving the mediations of human bodies with microbial entities. Artaud's concept of the "Theatre of Contagion"[62] became the key inspiration for my own work, as it explicitly links bodily performativity, together the body's symbolic or even metaphysical dimensions, to the life processes of microbial entities. By looking at how Artaud conceptually transformed theatre a century ago, I am able to theorize post-Internet performance art practice in its crucial relation to fungoid life.

I would now like to explain the role of the Dungeons space in my performance research—which I conceptualise as an iteration of Adorno's Theatre of Contagion. In his article "Artaud, Germ Theory, and the Theatre of Contagion" Stanton Garner interprets the concept of the Theatre of Contagion as an intellectual response to Pasteur's 'Germ Theory' by means of body performance. Pasteur offered an explanation of human body processes through looking at the activity of fungoids. Bruno Latour notices[63] that Pasteur's laboratory experiments with yeast fermentation recognised the fungal bodies of yeast as being predominantly performances. As "microbial causes for century-old diseases were announced in rapid sequence and in often spectacular manner",[64] Pasteur's presentations showed that lab or animal (including human) bodies manifested themselves as part of an operating theatre of microbial performers. Artaud takes Pasteur's realisation even further away from the scientific objectification of living bodies and proposes instead his own microbe-obsessed performative method, a method which addresses human bodies via their microbial intensities.[65]

Artaud's theatre thus becomes synonymous with infectious disease, the theatre space is re-discovered as a space of contagion, and human performers are seen as "infectiously possessed".[66] Artaud is said to have established "theatre and infectious disease (as) defining metaphors for each other"[67], a proposition which provides his performance theory with a network of metaphors for some novel modes of corporeal interaction. Human bodily performance as conceptualised by Artaud is essentially intended to be an expression, or extension, of the microbial entities that animate human bodies. To illustrate that, during his

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[62] See Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, Grove, New York, 1958
[63] See Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999
[64] Stanton B Garner Jr., *Artaud, Germ Theory, and the Theatre of Contagion*, Theatre Journal 58, 2006, https://www.academia.edu/25112852/_Artaud_Germ_Theory_and_the_Theatre_of_Contagion_2006 , p.5
[65] Ibid. , p.11
[66] Ibid. , p.9
[67] Ibid. , p.3

"Theatre and the Plague" lecture at the Sorbonne on 6 April 1933, Artaud "shifted from reading his text to replicating the symptoms of plague through and on his own body".[68] I see this performance of microbial agency as an important act that, through its extreme gestures, communicates the principle of mediation as a life-generating process. Here, Artaud's vitalism is distinctly opposed to Pasteur's more instrumental approach to the performativity of living bodies. Artaud challenges the fiction of the 'controlled conditions' of laboratory experiments with microbes and replaces medical the lab with a theatre space of bodily transmutation, where spontaneous generation of life can always emerge from a 'void'.[69] Transgressive theatre and a dance of new imaginary anatomies as envisioned by Artaud are proclaimed as a manifestation of the agency of microbial entities, mediated by human bodies in a form of performative disease, one that transforms humans into different bodies. This is achieved through the uncoupling of living bodies from rational scientific objectification and the recognition of the generative abilities of random particles of life. This is the recognition I'm also adopting as part of my methodology.

The Artaudian methodology of bodily contagion justifies the transgression of my practice-based research beyond the textual forms of critical humanities and towards the mutant performance within the fungoid space of the Dungeons. My performance space of the Dungeons is a squatted 19th century sewage infrastructure in decay. It was built as a direct response to the epidemics of cholera, typhoid and tuberculosis in industrial London at the time and, as such, it poses critical questions about living strategies in bio-contaminated, accelerating metropolitan areas. The choice of this environmental context for my practice research was strongly supported by such questions. All urban environments are indebted to microbial decomposers. "Fossil fuels are a form of necro waste formed from the mainly anaerobic decomposition of buried dead organisms",[70] argues Myra Hird. She points out that this is only one of the many ways in which humans use the energy of decomposing microbes to produce their technological infrastructures. Those infrastructures subsequently facilitate the working of the Internet and of other high-tech media. This relationship between microbial decomposition and technological production is of great interest and concern in my research. The material processes that power the most advanced technologies now also make themselves known through the landscapes of growing

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[68] Ibid. , p.11

[69] Ibid. , p.11

[70] Myra J.Hird, "Proliferation, Extinction, and an Anthropocene Aesthetic", in: Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein (eds), *Posthumous Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2016, p.257

dumping sites. E.H. Dixon's watercolour painting *The Great Dust Heap*,[71] [Fig. 5] from the times of the early industrial development of London, shows an enormous garbage and excrement dump, surrounded by urban slum dwelling and a smallpox hospital in the area. This area is now the North London neighbourhood where the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan are located, providing an apt setting for post-Internet mutant performance.

Fig. 5. *The Great Dust Heap* by E.H. Dixon, 1837 (Public Domain)

Navigating the fungi- and microbe-inspired philosophies of post-Internet mutant performance, the key intention of my research has thus been to create a thought passage to a global environmental imagination from the position of precarious urban living with bio-waste. Over the past two centuries of technological development, landfills across the world have grown enormously, as has their biological complexity. As "landfills assemble billions of heterogenous bacteria",[72] the different types of organisms are active in different stages of the processes of waste decomposition, report researchers concerned with nonhuman life, such as Hird. I give them voice in my thesis because media technologies such as the Internet entail, via their biological energy sources, vast microbial processes that move across the globe as 'leachate', the mixed miscellaneous exhaust of waste decomposition. Leachate "moves into and through plants, trees, animals, fungi, insects, and the atmosphere. Via Leachate, bacteria create well known, little-known, and new biological

[71] E.H. Dixon's watercolour painting *The Great Dust Heap* in Wellcome Collection, London https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ssu37wcd

[72] Myra J.Hird, "Proliferation, Extinction, and an Anthropocene Aesthetic", in: Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein (edit), *Posthumous Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2016, p.260

forms".[73] Bacteria also give evidence of microbial intelligence, claims Hird, in the way they develop "complex and ubiquitous relationality".[74] I consider all those insights about fungoid entanglements with living environments in parallel with the mobility paradigm in global societal processes involved in urban decay. The unknown behaviour of bacteria may have profound consequences for humans who still know very little about them, yet they co-exist with them intimately and may be completely dependent on their obscure performance and future mutations. Humans don't understand "bacterial losses, gains, and transformations, dynamics that are obscured by the scalar mismatch of bacteria and ourselves, by the immensity of their numbers, strangeness of their forms, and the difficulty of accessing many of the environments in which they thrive".[75] Dwelling in the architecture of decay, squatters often have to face the problems of environmental waste within urban environments, as they practice living literally within the waste. Mutant performers at the Dungeons fall embrace sewage infrastructure and adapt it as a method of examining the ongoing crisis of human civilization.

The Re-embodiment of the Digitised Body

For Artaud, the integrity of the human body is bound to be ultimately transgressed into multiple selves in motion, selves which are fragmented and morphing, assuming in process the shape of an entity of phantom limbs which are fighting among themselves. Post-Internet mutant performances that I engage in and curate seek to embody those processes of body decomposition through a variety of media. They could thus arguably represent Artaud's intended media presence, such as the radio broadcast that he perceived "literally to be a physical transmission",[76] with the "scream made new, vivid flesh"[77] multiplying through the electric media of the radio. The immediate and physical transmission serves to intensify Artaud's screaming body, when he proclaims that ideas in themselves are nothing, only corporeal intensity counts as meaningful, as it "wants to get out". This ecstatic urge against the dematerialisation of body mediations serves as a manifesto of an impossible dance during his radio transmission, a dance that negates any definite formulation of language or codes.

[73] Ibid., p.261
[74] Ibid., p.261
[75] Ibid., p.261
[76] Ibid., p.164
[77] Ibid., p.164

By developing a parallel between Artaud's concept of the contagious body and the new media context in which it can be productively located, Stephen Barber points out in his chapter "The Digitised Body of Antonin Artaud"[78] that the mediated body "remains distinctively extant only in the form of its most obstinate and anomalous residues".[79] Barber proposes that Artaud's quest for the immediacy of corporeality finds its unexpected realization in the mediation of the human body on the Internet and in other new, aka electric, media. Here and now Artaud's urge is thus actualized in "a corporeality enmeshed and disintegrating within digital environments, in perpetual flux, and possessing elements of persistent irreducibility in its most elusive or deviant manifestations".[80] The multitude of mutations was urged by Artaud as a form of a new raw presence of the body, which can be interpreted through Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of *remediation.*[81] Their concept describes the twin logic of new media with the complementary categories of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*. Hypermediacy is the process within mediation that involves a proliferation of the feverish multiplicities of mediated bodies, when at the same time the process of immediacy seeks new forms of the direct presence of the body via mediation techniques. Both processes are intertwined and are remaking each other. Remediation for them involves an attempt of human body "both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them".[82] For me post-Internet body performance is one of the rare human acts that can actually and materially, *enact remediation*, as it embodies all multi-mediations of the body in the direct immediacy of the physiological performance of mutation.

Developing a theoretical relation between the Internet and visions of the mutant body, Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer propose that there is a certain symmetry between the manipulation enacted upon the human body by communication media and that enacted by invasive biotechnology: "The new human of biology corresponds to the cloning of the world itself through the transmission technologies",[83] they suggest. In their book *Corpuscular Dawn*, Virilio and Lotringer comment on body art after the Internet. "Representations of the body, fragmented, abject, grotesque, sublime, monstrous" are for them "a massive symptom of the body's increasing disappearance"[84] in the advent of technological

[78] Stephen Barber, *The Anatomy of Cruelty*, Sun Vision Press, London, 2013, p.231
[79] Ibid., p.231
[80] Ibid., p.232
[81] See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation : Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, the MIT Press, 2000
[82] Ibid., p.5
[83] Paul Virilio & Sylvere Lotringer, *Corpuscular Dawn*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2002, p.102
[84] Ibid., p.118

communications and biotechnology. Performance art indirectly embodies the tendencies of new technologies and the dangerous processes initiated by them – from communication media to the new eugenics of genetic engineering. The bodily acts of contemporary performers, such as French artist ORLAN, can be seen as reactions against those technological processes. By means of body mutilation or abjection, various performances embody the disappearance of the human body in the context of its post-media mutation, as a result of technology entering inside it. Referenced by Virilio and Lotringer, ORLAN's body performances in 1990s[85] involved or even embraced plastic surgery, in a proclamation of mutant and nomadic identity. Her face was technologically altered in an attempt to go against the ideas of fixed Nature, imprinted DNA or other godly codes programming the human body. The technological processes that facilitated the shifts in ORLAN's identity, such as those related to eugenics and genetic engineering, invade the human body and open it to manipulation within. They redefine the human body as something disposable, made up of multiple misappropriated appearances, and manipulated by the nomadic games of communication entities and media clones of the body itself. This sense of bodily fragmentation and cloning, using technology both as a tool and as a source of its aesthetic, is adopted by my own 'post-Internet' performances in the Dungeons.

Via various mediations, the human body can burst into fragments and find its new anatomy of a thousand forms, at the same time assuming a new intensity of technological presence. This bursting mutation and the new anatomical dynamism are famously called by Artaud the "body without organs", which is further described in his radio transmission as "dancing inside out as in the delirium".[86] This delirium seems nevertheless infected with microbial bacillus, which animates it into "a rhythm, which transcends the Dance but seems graphic of Disease".[87] The paralytic shiver, or ecstatic delirium, can be described as the vision of Artaud's electric media that transcends the human body defined by its organs. In many ways this vision has its cruel and dramatic grounding in his experience of having received 52 electroshocks in mental asylums. There, the electroshocks served for him as an unwitting performance of the body's decomposition into electric media, resulting in the aforementioned artificial death. He describes the experience in his painful testimonies:

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[85] ORLAN, *Surgery Performance* (1990) documentation: http://www.orlan.eu/portfolio/first-surgery-performance-paris-july-1990/

[86] Antonin Artaud, *To Have Done with the Judgement of God,* in: *Watchfiends & Rack Screams*, Exact Change, Boston, 1995, p.307

[87] Antonin Artaud, "Concerning a Journey to the Land of Tarahumaras", in: *Watchfiends & Rack Screams*, Exact Change, Boston, 1995, p.77

> Thus, wrung out and twisted, finer on finer, I felt myself to be the hideous corridor of an impossible convolution. And I know not what suspension of the void invaded me with its gaping blind spots, but I was that void, and in suspension, (…) I was nothing more than a spasm among several chokings.[88]

The violence of such crude technology applied to Artaud's body ended up enacting a grotesque form of a new human corporeality that became his ultimate obsession. The bundle of spasms and choking suspended within a void tragically revealed the rawness of the intense bodily experience that he went on to recount numerous times in his writings. Searching for new impossible anatomies, negating both language and image, Artaud would express in his notebooks a desire for radical nonhuman sexual mutations[89] – mutations that could perhaps be seen as technological and/or fungal, as I argue throughout my thesis. Artaud challenged himself by saying "it is I who (…) tore my body from myself and battle against what is left of it".[90] What seemed left of it, I suggest, was the media proliferation of his body into the residue of microbial performance. The tearing of the mediated body into mutant fragments is being performed by myself and other post-Internet body artists in complicity with fungoids.

I follow the intuition concerning the penetrating agency of media within the human body, by exploring the notion of rot in my narrative about fungi media. I also embody it in my performance art practice, in particularly through my acts performed in the self-curated bio-active space of The Dungeons, as well as by involving microbial entities in my acts. Conceptualising my performances, I reference theories of Artaud, which found their iconic executions in Tatsumi **Hijikata's butoh** dance performance [Fig 6.].

[88] Antonin Artaud, *Electroshock*, in: *Anthology*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1965, p.182
[89] Stephen Barber, *The Anatomy of Cruelty*, Sun Vision Press, London, 2013, p.183
[90] Antonin Artaud, *Electroshock*, in: *Anthology*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1965, p.187

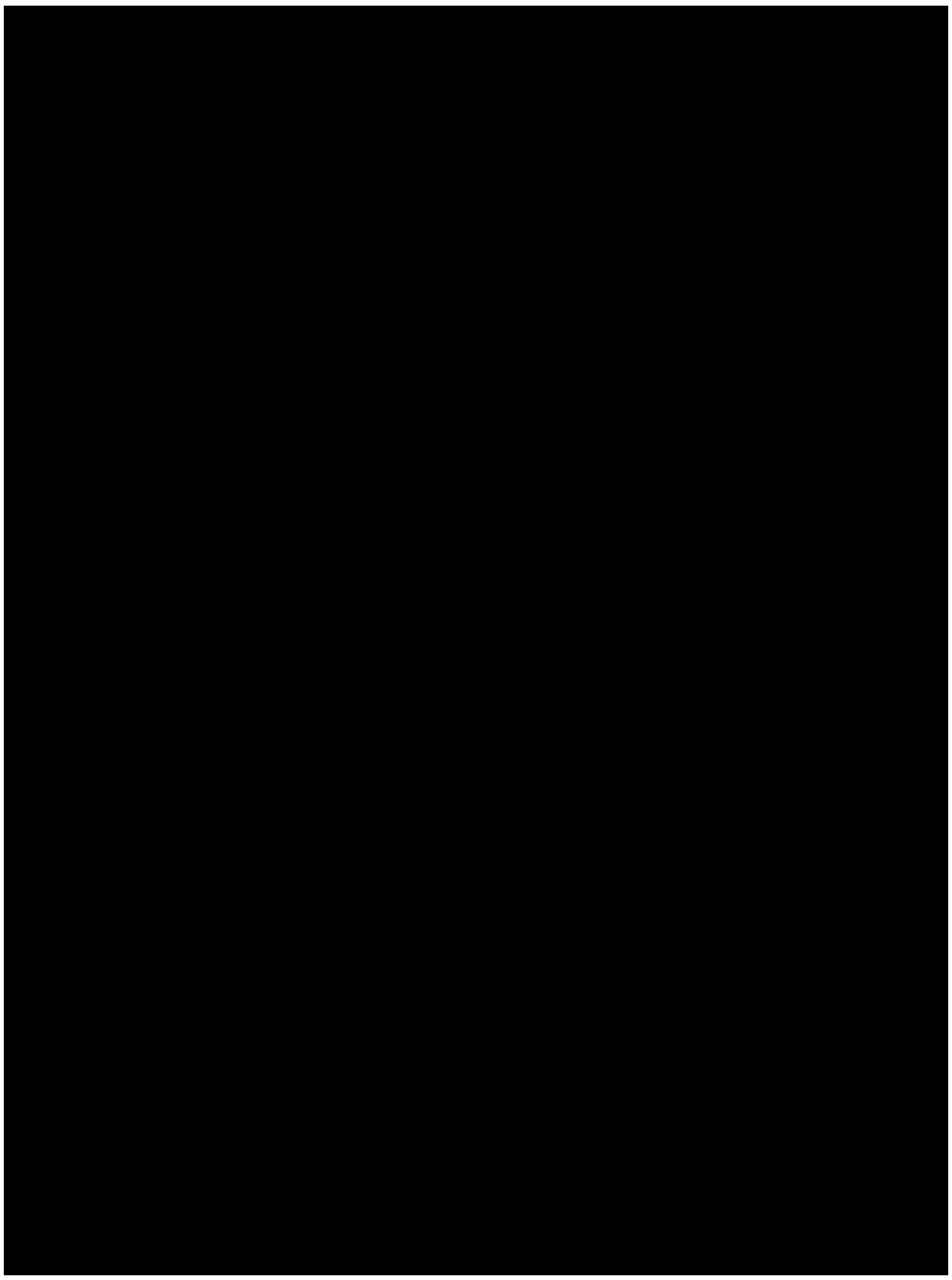

Fig. 6. Tatsumi Hijikata's *Revolt of the Body* based on A. Artaud. Photo credit: Torii Ryozen (copyrighted image removed)

Artaud's and Hijikata's transgressive visions and performances of bodily mutations and surgeries arguably evoke the drama of 21st century media bio-tech, precisely by conceptualising the body as if it was already subjected to the working of genetic engineering or network media communications, reconfigured by the mesh-up of the Internet. Staying in touch with the sense of diversity of bodily forms is crucial to my methodology of media research. That's why I'm choosing to focus on the specific phenomenon of post-Internet performance art, involving practices that not only re-work the

issues around technological mediations of the human body but also invite reflection on the sustainable relation of technology towards nonhuman life. They do that through staging intimate entanglements with the fungal fabric of life. In this way, they enact post-sexual bodily mutations, which I conceptualise as performative re-embodiments of the bodily mediations unfolding on and ‘after’ the Internet.

Literature Review: Mediations of Human Bodies within Fungal Ecologies

The concept of 'fungi media' discussed in this thesis offers a perspective on technologies of communication that aims to demonstrate how human bodies are technologically mediated in conjunction with, and as part of, fungal ecologies. My Literature Review explores the theoretical writings that support this perspective with the aim of developing an argument for a transformation of human sexuality through technological mediations – and for arriving at an alternative, 'fungoid' form of bodily reproduction.

Interrogating on a conceptual level the post-Internet performance of bodily mutations, I engage here with the philosophical texts that situate the understanding of the human body in theories of nonhuman life processes – particularly, the microbial mutability of living matter. Through this transhuman opening of the human body I approach mediations enacted on and via the Internet as environmental bodily processes. This will help me establish that technological mediations of human bodies can be understood as mutations that occur by means of non-sexual reproduction, enabling the emergence of alternative forms of sexuality. The aim behind my selection of the new materialist literature presented here is also to position certain performances of (what may look like) bizarre fetishist sexuality as expressions of the timely awareness of ecological complexities related to living in a post-industrial civilisation.

Importantly, the selection of the literature discussed here is practice-led. My philosophical reading of performance art which flirts with the aesthetics of androgynous monstrosity or ambiguous anti-sexuality assigns to it an affirmative value of a novel life pursuit. It proposes a way out of the nihilistic impasse of mass media culture, described by Jean Baudrillard[91] in terms of ambivalence, disappearance and transparency. In conclusion to his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, written in the wake of the Internet and introducing his concept of technological simulation as the primary perspective to think human life, Baudrillard defines his ethical position as mass media nihilism. Developing his critique of the rationalist and productivist principles behind the organisation of industrial society, he realizes that all forms of subversions aimed against the techno-system of control are bound to be eventually incorporated into that systems as its novel, supporting strategies. In consequence, Baudrillard diagnoses the disappearance of all meaning and values in

[91] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1994, p.162

contemporary (media) culture, which, according to him, is expressed in the aesthetics of ambivalence in media simulations – such as androgyny and monstrosity. In my interpretation of media simulations, the mode of disappearance and the aesthetics of ambivalence are tapping into processes of decomposition and post-sexual androgyny. I read those as life processes which offer an alternative to the productivist and consumerist principles accelerated by industrial society and engraved within the cultural tradition of family values based on binary sexualities. Moreover, I recognise those alternative life processes accentuated by media simulations as complementary to processes of production and consumption, and, as such, as necessary for the continuity of human civilization, to keep it renewable or sustainable. My involvement with the literature discussing nonhuman vitality in new materialist philosophy will be crucial for establishing this life-affirmative perspective on the mutant body simulations of post-Internet artists.

The literature supporting my research will then be applied to the analysis of artistic phenomena concerning my research topic. I will read these phenomena as not just aesthetic acts but also as an opportunity for enacting a cultural shift in understanding sexuality and the body. With the post-Internet performance of bodily mutations, the focus shifts to observing and speculating about the ecologically-crucial processes defined by the seemingly "nihilistic" phenomena of decomposition "and no longer by the mode of production"[92] and consumption. The chosen texts will help me to explore the fertile conceptual background of mutant performance art, a nonhuman background that affirms life beyond postmodern nihilism described by Baudrillard and that taps into the figurative prism of fungal mediations. Paradigmatic bioscience publications by mycologist Paul Stamets as well as evolutionary microbiologist Lynn Margulis were my original inspiration for selecting corresponding texts from the field of contemporary critical humanities. My selection involves texts that focus on the role of microbial or fungoid environments in re-negotiating our understanding of the human body, with particular emphasis on technological mediations and alternative sexualities. I have thus selected philosophical and cultural texts that have contributed to the discussion around new materialism, dark vitalism, post- and transhumanism and queer bodies. In parallel, I have complemented those more explicitly philosophical texts dealing with life and the body with writings from the field of media and cultural theory. Following in the lineage of McLuhan, my focus here has been on texts which explain technological mediations through relating media to bodily functions. In that context I have included texts offering a post-humanist critique of

[92] Ibid., p.162

biotechnology, embodiment in post-Internet culture, performance art, bioart, as well as the impact of technological processes on humans' living environments.

The Mycelial Internet

The essential role of fungi for ecosystems has been encapsulated by the metaphor of the Internet proposed by Paul Stamets in his iconic book *Mycelium Running*,[93] which is also the original inspiration for my research into fungi media. Published at the beginning of 21st century, the book summarizes several decades of Stamets' experience with fungi in the practice of regenerating forests, selecting various species as sources of medicine and nutrients, as well as cloning them and manipulating them genetically for health purposes. The subtitle of this iconic book is *How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World* and it expresses his affirmative life approach. Supported by his life-long forestry practice and innovative research into fungi, Stamets recognises fungi not only as organisms of key importance for the evolution of macroscopic organisms on Earth but also as crucial living entities nowadays. According to Stamets' expertise, fungi provide communication infrastructures for the world's forests by connecting to the roots of the trees and exchanging biochemicals as well as genes between plants. This is why he calls fungi the "Nature's Internet".[94] Yet what is particularly interesting for me is that his comparison of fungi to networked media is drawn not only because of a mere 'communication' of objectified, biochemical 'information'. The 'information' that fungi circulate in the biosphere is actually a live process, which is a vital part of the lives of diverse organisms and entities within the biosphere. Indirectly, Stamets suggests a concept of the Internet that is an embodied live process of all organisms on Earth. In Stamets' theory fungi are the major life provider of life on the scale of the entire biosphere. Their life-giving ability is achieved by linking all earthly life forms through the major nourishment process, which is fungal decomposition.

This brilliant form of mediation, which earned fungi a metaphoric comparison to the Internet, offers much more than any human media technology does. Fungal 'communication' not only 'informs' the many life forms about each other, but eventually it also recreates their bodies, alongside providing building materials for their reproduction, thanks to setting the molecular bio-energy into global circulations. Stamets urges humans

[93] See Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005
[94] Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005, p.2

to recognise the role of fungi in our common pursuit of survival, especially in the face of the monstrous ecological disasters caused by industrial civilisation. He argues “we can offset the environmental damage inflicted by humans by accelerating organic decomposition”.[95] What I’m pursuing in my project follows Stamets’ initial association of fungi’s decomposing mediation of living bodies with the Internet. Stamets’ expertise comes from his fieldwork experience, conducted while working as a forester who has been using fungi to restore environments that have been damaged by humans, as well as designing or genetically modifying myco-filters for neutralising toxic pollutants within those environments. It is the life-generating role of fungi which is related to the facilitation of biochemical communication between other living organisms that is the specific reason for the comparison Stamets makes between mycelium and the Internet. I follow this association as a methodological vector of my research into a post-Internet understanding of human bodies. I attempt to understand the mediation of humans on and ‘after’ the Internet through re-mediating them in a broader context of fungoid life. I am not attempting to assess the scientific validity of Stamets’ argument in my thesis. Rather, I take it as an inspiration for developing a set of critical humanities concepts, including my leading concept of ‘fungi media’, with a view to broadening my perspective and understanding the mediations of human bodies on and off the Internet, through the underlying life processes of those bodies. My interest here lies in identifying a post-Internet cultural formation that establishes a vital relation between technological mediations of human bodies and the vital process of decomposition.

Nonhuman Vitality in New Materialist Philosophy

A variety of texts have been selected and referenced throughout my thesis which allow a theorisation of the technologies of communication in the context of the body and, particularly, the body of fungi. Moreover, exploring the theories of media embodiment, I’ve been drawn towards speculation about obscure and miniscule life entities that, in their performance, elude precise definitions. Here lies perhaps the greatest difficulty of my philosophical attraction – I am writing a text, supported by dozens of other texts, with an overwhelming ambition to point at performing the materialities of life which are radically alien to textual conceptualisation. More than anything, I understand text-making as a human activity horizontally contextualized by an immense abundance of other-than-human

[95] Ibid., p.11

life activities. Nonhuman living bodies cannot be neatly summarised within a human text precisely because they are nonhuman. In the same way the world cannot be fully explained via the human-centric practice of writing because it is not fully human to begin with. One may think that humans create texts and technology and thus media must be self-explanatory for them, but I ground my research in questioning this very assumption, seeking the vital involvement of nonuhman life in the technological mediations of human bodies. This is why, in my Methodology chapter, I situate my writing as well as my body performance strategies in Artaud's[96] work aimed at the destruction of language.[97] His poetic and theatrical acts are driven by the idea that human thoughts are inspired by nonhuman life entities and that the destruction of fixed language forms creates an opening onto nonhuman irrationality. Artaud's writings have assisted me in realising that any attempt at writing about life that is not human has to consider writing itself, together with other communication technologies, as partially nonhuman and alive.

Similarly, the most advanced technologies of communication participate in life processes that perform transgressions beyond the human faculties of understanding or cognition. This inherent obstruction to the conceptualisation of nonhuman and technological entities is elegantly expressed in Timothy Morton's model of 'hyperobjects', applied to describe nonhuman life in his book *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*. Hyperobjects can be acknowledged as "massively distributed beings, of which we can only see little spatiotemporal pieces at a time".[98] My writing, along with the texts I reference, deals with a number of such hyperobjects, which include the biosphere, the Internet, species and mycelia. Morton's conceptual dimension of those distributed ecologies provides a framework for theorising the decomposition of subjectivities and the dispersion of bodies mediated on the Internet.

The literature of my choice attempts to touch on the technological embodiment of microbes that would otherwise be imperceptible to humans. I also explore the perceptibility of microbes by humans, enabled by technology. All the philosophical references that I draw on can be placed within the scope of contemporary, or 'new' materialism, with a particular focus on nonhuman vitality. Two anthologies have been instrumental for me in defining the academic discussion around the subject: *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and*

[96] Artaud is the only one of the key authors referenced in this thesis who doesn't comment on the Internet or electric media directly, although he writes extensively about electroshock.
[97] See Antonin Artaud, *Watchfiends & Rack Screams*, Exact Change, Boston, 1995
[98] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, Verso, New York, 2017, p.46

Politics[99] edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost and *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*[100] edited by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin. They include contributions from and references to authors who are also important part of my research, such as Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti and Bruno Latour. I mobilise texts by those authors to help me answer the question regarding the nonhuman vitalism of human technologies. All the writings referenced here have made a significant contribution to my understanding of communication technologies in terms of *nonhuman media for humans*, as they have allowed me to position mediation in terms of a human participation in nonhuman life.

'New materialism' is a name signalling a radical 'turn to matter' in many contemporary philosophies inspired by unprecedented technological manipulations of life during the last century. Those manipulations have raised concern about the scientific impact on living matter and about its unpredictable consequences in areas such as climate change, global capital and population flows, the biotechnological engineering of genetically modified organisms and the saturation of human lives with simulation technologies. New materialism offers a philosophical shift to the ontology of life and life-embedded technology, where matter is understood as a process, force, vitality or event rather than structure, system or mechanism. The vital agency of matter is accentuated here against the dualism of passive matter, as opposed to an active (human) subject. This philosophical focus is the reason why I involve performance art practice as a complementary tool in my research. With this I explore new materialism's ontological reflections about the world as produced by performative events, and as characterised by transience, dynamism, diversities, irregularities, contingencies, multiplicities and differences. Those ontologies produce an understanding of the bodies of humans and other living entities in terms of assemblages, i.e. anti-essentialist complexities defined not by their essence but by their relations to other bodies. Here, what is crucial for 'new materialism' is a definite shift of the central focus of attention from the human and towards material agencies "emancipating the affective capacities of non-human".[101] New materialism thus provides a context through which to reflect upon humans and their technologies, in all their nonhuman vitality. This focus on nonhuman vitality allows speculation about the ethics of engagement of human culture with other living bodies. It has inspired various ecophilosophies that

[99] See Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010
[100] See Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (eds), *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, Open Humanities Press, Ann Arbor, 2012
[101] Nick Fox and Pam Alldred, 'New Materialism', in: *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, P.A. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, M. Williams (eds), Sage, London, 2019, https://methods.sagepub.com/foundations/new-materialism, p.3

postulate an "anti-humanist critique of the environmentally-destructive capacities of humans, but also [propose] to re-integrate humans within 'the environment' ".[102]

Introducing the term 'posthumanism' in her research into critical humanities, in her book *The Posthuman*[103] Braidotti frames the human condition within transformational forces of nonhuman life and thus offers a different understanding of the human – one that links it to nonhuman matter and matters. The posthuman perspective is characteristic of the new materialist philosophy in the way it recognises the agency of nonhuman life forms, or indeed, of all forms of matter. In posthuman theories, matter in general possesses "its own modes of transformation".[104] Following this premise, Jane Bennett unfolds in her book *Vibrant Matter*[105] a project of 'vibrant materiality' by ascribing agency to materials such as electricity, food or trash. She looks at humans from the perspective of those materials, which she describes as active actants. This form of theoretical exploration is also inspired by Latour's actor-network theory, which is applied to theorise fungoid life in his book *Pandora's Hope*.[106] According to Latour, events of the world emerge as a heterogenous, transient and relational network of performances by human and nonhuman actants. As human activities always converge with performances of nonhumans, it is necessary to account for agencies of nonhuman materialities in order to understand humans. Another precursor of the radically interrelational theorisation of material processes is Barad, who has become one of the key philosophers of new materialism. In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*[107] she applies observations about the impossibility of the definite separation of events from each other in quantum physics to formulate a general ontology of life based on the material entanglement of various processes. Barad shows how the entanglement of many material agencies precedes the acute phenomena of the world's 'events'. Every attempt at a theoretical separation of an event is inevitably an action within the entangled material agencies. All those theories of posthumanist agency support the anti-essentialist understanding of bodies, which fluctuate in those theories as transient complexities and momentums of convergence of many different material agencies. Importantly for my research, in this framework human bodies are framed by the agencies of nonhuman life.

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[102] Ibid., p.4
[103] See: Braidotti Rosi, *The Posthuman,* Polity, London 2013
[104] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *Introduction*, in: *New Materialisms. Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds), Duke University Press, Durham, 2010
[105] See: Bennett Jane, *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, London, 2010
[106] See: Latour Bruno, *Pandora's Hope*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999
[107] See: Barad Karen, *Meeting the Universe Half Way*, Duke University Press, 2007

The majority of the general concepts of nonhuman life are encapsulated by theories of humans' living environments – principally the biosphere, as well as the environments *within* human bodies. Stacey Alamo in her book *Bodily Natures*[108] shows how models of disease and infection emphasise the understanding of the body as an open system, infiltrated by the environment. In this context, the problem of media can be formulated as one of dynamic and material relations between technology and the environment, with the media occupying the in-between (or ''medial') position. The relationship of technology to the environment exposes the nonlinearity of life processes in the form of unforeseen mutations, unpredictable trajectories of illnesses, GMO design for food and fuel, as well as medical and digital prostheses. The fungal theory of the Internet I develop in my thesis asks a question about the environment in order to offer a media framework that accounts for the nonlinear transformations of human bodies. To accomplish this, I will bounce off the 'infrastructural' analysis of media conducted by John Durham Peters. In his book *Marvelous Clouds*[109] Peters effectively reworks Marshall McLuhan's concept of media as environments for and extensions of the human body,[110] complementing it with his own speculation about the bio/technological embodiments of human and nonhuman dwellings.

In order to introduce the fungal perspective on media ecology, I begin by looking at the so-called "microbe effect", as described by Peters.[111] The term 'microbe' means 'small life' and designates organisms that are invisible to the human eye. Microbes were discovered over three centuries ago, thanks to advancements in the optical technology of the microscope. Its inventor, Robert Hooke, reported the discovery of microorganisms in 1665, by depicting the microfungus Mucor [Fig. 7.] in his book *Micrographia.*[112] It was published in London during a major outbreak of bubonic plague, which had also been spread by microbes, but of a different type.[113] The discovery brought to public attention myriads of life forms that were otherwise not perceivable by humans. Only hyper-microbial fungi, structured as microbes but of monstrous sizes, reaching the dimensions of their underground mycelial bodies as great as no other organism on our planet, have been known to human civilisations. Nevertheless, they were mostly recognised through their reproductive extensions of mushrooms but not through the essential body of mycelium.

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[108] Alaimo Stacy, *Bodily Natures,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2010
[109] See John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015
[110] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 2001
[111] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 2015, p.111
[112] See "Observ. XX Of blue Mould, and of the first Principles of Vegetation arising from Putrefaction". In: Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses*, Royal Society, London, 1665 http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15491/15491-h/15491-h.htm
[113] The Great Plague of 1665 killed 200 000 people and was stopped by the Great Fire of London of 1666.

Not much more than an estimated 10% of fungi develop mushrooms and, as Lynn Margulis points out, even though fungi perform sex through mushrooms, they can still reproduce without it.[114] To notice this fungal redundancy of sex is to acknowledge the multitudes of fungal non-binary sexualities and hence the possibility of the mutant reproduction of bodies as inherent to the ecology of life on Earth. This discovery provides a crucial ecological context to the post-Internet performance of humans who identify with various non-normative sexualities and who construct and express their identities through acts of body mutation. The understanding of life in terms of reproduction through the transformation of bodies beyond the sexual binary, a process I call fungosexuality, is inscribed in the trans-sexual, post-sexual or gender-queer character of mutant performances that I observe, research, choreograph and participate in.

[114] Lynn Margulis & Dorion Sagan, *What Is Life* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000, p.172

Fig. 7. Scan of the original print of microfungus Mucor. Illustration by Robert Hooke drawn in London 1665 for *Micrographia,* based on his observations with a handmade microscope conducted in the same year (figure 1) https://digital.sciencehistory.org/works/xw42n912b, (Public Domain)

To introduce the idea of the technological mediation of fungal bodies, which explores the possible understanding of human media technologies via theories of microbial life, I start

with a suggestion that humans can approach microbes only through technology. We can infer from this that it is only thanks to the microscope that humans can speculate about how miniscule bodies create the global networks of organic media that penetrate human bodies so thoroughly. Described by Peters as the “microbe effect”, this state of events suggests that we can only notice and understand microbes via technological cognition, which brings microbes to life for our perception.

Human environments turned out to be manipulated by scales so fine that we can never be sure about the nature of life forms we are dwelling with. We can recognise this new form of being in the world as *dwelling with microbes*. Their appearance to us made us aware of being embedded in the world in a new microbial sense, but it also revealed the technological sense of microbe surveillance technology, since we wouldn’t have been aware of the microbes without the microscope, as Peters[115] points out after Bruno Latour.[116] Thus, the microbial understanding of human dwelling is techno-biological. In a way we can say that there were no microbes before the microscope, for human understanding at least. The ‘microbe effect’ names the impossibility of the existence of microbes for humans before the emergence of the technology that exposed microbes as an actor behind the scene of the whole life affair and that gave a new dimension to the performance of living bodies across all scales. Indeed, our techno-mediated understanding of all the forms of life in the animal and plant world suddenly became microbe-dependent, i.e. conditioned, if not threatened, or rather made possible, by microbes. But on the other hand, Latour insists, our understanding of technological communications has been incited by the mediations of microbial networks and by the exploration of the connectivity within their entities. Humans invented microbes together with their technologies and, at the same time, invented the technologies through which they had been involved with microbial performance.

In turn, Peters’ concept of “infrastructures” poignantly exposes how superficially invisible technologies, such as the Internet, are actually only hidden from our eyes yet remain embodied in material processes on a global scale, processes that thoroughly challenge the conditions of every individual human life as well as other organisms. Here, Peters also references theories of McLuhan, who presented media as the extensions of human bodies. I pay attention to this relation of human technology to human bodies but at the same I seek its convergence with relations to nonhuman bodies. I also consider possible

[115] See John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015
[116] See Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999

consequences of the logic of McLuhan's extensions by speculating about the human bodies being extensions of microbial entities' networks, which media technologies embody.

In his book *Understanding Media* McLuhan considers media very broadly as all forms of communication technologies, material cultures or civilisational advancements. Taking those human material expressions in their diverse forms he defines them as extensions of the human body, with each of them emphasising and amplifying a particular feature of the human body's performance. At the same time, by extending particular body features, McLuhan's media change the relationship of those features to other features within human bodies. Thus, through processes of extension media infiltrate human bodies and re-shape them on a global scale. According to McLuhan, media become the process of human bodies' mutations.

In my thesis I confront McLuhan's techno-evolution theory of human bodies' mutation through media with the concept of a microbial "carpet of life" introduced by Lynn Margulis. Margulis introduced this concept to the theory of evolution under the name *holobiont*, presenting it in her book, *The Symbiotic Planet.*[117] Margulis' writings offer a groundbreaking explanation of life through looking at various aspects of microbial connectivity. She elaborates on the mutability of microbial bodies, which is facilitated by their ability to communicate and enter symbiotic co-existence, as the crucial processes for the evolution of life. The key interest of my project on fungi media is to find a theoretical convergence between the McLuhanian theorisation of techno-evolution that is focused on the human body in relation to human media technologies, and Margulis' thinking about life as animated by distributed nonhuman life entities and their mediations. I think that there is a shared vision of global networks of mediation and mutation between those two theoretical approaches. The task of my project is to recognise a certain accountability for the environmental intricacies of life in the global media culture of the Internet. In my view, this kind of accountability should be assisted by the recognition of the role of nonhuman agencies in the making of human media, human bodies, and, particularly, the human bodies that are being mediated on and by the Internet.

[117] See: Margulis Lynn, *The Symbiotic Planet,* Phoenix, London, 2001

The Environmental Intelligence of Nonhumans

The concept of microbial evolution introduced by Margulis serves as an inspiration for many "transhuman" philosophies explaining human life through its inescapable relation with the multitudes of nonhuman life forms that live inside, outside and with human bodies. Influential ecofeminist Donna Haraway continues the thought of Margulis by emphasizing the 'sympoiesis', which is the term for processes of organisation through a co-existence (symbiosis) of all sorts of different creatures. "Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements",[118] writes Haraway. One important consequence of her sympoietic perspective is the centrality of the interrelated processes of nonhuman life and their necessary involvement in human cultures. In her book *Staying with the Trouble*[119] Haraway calls for cultural accountability for that inevitable nonhuman context to everything considered human. At the end of the book she outlines a speculative scenario about future cultures created by dispersed 'Communities of Compost'[120] that are living in ruined places. Those communities are primarily focused on the complexities of nonhuman life and on new ways of establishing companionship between humans and nonhumans, instead of focusing on the sexual reproduction that is typical of anthropocentric society, by proclaiming: 'Make kin not babies'. Speculating about ecofeminist futures, Haraway writes about compost, which is a term for a complex assemblage of active microbial entities, turning it into a concept for describing transhuman co-existence within diverse ecologies.

Following Haraway, Anna Tsing writes in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*[121] about fungi as the most vivid example of infectious relationality within the biosphere, a situation which doesn't allow any organism to exist as completely separate. She also calls for a radical openness towards the otherness of fungal life and intelligence as a strategy of survival for the human species. The unpredictability of fungal growth and the precariousness of foraging for mushrooms in the forest of Oregon are for Tsing a figuration of grassroots human survival beyond the 20th century grandiose political visions of stability - "a common life without guarantees".[122] She suggests that those fungal ways of

[118] Haraway Donna, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, London, 2016, p.75
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., p.138
[121] See: Tsing Anna, *The Mushroom at The End of The World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015
[122] Tsing Anna, *The Mushroom at The End of The World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, p.2

living seem to be "the first requirement of collaborative survival in precarious times".[123] In the midst of the crises of technological control over nature, her work offers sensitivity to the fungal modes of mediation as a way of undoing the environmental deadlock of the industrial society by highlighting resonance with the fertile indeterminism of decompositions.

Rot as a "dark" and unintelligible underbelly of human life is brought to light by theorists of the nonhuman vitality of mater, such as Ben Woodard. His book *Slime Dynamics*[124] summarises the role of fungi as a new materialist figuration of the transhuman mediation of human bodies. In a similar vein, Reza Negarestani has taken even more risks in his speculative philosophy, proposing in *Cyclonopedia*[125] that the most complex symbolic structures conceived by human civilisations indirectly express the deeper intelligence of the dispersed tangles of biological particles that perform hypercomplex mediations of their bodies into forms that we recognise as 'human'. The primordial microbes, remaining ever incomprehensible to the human mind, are in constant transformation. Negarestani's speculations tap into the discussion about the intelligence of vegetative life organisations, outlined in *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence*[126] by Anthony Trewavas. In his comprehensive study, Trewavas analyses various aspects of the behaviour of vegetative organisms, building a theory of vegetative intelligence based on his detailed observations. Applicable also to fungi, Trewavas' theory, alongside Negarestani's theoretic-fictional speculations, offers me a number of conceptual tools which challenge the assumption of exceptionality with regard to human intelligence in the biosphere and which extend the category of intelligent behaviour onto fungoid environments. By exploring the concept of fungoid intelligence, those texts further embed humans in nonhuman life. They position humans as a momentum within the wider processes of life's generativity.

Philosopher Manuel De Landa investigates this creative potency of life and matter in *Philosophy and Simulation*.[127] The basic material potency in many different forms emerges in the form of complex structures with qualities that exceed the characteristics of their parts. What is important is that these forms of "intelligent" behaviour are performed in nature thanks to its immanent morphogenetic capacities and without the necessity of being commanded from the outside. "It is absurd to think that complex self-organizing structures

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[123] Tsing Anna, *The Mushroom at The End of The World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, p.2
[124] See: Woodard Ben, *Slime Dynamics*, Zero Books, Washington, 2011
[125] See: Negarestani Reza, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008
[126] See: Virilio Paul, *Art and Fear*, Continuum, London, 2006
[127] De Landa Manuel, *Philosophy and Simulation*, Continuum, London, 2011

need a 'brain' to generate them", argues De Landa. He shows us that many complex material phenomena, such us thunderstorm, swarm behaviour and even distributed intelligence, perform "not only without a brain but without any organs whatsoever".[128] In the same way microbes make choices all the time, sourcing different forms of matter for biological life purposes.[129] Primitive unicellular organisms emerge distinct forms of behaviour that humans call 'intelligence' but without any nervous systems to facilitate individual identities. Those theories of nonhuman material generativity provide a framework for my concept of fungosexuality as they emphasise diverse forms of bodily reproduction unfolding beyond human sexuality.

The recognition of nonhuman life as intelligent can arguably broaden the understanding of human co-existence and co-reproduction with fungoids. In *Pandora's Hope* Latour argues that nonhuman life forms can be understood by humans only through their attempts to perform together with nonhumans. In his approach, the only way to get to know anything about nonhumans is to initiate mutualistic actions of humans *with* nonhumans. Media technologies become a material form of these involvements for Latour. Barad adds, in *Invertebrate Visions: Diffraction of Brittlestar*,[130] that the body has to be understood primarily as a multispecies performance and, as such, as a technological process of worldmaking. Barad's insight is yet another testimony of nonhuman intelligence, which is inherent to different forms of living matter and defined by specific performative 'technology' of their bodies. I take her framework of vitalist intelligence and body-technology onboard in my approach to fungi as I theorise them as a life process of bodily reproduction beyond human sexuality.

With this philosophical positioning of technology in mind – as a type of live body performativity - I find Paul Virilio's analysis of body performance art particularly insightful. In his book *Art and Fear*,[131] Virilio discusses the radical experimentation of artists with their bodies, which are approached as manipulable processes, as a way of inviting an utter conceptual reinvention of bodies. I explore this notion further by exploring the dimension of digital body performance online. Such modes of performance enter another stage of media mutation, one that is specific for the Internet platforms and that aesthetically embraces vivid fungal characteristics.

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[128] Manuel De Landa, interview by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, Open Humanities Press, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, 2012, p.43
[129] Lynn Margulis & Dorion Sagan, *What Is Life?,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000, p.219
[130] See: Barad Karen, "Invertebrate Visions: Diffraction of Brittlestar", in: Eben Kirksey (ed.), *Multispecies Salon*, Duke University Press, Durham 2014
[131] Virilio Paul, *Art and Fear*, Continuum, London, 2006

Looking at selected examples of bioart, body art as well as the digital art of corporeal mutation, I find a crucial explication of technological vitalism in Robert Mitchell's book *Bioart and The Vitality of Media*,[132] who brings to the fore the concept of media as biological processes that generate and reproduce life. I would suggest that the body of performance artists becomes a medium, anticipating the laboratory experimentations of bioart. The pursuit of bioart is driven into visual acceleration with digital image manipulations on the Internet, experiments which are often associated with concepts of online performance. As I frame those forms of art in terms of the pursuit of fungal replication by means of media, I also seek connections between the cultural concepts of queer or non-binary sexuality and the dark vitalism of primordial life embodied in technology. Eugene Thacker's concept of biomedia, presented in his book *Biomedia*,[133] explores such connections by theorising how different technological mediations of human bodies not only change those bodies or enter into hybrid fusions with them but actually become increasingly more difficult to distinguish from human bodies. The conceptual framework of biomedia will become instrumental for my discussion of not only how technologies are being reformulated as processes of transhuman bodies but also of how we can see *all* human activity as a form of biotechnology, aimed at strategies of bodily reproduction that go beyond binary sexuality.

From Transsexuality to Fungosexuality

Most of the philosophies of media technology in the context of microbial life referenced in my research are directly inspired by the writings of Margulis (whom I mentioned earlier), focusing in particular on her 'endosymbiotic' theory of evolution. The concept of 'endosymbiosis' greatly enhances a mediatic understanding of life processes, as well as suggesting a thought-provoking parallel between the working of human technologies and the essential process of the replication and transformation of biological bodies. Even though it was developed by someone who originally trained as a biologist, it provides a deep philosophical understanding of pre-sexual and beyond-sexual mutation strategies of the body, an understanding which I draw on to develop my concept of fungosexuality with regard to post-Internet performers.

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[132] See: Mitchell Robert, *Bioart and The Vitality of Media*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010
[133] See: Thacker Eugene, *Biomedia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004

By explaining all complex multicellular life forms (such as humans) through microbial activity within the biosphere, Margulis deconstructs sex as a form of the post-digestive mergence of microbe bodies and their cannibalistically confused splitting. In a way, in her theory the reproduction of life forms is always a variation on the breaking down of a microbial body into parts – parts that merge into new mutations. From this point of view, reproduction is not as much a creation of novelty but rather a breaking down, eventually assisted by the metabolic transformation of matter particles and an incorporation of them into biological cells. This theoretical perspective draws clear parallels between digestion (or decompositions)[134] and the emergence of new mutations in the processes of fungal mediations.

Drawing on Margulis' theory of the origin of sex in digestion, Michel Serres in his book *Parasite*[135] proposes an understanding of body mediation as the manoeuvring of other organisms into parasitic relations. He claims that parasitism is necessary for communication between bodies[136] as all the living bodies use each other as sources of nourishment. Thus the human meaning of the world, culture and technology can be understood as created by means of human parasitism in the world of nonhuman bodies that host humans. Serres' theory locates body reproduction beyond sexuality and within specific and uneven relations between different species.

Exploring the subject of the separation of sex from body reproduction, Luciana Parisi (whose work is also inspired by Margulis) offers a technological concept of "abstract sex".[137] She claims that Internet-mediated communication and the simulation of sex accelerate the separation of sex from bodily reproduction, but also separate the spectacle of sex (i.e. fetishism) from the actual bodily contact. At the same time, Parisi points out that the "disappearance of male and female functions of reproduction"[138] through cybersex is parallel to the development of human cloning technologies. Parisi proposes that, at the dawn of the 21st century civilisation, the most advanced media together with the medical infrastructures facilitated a revival of the microbial forms of reproduction for techno-humans. I reference her proposition as an intriguing context through which to interpret the self-identification of post-Internet performers as *nonhuman mutants*.

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[134] which is an external form of digestion outside of fungal bodies
[135] Michel Serres, *Parasite*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982, p.62
[136] Ibid., p.12
[137] See Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex*, Continuum, London 2004
[138] Ibid., p.2

In her theory of endosymbiosis, Margulis describes how microbes delineate the reproduction of macro-bodies by hijacking genes, infections, contaminations and mergers. Parisi shows a reverse relation in which human technologies of abstract sex manipulate cells and, in this technologically-assisted form return to methods of reproduction which are similar to those of bacteria (i.e. cloning). She then posits an "immanent connection between bacterial sex and biodigital cloning" that extends "from the digital culture of cloning images to the bio-technological proliferation of engineering cells".[139] Following Margulis' theory of evolution, Parisi writes about sex being constituted by assemblages of microbes and sees their reproduction to be emerging from the transmission of information among bodies – both microbial and technological.

Highlighting the new technological-evolutionary context of the human species, Parisi adds that by allowing an immediate transformation of human bodily features, media accelerate the indeterministic recombination of mutation against the linear determinism of Darwinian evolution propelled by individual competition.[140] This technologically-infused mutability of humans is also perceived by Parisi as being parallel to the process of "rebelling against the disciplinary and industrial organization of the body-sex", [141] a process that is accompanied by the "rise of marginal identities". [142] Perhaps the inclusion of social outcasts, low-lifers, queers and post-colonial human debris into hybrid communities could be read as an expression of a biotechnological increase in "mutations of molecular variations distributing non-genital sex through a new assemblage of desire-power".[143] The media mutations of human identities provoke the emergence of new techno-communities, which are irrelevant to, and irreverent of, the linear traditions of families and nations. I explore this notion closely, referencing authors writing about online fetishism, such us Susanna Paasonen in her book *Carnal Resonance*.[144] in which she analyses how pornography, with particular tendency to abject and fetishism, is the driving force of communication on the Internet. A different vivid example of novel communality formed around transgressive ideas of bodily transformation is 'bio-hacking', an underground culture developing independent biotechnologies as described by Marcus Wohlsen in his book *Biopunk*.[145] What is of importance for my research is that in all those techno-

[139] Ibid., p.16
[140] Ibid, p.129
[141] Ibid., p.137
[142] Ibid., p.137
[143] Ibid., p.137
[144] See: Paarsonen Susanna, *Carnal Resonance,* MIT Press, Cambridge, 2011
[145] See Marcus Wohlsen, *Biopunk*, Current, New York, 2011

communities it is fetishised technological mediation rather than sexual reproduction that is the key element which transforms and reproduces the body.

By researching the post-Internet performance of body mutation I thus re-construct elements of what could be seen as a shift towards an Internet-inspired culture focused on new forms of tangible, bodily participation that celebrates anti-natality through non-binary sexualities and nonsexual (although often oversexualised in their aesthetics) body transformations. Importantly, this culture incorporates nonhuman features. The majority of the mutant performers I research identify themselves as queer, trans-sexual or fetishist, abandoning heterosexual reproduction and pairing their sexual transgression with the visual dehumanisation of their bodies and the performative expression of intimacy with nonhumans. Non-normative sexualities are considered in many cultures to be an "unnatural" degeneration of human life, though through post-Internet body mutant performance they actually build an explicit connection with the environmental concerns which are directly related to the survival of the human species. The emerging sense of queer communality, amongst the multitudes of scattered groups connected by the Internet, not only offers modes of co-existence within radical diversity but also encourages experiments with forms of companionship that are an alternative to childbearing families. What locally seems to many an assault on perpetuation of human life, globally it helps to counter extermination of human living conditions. In that context, I analyze queer sexualities as cultural decomposition of accelerated sexual production of humans, which finds in post-Internet mutant body performance an explicit shift of human sexuality towards curious and intimate co-existence with nonhuman bodies.

In order to contextualise the queer aspect of mutant bodily performance I look at concepts of non-binary sexualities which encompass a variety of complex and distinct non-heterosexual identities. A precursor of the term 'non-binary' was Genesis P-Orridge, who inspired a variety of subcultural movements playing with that identification since 1970s. In their autobiography *Non-Binary,*[146] published after their death, P-Orridge postulates to "discard all inherited value systems, social conditioning, and family loyalty for its own sake, and to come to realize that gender is a red-herring distraction as an issue".[147] In their pursuit of the regenerative sense of communality against the destructive civilisation driven by totalitarian political control, P'Orridge pursued squatting, amongst other practices of re-using what was considered by the capitalist society as waste, as well as experiments with

[146] See: Genesis P'Orridge, *Nonbinary*, Abrahams Press, New York, 2021
[147] Genesis P'Orridge, *Nonbinary*, Abrahams Press, New York, 2021, p.XIV

multimedia art, with a view to creating alternative social networks. Rejecting binary sexuality was at the core of those activities, as P'Orridge considered all oppressive cultural patterns to be linked to it. P'Orridge encouraged cultural subversion by convincing others that, with a radical opening of the definition of human sexuality, ways of living can be changed, "bodies adjusted, imagery altered to tell a story or hide a story. Everything is mutable!". This very conclusion finds its elaboration in P'Orridge's own transsexual transitioning, together with Jaye Lady, endorsed by their body modifications and digital body-image manipulation as narrated in *Pandrogyny Manifesto*.[148] In the text they express their conviction that with the mutability of sex humans can also transgress anthropocentrism which ingrained in their cultures and make more space for their co-existence with nonhumans.

Experiments in gender and sexuality have been extensively theorised in academic literature, often with reference to prior subcultural and art practices. In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*[149] Judith Butler introduces the concept of 'gender performativity' that conceptualises the process of the mutability of human sexuality. In her theory, sex is always in the process of a performative interpretation as gender changes, fluctuates and becomes always more than can be pinpointed by medical sciences. The fertilisation-oriented copula of binary genitals is only one of the many aspects of the complex spectrum of human sexual performances that are not biologically determined in a straightforward way. This influential realisation has given an unlimited space for cultural expressions of sexualities that don't conform to binary roles, signaling opportunities for a mutation of the biological bodies of humans. Trans-rights activist Ricki Wilkins has endorsed Butler's concept and coined the term 'genderqueer', whose implications are discussed in the book *Genderqueer: Voices from the Sexual Binary*[150] co-edited by them. This and similar discussions have played a dramatic role in establishing global platforms for the recognition, protection and support of sexually non-conforming youth on the Internet and beyond. The role of the Internet in bringing together marginalised sexual communities can't be underestimated. At the same time it is crucial for their existence to establish the space for open sexual expression beyond the Internet and in the direct relation to the tangible materialities of everyday life. *Transgender Marxism*[151] edited

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[148] See: P-Orrige Genesis, Jaye Lady, *Pandrogeny Manifesto* Part 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fDFiV3gl1E, 2006

[149] See: Butler Judith, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York, 2008

[150] See: Clare Howell, Joan Nestle, Riki Wilkins (ed.), *Genderqueer: Voices From the Sexual Binary*, Alyson Books, NY, 2002

[151] *See:* Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (ed), *Transgender Marxism*, Pluto Press, London, 2021

by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke focuses on discussion of specific embodiments of the issues around non-binary gender and sexuality in different material contexts. The introduction by Gleeson and O'Rourke links the trans-gender liberation from sexual norms to the radical activism against the exploitation within industrial societies, specifically through the critique of the "(re)productive heterosexual family unit"[152] that is stained by "its total immersion in the reproduction of capitalist relations", [153] including the exploitation of natural resources.

In her psychoanalytical manifesto of transsexuality *Why Are We Like This?*,[154] Xandra Metcalfe develops her antithesis against the common assumption that sexual deviation from heterosexuality (i.e. cissexuality) is "unnatural". On the contrary, she argues that "polymorphous perversity, psychical hermaphroditism, and bisexuality" are the very early stage of children's development, while the structure of 'straight' sex roles is imposed on them by society only later. Regardless of any factual value of her statement, what is notable here from my point of view is the desire of a queer person to locate their complex, nonnormative sexuality in the domain of life that precedes the conscious, human subject. This intuition about an irrational, somehow pre-human life that lives within every rational human subject echoes the ontological proposition of Camille Paglia who in *Sexual Personae*[155] states that transsexual androgyny connects humans to the nondifferentiation of primordial life. Those are the poetic voices in the discussion around queer bodies that speculatively explore the possibilities of the nonhuman forms of reproduction at work within human bodies and the partial constitution of human sexuality by nonhuman life. In the theories of Paglia and Metcalfe, the term 'transsexuality' is used in a very broad philosophical sense, encompassing the simultaneous plurality of erotic tendencies and an idea of deep hermaphroditism. This is also the way I use this term, although in the process of finalising my research I decided to mostly replace it with an invented term 'fungosexuality', which more directly suggests the intended association of queer sexualities embraced by post-Internet mutant performers with the beyond-sexual forms of reproduction of fungoid nonhumans.

In order to build my theory of fungosexuality I discuss all the above-mentioned literature in the three chapters that follow. Chapter 1 explores the grounding theoretical landscape of

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[152] Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke, *Introduction*, in: Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (ed), *Transgender Marxism*, Pluto Press, London, 2021, p.32
[153] Ibid., p.32
[154] See: Xandra Metcalfe, *Why Are We Like This?*, in: Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (ed), *Transgender Marxism*, Pluto Press, London, 2021
[155] See: Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991

transhumanist philosophies and critical humanist interpretation of the key bioscience concepts related to fungal decomposition, which my thesis is inspired by. This exploration facilitates the understanding of human bodily mediations on the Internet in terms of nonhuman life processes embedded in fungoid environments. With an aim to offer a tangible grip on the philosophical problem of fungi media, Chapter 2 focuses on the phenomenon of mutant performance art at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, which has served as a performance space for my practice research. As my performance practice examines the body of the human performer through its relationship within the fungi-inhabited entity of a live performance space, I mobilize texts pertaining to transcorporeality, the disintegration of the human bodily form through illness and urban decay. Chapter 3 references a plethora of vivid examples involving online mutant performers who take their practice beyond the Internet through their remediation of bodily acts that seek an intimacy with fungoid life. Literature analyzing bioart, queer sexuality, fetishism and biotechnology becomes instrumental to formulating my conclusion about the phenomenon of fungosexuality.

Chapter 1: Fungoid Decomposition as a form of Post-Internet Biomediation

In this chapter I'm engaging with contemporary philosophical theories that account for the transformation of human bodies through media. I discuss them in conjunction with theories of nonhuman living environments, by way of providing a context to technological mediations. I draw on those theories in an attempt to understand the performative mutations of bodies in post-Internet performance art, i.e. performance art unfolding both in real and virtual spaces but shaped by a specific Internet aesthetics. Post-Internet bodily mutations occurring in these performances remediate the digital mediation of human bodies. My focus is on those forms of bodily performance that embrace fungoid decomposition. I am particularly interested in exploring ways in which such performances account for the ecological entanglement of human and nonhuman bodies – and for the extension of human bodies by and through the Internet. In my 'fungal' take on eco-philosophy (in its 'dark' vitalist guises), I look at decomposition as the key process involved in the nourishment, creation and transformation of living bodies and, particularly, human bodies extended by the Internet. I argue that the mutant performance, which I study in my research, critically reworks the purely biological idea of decomposition by remediating it technological. The concept of fungoid decomposition, which becomes a media concept in this framework, is understood here as referring to the constitution of the mutant bodies of post-Internet performers. This concept allows me to position performance art as an embodied mode of speculation about human and nonhuman life – and about its technological mediations. This chapter thus outlines several structuring concepts of my 'fungal media' figuration, while preparing the ground for the discussion of fungoid bodily performance in Chapter 2 and of fungosexuality in Chapter 3.

The Contaminated Elements of the Biosphere (aka 'Planet Rot')

The pre-industrial definition of media links communication technologies with natural elements. John Durham Peters recalls "the elemental legacy of the media concept"[156] that he traces back to the origins of the philosophy of matter. He argues that media should not be primarily seen as message-bearing human institutions or communication technologies, but rather as beyond-human "vessels and environments, containers of possibility that anchor our existence and make what we are doing possible".[157] In order to understand media Peters urges us to explore nature, understood as "the background to all possible meaning".[158] Water, air, earth and other communication channels of the biosphere facilitate life dynamics. As far as these classical elements are concerned, fungi can be recognised as creators of the earthy composition of the world. Soil, which is a chthonic source of creation for farming cultures, is actually a product of fungal metabolism – their excrement. Thus, one of the natural elements identified by Peters as media, in fact functions as a seed, or rather as spores of the biological organisation on planet Earth. Interestingly, in Peters' perspective on 21st century communication networks, those natural elements are described as evolutionary technological infrastructures for the human species. Cultures, being the re-working of nature through technologies, are regulated by media infrastructures that derive from elements of nature. This process, fuelled and fed by fungal decomposition, provides material for food and microbial energy sources, such as oil or soil. The body of fungi, called mycelium, produces the soil environment that functions as a channel for the biochemical information and energy transfer of plants. Planet Earth is in fact Planet Rot, a fungoid excremental phenomenon that sprouts the most complex life forms, including humans, and it is precisely this fungal element that makes media biologically charged.

Technological infrastructures are shaped by geological formations, argues Peters by describing how those infrastructures re-enact atmospheric processes and how they shift with ocean tides. They also use fossilised bio-forms that originally captured the energy of the Sun. As Peters points out in his landscape-based concept of infrastructures, media entail not only the human manipulation of nature but also the nature that precedes humans. Thus, the re-making of humans through media is driven by natural elements that

[156] John Durham Peters, *Marvelous Clouds*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015, p.2
[157] Ibid.p.2
[158] Ibid., p.2

go beyond the human. Humans engage with the elements of life to cultivate it – thus starting the civilization of human cultures – and, in the process, re-inventing life technologically. Observing the becoming of technology in human ideas about nature, the fungal perspective can offer us a theory of contaminated natural elements. Media elements can't be objectified as abiotic abstractions of philosophical substances. Rather, they contaminate each other with infectious strategies of decomposition, as the distinctions between the elements are incidental to their rot-induced mergence.

Decomposition moves all media elements into a fungal bodily expansion. As Paul Stamets[159] advises in his instructions to farming fungi, mycelia cannot stay alive if they are not moving. Yet fungal body movement can't be accurately described in terms of the mechanics of the complex structures of animalistic humanoids, as there are too many elusive micro-mechanisms of vegetative movement to comprehend. The movements emerge as forms of blob behaviour. Morphing the blob mass, fungi move by the constant expansion of their hyper-cellular body (a body that lacks firm separation between the cells, which is the characteristic of animal and plant organisms) by accelerating the extensions of the hyper-cell. They do not move their body as such, but rather change shape through strategies that involve the forking of the nano-tubes they are made of, and by hyper-layering their extended sub-structures that connect and re-connect within. While spreading, fungi feed on many complex bodies – living, dead and in various stages in between - thus creating a fertile environment for all the complex organisms on the planet. They accelerate the bio-potency of microbial life, enlarging it into the macroscopic form of life that is perceivable to the human eye. They do so by feeding on the decayed carcasses of multicellular organisms of plants and animals, at the same time utilising their most toxic waste. Fungi animate nature's energy loops, before any discrete elements of nature's compositions can be conceptualised, because all the compositional elements of life need the cycles of decomposition to be actuated. The decomposition of fungi media creates a rotting environment that offers possibilities of elements before they are there for human perception– and perhaps too multiple and too dynamic to be charted or represented by precise numerical values of human technologies. As a result, the dirt of decomposing ecologies unveils a complexity that does not fit into the ontologies of wholeness or unity. The concept of decomposition, which I will be drawing on in Chapter 2, has been embraced by many post-Internet mutant performers (including myself). Their performance

[159] See Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005

acta incorporate features of nonhuman species in their use of twisted body expression and forced restraint of movements, latex deformities, rotten makeup, synthetic illness symptoms, fantasy prosthetics, monstrous glands or multiplied folds of fleshy overgrowth.

In his non-hierarchical, pluralistic 'heap' ontology of the biosphere, Timothy Morton defines the category of the "implosive hole",[160] within which entities are related in a non-total, ragged way. 'Holes', as opposed to 'wholes', lack unified structure. They form pluralistic and dynamic connections within life, understood as multitude of inherently ambiguous processes. Morton describes the biosphere as "implosive, ultimately meaningless and contingent"[161] symbiotic processes. Based on symbiotic relations, the biosphere has to be ambiguous, as it doesn't specify the dominant body of symbiosis. Morton illustrates this ambiguity with an example of the relation of humans to microbes inside their bodies – it is not clear if humans are the hosts of microbes, providing a vehicle for them, or if humans are hosted by microbes that perform the essential processes of human life. "The human body is a hysterical record of nonhuman evolution",[162] Morton adds, by pointing at the nonhuman context of microbial humanity. Both humans and microbes create an implosive whole. Whilst a whole is usually made of the sum of its parts, in Morton's theory of implosion the whole is actually less than its parts but, nevertheless, offers some form of connection between parts. Morton proposes that the biosphere and its parts such as ecosystems, species or societies form implosive wholes of heaps. He calls ecosystems "a heap of lifeforms (and) the biosphere – the heap of heaps".[163] Those heaps are not guarded by general rules that would explain their individual parts. Instead, heaps define certain plains of relationality by allowing for symbiotic mergers. I will show later on how the implosive wholes of the decomposed bodies in mutant performers don't assume any consistent human identity but rather emphasise their relationship to nonhuman life.

In Lynn Margulis'[164] exploration of microbial endosymbiosis, the evolution of life presents itself as a heap entailing a disproportional complexity. The evolutionary replication of forms is both finite and distorted, as species emerge only at some point in time, change gradually with repeated generational cycles and eventually perish. Any act of reproduction involves

[160] Timothy Morton, *Humankind. Solidarity with Nonhuman People,* Verso, New York, 2017, p.1
[161] Ibid., p.23
[162] Ibid., p.135
[163] Ibid., p.124
[164] Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet,* Phoenix, London 2001

random mutation, which means that biological replication involves not only repetition but also change**.** Moreover, if life unfolds in a dynamic diversity, as Margulis has pointed out, the biosphere cannot be perceived as an organism, as no organism eats its own excrement. Fungi, in turn, do eat the world's excrements, which means that the planetary biosphere as a whole –named 'Gaia' by Margulis- has no integrity that would be similar to human identity or any other form of individuality of a separate bio-organism. Rather as an entity it relies on fungi to manage its key life processes of waste management. It doesn't make sense to understand Gaia as an identity, argues Margulis, while Isabelle Stengers adds that it still may make sense to treat Gaia as one whole, i.e. as a reacting entity, which she calls "the intrusion of Gaia".[165] Stengers postulates: "Gaia is ticklish and that is why she must be named as a being",[166] and adds that Gaia doesn't ask anything of humans because she is not threatened by humans with their technological impact. Gaia's intrusion is careless, as she is "a ticklish assemblage of forces that are indifferent to our reasons and our project".[167] On the other hand the "reasons" for Gaia's "ticklishness" should be investigated, since humans are threatened by Gaia's reactions to their technological infrastructures and that is the reason for them to consider Gaia as a being. This postulate highlights the connection of human communication technologies to the bio-dimension that precedes humans and shall exceed them in the future. Gaia's "innumerable co-authors, the microorganisms, will effectively continue to participate in her regime of existence, that of a living planet",[168] suggests Stengers. Those microbial agencies, performed by post-Internet mutants, represent a nature that's not innocent, vulnerable or endangered – but that is rather blindly transgressing humanity. Mutant performers enact ambivalence and aesthetically casualise the possibility of self-inflicted extinction. They adopt the perspective of an "implacable being who is deaf to (human) justification"[169] and who performs extinction beyond any human-centric concern with species preservation.

Fungi are such implacable beings. They enter the human body without notice, in a casual everyday breath, being inhaled in the most basic act of energy sourcing from the environment. Fungi and other microbes always contaminate the air on the earth, challenging the clean distinctions within nature. The separation of natural elements is impossible for fungi media, as nature operates through contamination. Philosopher Reza

[165] Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Open Humanities Press and Meson Press, London, 2015, p.43
[166] Ibid., p.46
[167] Ibid., p.47
[168] Ibid., p.47
[169] Ibid., p.47

Negarestani highlights that "Earth and Water need Menstruum (living mud) to communicate. The living mud is a communicational entity".[170] The communication processes of life are mediated through dirty contaminations; the earth gets mouldy and moist, the water airs itself into fermentation, the heated air bubbles into boiling pockets of tropical infections and the fire treated by fossilised microbes energises into the mechanical fever of human technology. Fungi media thus melt the natural base-matter into elementary connections of life. Mutant performers engage with the tangibility of those dirty elements and relate to mud, soil and waste, bringing out their own transhuman fertility in the process.

Human bodies after the Internet

The vital materiality of communication technologies is embedded in the decomposition processes of life and it can be linked to, or studied via, the idea of the death of the Internet. It is incorporated by the remediation of the digital decomposition of human bodies that mutant performance art originates from. Explored by a network of thinkers gathered around the journal *e-flux*, the notion of the decomposition process of media is complementary to the notion of the decomposition of the mediated body through technology. The mediation of the body can be understood as its extension and mutation into media. The media at the same time decompose into the body by redefining it in terms of technological performance. Technology is not the end of the body but a pivotal point of its transformation. Hito Steyerl suggests[171] that the Internet is dead in the sense that it doesn't work as the late 20th century 'cyberpunk' idea of escaping from the flesh and into a new digital realm. In her narration, the early 21st century Internet projects back onto or into the bodies -- not only human bodies but also those of the most elusive life forms and environments. Contrary to the cyberpunk utopian ideas of the Internet transgressing the materiality of the body, fungi media transgress the Internet *with* the body, but it is a body that has been technologically decomposed. The corporeal is now embodying the Internet with the diverse performances of fragmentary life entities – the post-human life embodying new media performance. Steyerl postulates that media technologies and their specific forms of communication are themselves embedded in networked matter. The space of

[170] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008, p.228

[171] See Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?", in *e-flux journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2015

bodily extensions transgresses the technology and becomes a medium *for* technology. Steyerl proclaims a return of technology to the flesh. She diagnoses the death of the Internet in its moving 'offline', by noticing that the decomposing Internet becomes greatly intertwined with the bodily entities of "networked matter".[172] "Networked space is itself a medium", [173] she adds, pointing out that the bodies outside of the Internet perform as a medium for the Internet in the physical space. Technologies of communication return to the pre-Internet close-to-body forms of expression but with the understanding of the type of relationality enfolded by the Internet.

At the beginning of the Internet era in the 1990's, humans who ventured online asked themselves whether they were still human, whilst at the same time trying to define themselves in the context of the new medium.[174] They were translating their pre-Internet lives into the new medium. Now, after over three decades of the Internet development, humans offline are recognising the patterns of networked media dynamics in the corporeal phenomena. The Internet lives of humans are being translated beyond the medium. Nonhuman and postInternet bodies, cultures, societies, species, genes, organs, environments – they all perform the corporeal decomposition of the Internet, as the Internet not merely facilitates the digital translation of body processes, but more so it is being incorporated into the body dynamics in the way the logic of connectivity is enacted offline. To give an example, Geert Lovink proclaims social media an abyss that invades all relations between humans. "The centre-less network logic comes from media and has penetrated culture in deep way"[175] by amplifying destructive forces in the social organisation and at the same time exposing the fragility behind people's actions. This process is reflected in my performance practice at The Dungeons, "in which the liquid, the amorphous or the ephemeral overrun both, a characteristic and the subject matter" for the sake of embodying "an active agent of becoming".[176]

In the post-Internet cultures the normalising ideologies of life are dwarfed by life's 'overperformance' by freaks. Bauman describes these phenomena as the attention regime

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[172] Ibid., p.17
[173] Ibid., p.17
[174] See Max More and Natasha Vita-More (edit), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2013
[175] Geert Lovink, *Social Media Abyss,* Polity, Cambridge, 2016, p.190
[176] Dietmar Rubel, "Plasticity: An Art History of Mutable", in: *Materiality*, edited by Petra Launge-Berndt, Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, London, 2012, p.94

of fluid and mobile images that are less of a structured spectacle but that signal an intensity of a chain of actions. Mutant performance art involves the frailty of body processes, that of "ephemeral performers and happenings (…) scrambled together from manifestly and self-consciously perishable materials".[177] The alienation of bodies, cultures, societies, species, genes, organs, environments disperses them into randomised proliferation, as each of those entities becomes reinvented by indeterministic mutations of technologies.

In his essay 'Some Experiments in Art and Politics', Latour proposes a theory of media-life that merges Peter Sloterdijk's biotech philosophy of 'spheres' with the analysis of networked communications. *Spheres* narrates through concepts of bodily co-existence, which assume collective entities of mutation. It presents a variety of theoretical concepts inscribing communication and media technologies within enclosed and compressed tangles and dynamics of systemic relations, imagined as forms of bio-capsules, which Sloterdijk calls 'symbolic air-conditioning systems' or 'cultural laboratories to farm humans'.[178] Sloterdijk's 'spherical' focus on media exposes different modes of the openness of human identities and of the re-making of the human in the dynamic scenarios of mergence with otherness. Spheres are Sloterdijk's figures of trans-human entities, where human subjectivities are areas on the spheres' surfaces, amorphously defined. Rather than having firm boundaries, they gradually change into not-necessarily-human otherness taking up other areas of a sphere. Spheres are organisational forms of trans-human entities via various media that elude too definite distinctions between human and nonhuman elements proposing an idea of gradual mergence instead. In his essay Latour puts 'spherical' concepts of communication within the context of long-distance global processes that distribute spheres disproportionately. He points out that local organisations appear in the context of global randomisation described as "heterarchy". "Local nesting, yes; global hierarchy, no"[179] - is his visualisation of communication networks. This offers a structure of the complementary duality of media, which are comprised of both spherical concentrations and dispersions of networks. These spheres, which according to Latour are embedded within networks, are anti-essentialist concepts that can account for the ambiguity of transhuman life entities.

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[177] Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004, p.120
[178] See Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2011
[179] Bruno Latour, "Some Experiments in Art and Politics", in *e-flux journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2015, p.46

The relation of spheres to networks, as described by Latour, maps the phenomenon of the dual functioning of media as immersive simulation environments on the one hand and hypertext interfaces on the other, as argued by Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska in their *Life After New Media*[180]. According to them, a mediated body passes through corporeal networks exceeding the bare presence of interfaces, which is described by the "framework of immediacy and hypermediacy" as "indicative (…) of the 'double logic' of remediation".[181] Kember and Zylinska borrow the categories of immediacy and hypermediacy from Bolter and Grusin to describe their concept of remediation.[182] The hyper-mediated body is a network of affiliations which are constantly shifting. This defines the mediated body as interrelated and interconnected. At the same time, the immediacy aspect of remediation immerses the mediated body in an apparently seamless and transparent environment of (mostly graphic) simulations. This dual experience and the dynamic between the two forms accentuate the multiple layers of the remediation process. In mutant performance art, the hypermedial decomposition of the body achieves its novel immediacy via the translation of the body into corporeal acts involving immediate mutations that unfold beyond and outside the Internet.

The Internet itself remains corporeal also because all media simulations and connections are embedded in the materiality of the infrastructural hardware of technology. It becomes apparent especially when the technology turns obsolete. As Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka point out in their article about "zombie media"[183], consumption-oriented systems of technology production are driven by strategies of planned obsolescence, which in turn inspire artistic strategies of repurposing the damaged media artefacts. Hertz and Parikka "believe that media never die: they decay, rot, reform, remix, and get historicized, reinterpreted and collected".[184] Parallel to this narrative of wasted technology unfolds another narrative of waste – Bauman's "human waste".[185] In *Wasted Lives*, Bauman suggests that, at the beginning of the 21st century, the direct effect of the acceleration of the technosystem involves not only the accumulation of the waste products of industrial production but also the expulsion of obsolete humans, useless for the global power systems and their technological designs. The "new fullness of the planet means essentially

[180] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, p.131
[181] Ibid.p.131
[182] See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1998
[183] See Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka, "Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archeology into an Art Method", in: *Leonardo*, Volume 45, Number 5, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012
[184] Ibid. p.430
[185] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004

an acute crisis of the human waste disposal industry"[186] as more people find themselves strategically excluded from high-tech utopias. There is a clear need for decomposing media, feeding on the techno-human waste, and the art of mutant performance provides an enactment of such processes of decomposition.

With this, my fungi media project offers a provocation, entailed in the artistic proposal for repurposing the post-mediated bodies of media users. We know that the infrastructures of human civilisations are made out of the decaying bodies of technological artefacts that themselves are constructed from the decaying bodies of prehistoric microbes. Also, human cultures create their symbolic systems out of the dead bodies of past generations. Every aspect of communication thus functions as a mediation of, and mergence with, the dead. By participating in any communication technologies, humans are getting immersed in the decomposition processes of life. Hertz and Parikka point out that "media cultural objects and information technology have an intimate connection with the soil, the air and nature as a concrete, temporal reality. Just as nature affords the building of information technology – (…) so do these devices eventually return to nature".[187] And so human bodies, identities, cultures and civilisations decompose through technology, reconnecting again with nonhuman bodies.

Noticing the base-materiality of media exposes the abstract and rational image of computer networks as being itself a form of decomposition, since every technological refinement is eventually embedded in many raw material temporalities. Digital simulations mask the biological processes that feed them. Recognising the fragmentation of mediated human identities as techno-microbial life reveals the key energetic process of life in decomposition. The infrastructure of body nourishment shares the same digestive system with the decay of excrements. Sexual organs that sprout into the multiplicity of progeny at the same time transmit the deathliest zombie-organisms of viruses and pass on lethal genes. Here, the transhuman bodies of mutant performers remediate the Internet in kinship with fungal life.

[186] Ibid. p.6
[187] Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka, "Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archeology into an Art "ethod', in: *Leonardo*, Volume 45, Number 5, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, p.429

The self-digestion of human bodies online

As Lynn Margulis reminds us,[188] human life originated from the mutual cannibalism and incest of bacteria. Both phenomena are common tropes of body horror, referenced by mutant performers through visual forms of auto-consumption and autoeroticism in their acts. Cannibalism is a feeding of a body on another body of the same species, a devouring of almost an identical body, which is very close to eating itself. As such cannibalism is symptomatic of the microbial self-digestion of decomposing bodies. Similarly, incest involves a coupling of a body with its own kind, referencing bacteria of the prehistoric proto-species incorporating each other into their bodies. The Internet subcultures of virtual cannibals, like the one analysed by Beth Coleman,[189] can be said to perform extreme versions of the primal auto-consumption desires. Dolcett Internet users, a particular fetish group who offer their cyberspace avatars to be eaten by other users in strangely sexualised rituals are giving their bodies away to abyssal techno-nature, where the networks can decompose it with an aid of symbiotic and parasitic simulations. “Humanity attained such a level of self-alienation, that it can now experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order”,[190] comments Virilio. Media and bodies are feeding on and with each other. Similar visual metaphors reappear more and more often with yet stronger intensities of the aesthetics of body implosion in 3D art online.

[188] See Lynn Margulis & Dorion Sagan, *What Is Life?,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000
[189] See Beth Coleman, *Hello Avatar*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2011
[190] Paul Virilio, *Art & Fear*, Continuum, London, 2006, p.11

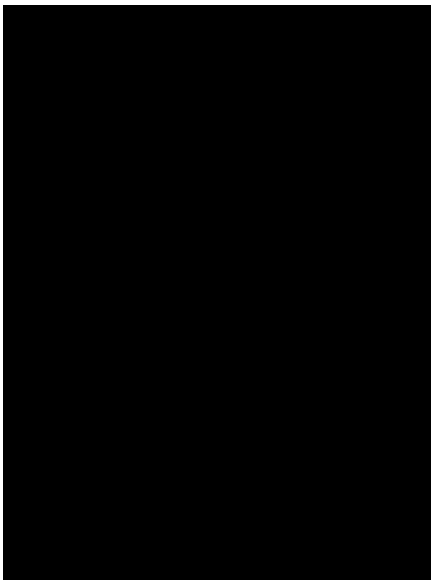

Fig. 8. still from *Performance Capture 2*, Mike Pelletier, Amsterdam, 2016 (copyrighted image removed)

The *Performance* animations of Mike Pelletier[191] [Fig. 8.] offer vivid examples of that aesthetics, where technologically-processed human forms collapse into themselves and yet unfold inside-out. Those forms can be perceived as an illustration of a certain abstract technological process, but I would argue that they are not *just* an illustration - perhaps the general condition of 3D environments already evokes different experimentations with visions of bodily collapse. 3D animated 'performances' visually expose the undoing of the body through media. Also, in these examples, the communication networks prove themselves not only non-linear but also non-surface. Playing with the mushrooming multitude of screen surfaces, fungal media thus operate through networks deconstructing every image screened by vicious linking, reposting and accelerating network attention, mutating it and connecting with the hidden processing and generating programs or abyssal loop-tunnels. The mirror-illusions of technological interfaces for human bodies disperse them into fragmented fracture-lives. They are networks of undead bodies, which Nick Land calls 'Datacombs'[192] in his speculative fiction.

Datacombs are the catacombs of databases. Formed by the underground processes of the Internet, they don't organise the world but rather decompose it into a multitude of incomplete carcases of worldings, by means of involving the digital spaces in the rotting

[191] Mike Pelletier, *Performance Capture,* http://mikepelletier.net/Performance-Capture-Part-2
[192] See Nick Land, 'Occultures' in: *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, Urbanomic, London, 2010

juices of the “external digestion” of humans by communication technologies. In the narration of *Occultures*, Land describes the outcome of the connection between computer databases and human nervous systems in terms of a delirious, fictional tropical infection. His Internet hallucination reinvents the soft machines of William Burroughs.[193] Soft machines are the communication technologies that enter human bodies like junk and dangerously mutate with them. Their codes spread like a virus, deforming human bodies with disproportional organs and breeding the technoid larvae of invisible insects from outer space. They are also related to Burroughs’ concept creation of ‘schlupping bodies’ that perform “the total osmotic ingestion or fusion of one body by another”,[194] staged as a form of biotechnology related to queer sexuality and later developed into various technological means of bio-communication between human and nonhuman bodies. All those science-fiction figures used by Burroughs and Land are accentuating fungi media performativity, accelerating and spreading the human characteristics far beyond the human scale. This contingency of fungi media, which makes a mediated human body behave with an agency of a microbe entity, is encapsulated by Stamets’ biomedial illustration of fungal infection within an insect body. The spores enter the body, eating through the exoskeletons and being absorbed via orifices that open the interfaces of the body:

Other portals of entry include the respiratory tract, anus, and mouth. Once inside, the mycelium forks and runs through the internal organs, interfering with the creature's metabolism and causing malaise, necrosis, and death in a few days. The insects, looking mummified with fuzzy mycelium, then become a launching platform for further sporulation. With some species (…), a tiny club-shaped mushroom (…) can sprout from the dead insect carcass[195]

I would like to accentuate this negative or destructive materialist perspective that fungi media offer, where ‘negative’ refers to the undoing of the body, which at the same time can be considered ‘positive’ in terms of entering a new mediatised forms of technologically-filtered bodily existence. As post-Internet mutant performers distort their human body shapes by means of digital tools, they achieve novel corporeal forms that invite kinship with nonhuman entities. Focusing on decomposition processes within communication networks brings attention to the base materiality of all cultures, which ultimately consist of

[193] See William Burroughs, *Soft Machine*, Groove Press, 1992
[194] Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat,* MIT, Cambridge, 1999, p.295
[195] Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005, p.179

human corpses, symbolically mediated into religions, knowledge and history. The death of humans is where the decomposers thrive, opening towards the realm of the microbial, which is where fungal mediations come from. As much as human cultures attempt to repress those processes of decay that fuel life and feed on life, in some essential perspective human cultures themselves are grounded in the decomposition of dead human bodies by constantly attempting to communicate with distant ancestors, worshiping totems of ghost and demons, or performing other rites of magic and religious ceremonies in order to explain the corporeal world. The catacombs are the most ancient remains of human activity, giving evidence of the very first attempts of humans at communication and the extension of their bodies. Cultures develop as symbolic techniques of the undoing of ancestral dead bodies. Graves and tombs are thus the original databases of human civilization. Humans begin to reflect upon their lives precisely when the life of their bodies ceases to be *human* life. Mutant performers enact this death of (their) humanity via a transgressive experience of body mediation, opening their bodies to a thoughtful co-existence with and through nonhuman life.

Slimy proto-life behind the Internet

Ben Woodward's *Slime Dynamics* presents a fertile interrogation of nonhuman media. The metaphysics of organic entities proposed by Woodward[196] offers an intriguing example of the post-human understanding of media, which is arguably one of the most advanced material creations of human thought. In his vision, microbes represent the "globs of swarming proto-life …that provided the template for all organic beings and all eventual thought on the planet Earth".[197] Woodward formulates a fungal condition for thought and encourages us to notice the pre-human patterns for the emergence of intelligence. One may even wonder whether humans are not an episodic and pointless addition to the microbial outgrowth. The key point here is the hypothesis about aspects of human intelligence that come from the microbial outgrowth. What is the particular role of fungi media in the microbial claim to human thought? Fungi remake the microbial on a macro-scale, jumping over the gap between microbes and macro-bodies, as Woodward notices. In terms of rescaling the nonhuman life for human perception, "the slime and ooze from which we came is not so unsettling since it appears (for us) as that dead matter which is

[196] See Ben Woodard, *Slime Dynamics*, Zero Books, Washington, 2011
[197] Ibid., p.1

waiting for potentiation whereas the slime mould, the fungus, appears as the same kind of matter but that which is active of its own accord".[198] Fungi thus perform as the media of microbial agency, embodying the slimy nonhumans in the human scale. Described by Woodward as 'globs of proto-life', these slimy creatures are embodied in the human scale by both fungi and media technologies. According to Woodward, the microbial dimension of nonhuman life that is most unsettling for human perception is to be found in fungal bodies. Mutant post-Internet performers play with this synchronicity by narrating their experience of technological mediation via adopting fungal shapes in their bodies.

The newest media simulations picture the body's collapse in ever more intense renderings – the oddity of virtual worlds, showcased unsettlingly by the sleekness of 3D animations and their glitches, reveals visions of the technological growth of fleshy wastelands on the Internet. Replacing, extending and imploding into human bodies, fungi media thrive on humans and transform them into something yet undefined. The fragmentation of the human body in the luminous reflections of the screens reflects the apparatuses feeding on humans and mushrooming from them: "The fungal marks the unnerving nature of somatism – the food of the dead and fruiting bodies. Fungal bodies are thus hardly bodies at all as they stretch the conceptual limits of their own bodies as well as destroy and decay the purportedly solidity of other bodies".[199] The first stage of the decomposition of the body is the autocannibalism of cells and fungi, which are the prime agents of decomposition, reminding humans about their conflicted corporeality. It is the creeping life exposed in fungi media that makes the human technological bodies amorphous, or makes them appear as performative network variations without form.

Digital mediations of human bodies which inspire post-Internet mutant performers do not emphasise a defined bodily structure which undergoes various life processes, but the processes themselves. The structures of virtual bodies are about slimy shifts of fungi media networking. The processual virtual bodies cross the separation between matter and energy or body and intensity. They behave like protoplasmic masses that represent a connectivity underlying all life in an exquisite slimy moment. The slime perpetuates the dynamic of extilligence – an intelligence externalised in microbial networking. Networks of microbes become extended through human media technologies that embody the fungal

[198] Ibid., p.24
[199] Ibid., p.29

"external nervous system" described by Stamets.[200] The slimy extilligence of fungi media collapses human thought into no-longer-human technological bodies. Human thought reflects itself in fungi media as only one stratum of nature while technology embodies many natural strata beyond thought. That's why the performativity of media technologies radically transgresses humanist self-reflection.

The question of a radical opening to transhuman life through technology, which post-Internet mutant performances interrogate, was posed by Donna Haraway via her concept of 'cyborg'. Her postmodern narrative of the "cyborg myth" unveils ontology of techno-biological hybrids. The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity.[201] The cyborg is a many-headed monster standing against the unity of identity. It is a coursed beast, an illegitimate offspring, bred from an awkward merging of humans with media technologies. It spreads into invisible omni-potentiality of presence, signalling a random multiplicity. An infectious affinity of fragmented identities has the lightness of a puffball, sprayed with facture so fine that we cannot see the very fragments or bits of information. We cannot predict our possibilities. The bestial appearance of unicellular techne once again escapes the framing of calculated scenarios of futures. Life after media goes beyond the rationale of computing and spills vulgar leakage of the diversity of chances. The bio-feedback of technologies, understood as their grounding in obscure materialities, embeds them in a randomness of corporeality. The variety of life forms doesn't make any sense, it is not composing any complete symbolic system, illustrating a plan or copying human intelligence – evolutionary expression is ridiculous, disproportional and surprising! I want to suggest that Haraway's cyborg serves as a figure of fungi media in the sense that it postulates the essential openness of high technologies to even the most awkward mergings with bio-bodies. And the fungi are arguably the most elusive living entities, ever confusing the sense of human identity.

Participating in media decomposition, post-Internet performers emerge with various mutant singularities that morph them away from the idea of 'human species'. Timothy Morton here makes a blatant point proclaiming the non-existence of human species, as techno-humans have to learn to be "humans without humanity".[202] Though looking at the symbiogenetic evolution of life, the kinship of freaks beyond the lineages of species is not unusual at all. "Bacteria do not have species",[203] writes Lynn Margulis, pointing out that the freak is a rule

[200] See Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005
[201] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Routledge, New York, 1991, p.153
[202] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, Verso, New York, 2017, p.124
[203] Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet,* Phoenix, London 2001, p.8

of microbe life, with no firm separation of bodies and the intense fluidity of bio-cell identities. According to her testimony, genetic research and other biochemical work explore the chimerical nature of life that contains in its forms a variety of unrelated genes in different parts of the same organism as well as allowing seemingly separately defined organic forms to merge with each other. Mutation, reproduction and the reproduction of mutation on microbe are embodied in mutant performance.

Microbes within microbes form symbiotic bodies, feeding on each other and reproducing within as a part of an elusive amalgam. Mutant performers engage with those processes as they enact the integration of symbiotic bacterial communities that create complex bio-forms. All cells of unicellular organisms come from the mergence of microbes, e.g. “cells with nuclei originated through a specific sequence of merges of different types of bacteria”.[204] Multicellular identities of macroscopic organisms are formed by the incorporation of microbes and their transformation into compound bodies. Technological symbiogenesis can be understood as “the appearance of new bodies, new organs, new species”[205] through a cohabitation of very different kinds of organisms connected by technological infrastructures. Those forms of new organs and species constitute the narratives of mutant performances. Humans form virtual networks of fungi media, embodying the vast networking of microbes that form the human bodies and bodies of all other organisms that humans can perceive. “All organisms large enough for us to see are composed of once-independent microbes, teamed up to become larger wholes”.[206] Uncovering the microbial past of our bodies, Margulis also stresses the fact that microbes lost some of their individuality in the process of evolution and suggests that to an extent humans give up their individuality in the process of emergence of their technologies. Last but not least, human technologies are made out of bodies of other living organisms and impact technologically on many more by the thorough interference of human-made infrastructures within the biosphere. This making of humans as living entities of nonhuman humus is accounted for in mutant performance.

Microbial intelligence, or the sophistication of decomposers

[204] Ibid., p.40
[205] Ibid., p.43
[206] Ibid., p.43

The spectacular exposition and computational recognition of the mediated multitudes of miniature biosphere bodies pressures us to rethink the human body in a radical way. Scanning our planetary bubble of life with contemporary technologies, we are lured to zoom in onto the microbiological level and notice "life itself as starting from a single cell"[207] through the perception of the cellular units of biological organisation. Joseph A. Amato proposes the cellular scale of life as a stage for his media-archaeological narration about 'dust' in the book of the same name. "The smallest living creatures come undo the greatest"[208] he states and goes on to tell a story of the human discovery of microbes as a turning point of the civilization that eventually inspires the advancement of media technologies and that offers new forms of existence in computer-based virtual realities. Describing human obsession with microbes posing deadly threats to the civilization of hygiene throughout history, he sees industrial technology as an attempt to tame the microbes. Amato suggests that media simulate the microbial dimension of life by reconstructing them as technological processes, and at the same time try to control microbes by replacing them with simulation and thus neutralising them via the distance of technological abstraction. Clean abstractions of corporate and other institutional media environments are clearly an extension of the cultural paranoia of hygiene and control of power systems.

A simple constitution of unicellular organisms in critical mass leads to the emergence of an intelligent behaviour of spontaneously made-up dynamic structure, according to theories of bio-emergence of Francisco J. Varela[209] or Anthony Trewavas,[210] allegedly exceeding the sophistication of the most advanced computer networks at this time. Also computer networks amass processes and various activities of human involvement, which exceed centrally designed algorithms, created to regulate them. That's why the Internet or VR systems can't be perceived as only isolation[211] from the "crude matter" of Amato's dust. Amato doesn't properly recognise the microbial intelligence and fails to consider the connection of microbes' behaviour and the performance of the re-making of the human species within their technologies. Indeed, he perceives dust as rather crude. Perceiving dust as crude is rather crude itself, as the leftover detritus in the random bio-geological

[207] Joseph A. Amato, *Dust*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000, p.100
[208] Ibid., p.155
[209] See Francisco J. Varela, *The Embodied Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991
[210] See Anthony Trewavas, *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014
[211] Joseph A. Amato, *Dust*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000, p.166

location on our planet (even on the outskirts of the atmosphere) actively partakes in the minuscule microbial life processes on the global scale.

Yet, in his concept of 'germs', Amato to a certain extent demonises microbes by referencing systems of social control (eugenics) that create the scare of random mutation and employ technologies to isolate the human species from microbes. He writes: "Virtual reality is the logical culmination of a society whose members' lives and minds are removed from direct contact with the stuff of the world – its dust and dirt – and are constructed around refinement and manipulation of human and natural environments".[212] Although Amato presents media as directly linked to microbes, he positions them as microbes' antithesis – something that separates humans from the minuscule. Contrary to this perspective, I examine how media actually redefine humans as minuscule processes by connecting their nervous systems to the microbial entities of their bodies, in the most extended sense of the biosphere. Network media such as the Internet are the new dust that is contagious and that sprouts complex viral mutations in the technological extensions of humans. According to Amato's expertise in the history of civilization, negative tendencies in the cultural perception frameworks stop us from recognising affirmatively the bio-potency of technologies, particularly the life of media. Generally, people tend to only notice the relatively rare life-threatening microbes, while at the same time completely ignoring the majority of microbes that are necessary for sustaining any complex life on planet Earth, including the life of humans. Yet humans tend to demonise most microbes as germs, perceiving them solely as the origin of diseases but forget about their crucial role in the biosphere. Paranoid repulsion towards life tends to reduce the network behaviour of ambiguous symbiotic relations to "a complete narrative of contagion, epidemic and plague".[213] Thus, popular understanding commonly identifies microbes, such as fungi, as a life threat.

To counter this antagonising attitude towards and alienation of the microbial fabric of life, mutant performers engage with a counter-perception that explores the embodying of the microbial organisation in media as a more sophisticated form of engagement with technology. This form of engagement happens through establishing the technological participation in microbial life. Media technology performs as a residue of invisible life

[212] Ibid., p.166
[213] Ibid., p.166

processes. Fungi and viruses have played a key role in the emergence of the whole of multicellular life on the Earth, employing direct slitting mechanisms into DNA. The evolution of species is submerged in the microbial networks of "great evolutionary forces, such as symbiosis and hybridization, (which) are of a vital importance".[214] Frank Ryan in his theory of virulotion introduces "a very different perspective of evolution than selection working on informationless noise".[215] Microbes act beyond natural selection and random mutation as they perform "natural genetic engineering" (a paradoxical term in itself) by transferring key genes between the nuclei of plant and animal cells. Thus, germ theory is one-sided at best and actually conceptualises technologically conceived scenarios of extinction, as exterminating microbes (total hygiene) would equal the extermination of the whole of life, as we know it on our planet. But technology is unable to kill all life. Even if it seemingly changes a lot for humans, it is still not really threatening for miniscule life. Even the most dystopian visions of the technological suicide of the human civilization cannot convincingly conceptualise the death of bacteria. On the other hand, perhaps human technologies that make up civilizations can survive or even thrive by learning from the microbial networks.

The scale of the human body and human perception, with its pace aligned biochemically with the pace of animalistic movement, made classic theories of evolution (Darwin) emphasise violent competition for sexual partners.[216] The valid expressions of life intelligence according to those evolutionary mechanisms of sexual violence are mostly actions that are proportionate to animalistic moves, perceived as a decisive factor if a mutation is to occur (e.g. competition for sexual mate). Similarly, perspectives on life processes completely ignore the microbial networks that create the fabric of entangled web of interactive mutations. Thus, Amato argues that "human imagination will not be transformed by the microworlds of science and technology"[217] because the scale of human bodies makes microbes meaningless for humans. In his summary, Amato suspects that the hyper-complex multicellular organisation of human bodies makes them unable to relate to microbes or at least doesn't allow for an appropriate account of the miniscule scale. Yet the fact of the matter is that microbiota actually regulates the main human body processes, from sex and digestion through to mental and other chronic illnesses. In its essential functioning, human bodies actually *are* microbial. Even the nervous system behaves

[214] Frank Ryan, *Virolution*, Collins, London, 2009, p.5
[215] Ibid., p.5
[216] See Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1861
[217] Joseph A. Amato, *Dust*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000, p.175

apparently like mycelium and can be drastically influenced by various biochemicals sourced from fungi. To recognise it, one has to imagine the miniscule movements caused by non-centralised nervous cell entities (of microbes, fungi or plants) in their most radical consequences of body mutations, embodied and enacted by post-Internet performers.

Challenging for the humanist common sense of Amato is the perspective of Anthony Trewavas, who in his book *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence*[218] aims at defining the intelligence of life forms beyond anthropomorphic thinking and its animalistic perception – and instead recognising intelligence in the behaviour of plants as well as microbes and fungi. Trewavas writes that the human understanding of intelligence is an "anthropic or anthropomorphic supposition".[219] In his view, humans impose their expectations about what qualifies as intelligence based on how they can perceive behaviour. Fungi behaviour is hardly perceivable for humans and thus fungi as well as other microbes are not recognised as intelligent. At the same time media technologies mimic the behaviour of microbial entities for human perception and are recognised by humans as intelligent. Microbes and plants don't move at a pace recognised by human perception and have no defined nervous systems, though isolated nerve cells of plants behave indistinguishably from those of animal nerves, throughout the long series of parallel variants of conditions. The difference is made by the complex organisation of animal nervous systems and in particular by the human brain. The brain's cognitive functions are linked to the pace of movement as defined by the speed of communication between the nerve cells. Trewavas concludes that "most animals that use nervous systems for communication will operate their movements on a timescale familiar to ourselves"[220] because the pace of communication within all animal nervous systems, as well as the body coordination of animals, have similar speed to human bodies and brains.

Trewavas shows that brains are not necessary for intelligence, taking an example of the slime mould that learns about its environment and changes the behaviour in reaction to it (as evident, for example, in its discrimination between food sources). "This single-celled organism is therefore capable of simple reasoning".[221] Intelligence is defined by Trewavas as a process beyond cognition, and is understood as adaptation of highly organised and

[218] See Anthony Trewavas, *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014
[219] Ibid., p.14
[220] Ibid., p.16
[221] Ibid. p.16

centralised nervous systems. Deconstructing the brain, Trewavas recognises intelligence on a cellular level and in the self-organisational abilities of the multitudes of separate living cells, such as microbes. Communication between common bacteria illustrates the decomposed microbial intelligence that media embody, breaking down the functions of the human brain into technological extensions, which drive its behaviour with the intelligence of media networking. Trewavas argues:

Moreover, various signal transduction assessments show the intelligence of bacteria. Bacterial communication is apparently meaning-based and permitting colonial identity, intentional behaviour (e.g. pheromone-based courtship for mating), purposeful alteration of colony structure (e.g. formation of fruiting bodies), decision making (e.g. sporulation), and recognition and identification of other colonies, are credited with and resulting from a bacterial social intelligence and wisdom.[222]

It's the volume of microbial entities that accompanies their structural re-organisation. Unicellular organisms' simple rules or basic elements in extreme number inspire the bottom-up emergence of the complex structural dynamics of entities such as hyper-microbial mycelia that regulate the biosphere. Microbes form network media of mycelial bodies and bacterial symbiosis, structures similar to the computer networks of the Internet. Those networks have many elements with a few connections (so-called connectors) and only a few elements with a lot of connections (hubs). These processes of networking are related not only to emergence but also 'stigmergy' – the control of structure by information that comes from the structure itself. It is the re-writing of the behavioural patterns based on previous behaviour that humans teach their "intelligent" media.

A famous illustration of the narrow and mechanistic understanding of intelligence is the criteria of the ability to navigate the maze – performed by slime moulds as well as computer game players. The navigation of the maze seems to be a task that clearly evaluates the decisions as intelligent on a scale of basic efficiency. The ability to navigate not only serves as recognition of the intelligence of microbes but also exposes the part of human intelligence that is shared with microbes. Interestingly, Trewavas mentions "the ability to navigate a maze (that) is shared between social insects and plants",[223] where the

[222] Ibid., p.201
[223] Ibid., p.99

"maze" is understood as soil and air – which are the excrement of fungal and microbial digestion. Fungi decomposition provides therefore the environments in which microbe intelligence is performed. Every unicellular organism "gathers and continually updates diverse information about its surroundings, combines this with information about its internal state, and makes decisions that reconcile its well-being with the environment".[224] Some cognitive scientists, like Varela,[225] would recognise those patterns as characteristic of the cognitive processes of the human brain. To recognise those feedback patterns of behaviour in microbiological bodies, thanks to observation done with apparatuses of human technology (human body extensions), constitutes a technological opening of humans towards the miniscule media of microbes. The technological networks are the filters through which the human life presents itself to human perception as microbial processes. Tech-mediation constitutes transhuman life. We perceive our techno-bodies as media-microbes, since the technologies expose and increasingly emphasise the processes of human functioning as dependent on microbial life.

Stamets repeats the argument, originally made by Lynn Margulis, that symbiosis is not an exception in nature but rather the norm. The advantage of recognising the fungal media realm of intricate microbe communication networks can be of much greater importance than the threats posed by infectious parasites. Anna Tsing's narration about "the mushroom at the end of the world"[226] shows how fungal strategies can lead humans beyond the self-inflicted scenarios of technological disasters. In her story the "capitalist ruin" of abandoned US industrial sites sprouts oriental mushrooms that provide food, jobs and new lifestyles for excluded, globally dislocated populations of the 21st century. They negotiate the life with fungi that become the environmental media of post-industrial, dynamic social networks. The mushrooms at the end of the world are a fine example of fungi media for a future remediation of environments and communications. They perform certain parasitic and infectious processes, but their context goes far beyond. "After hundreds of millions of years of evolution, fungal alliances have become part of nature's body politic. It is time for our species to partake in this ancient mycological wisdom".[227] Stamets urges us to take an active part in what he calls "Mycotopia" – an environment in which fungi are actively used to enhance or preserve ecological equilibrium. Certainly, the fungal behaviour eludes the imagination of proportionate balance as it spreads by

[224] Ibid., p.100
[225] See Francisco J. Varela, *The Embodied Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991
[226] See Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at The End of The World*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2015
[227] Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005, p.34

deforming the environment into overly complicated and patchy holographic discontinuities. Then, certain technological involvements with the biosphere can be considered advantageous or disadvantageous from the perspective of human survival on the planet. How can fungi media possibly enhance and preserve human environments? In describing his theoretical “Mycelial Internet” Stamets mentions such an advantage for the dynamic functioning of the biosphere processes as enabling greater nutrient flows, improvement in moisture absorption, the bolstering of disease resistance, erosion reduction, the provision of niches for fauna and flora, and the bequeathing of debris streams for more fungal cycles. He argues that future habitat restoration has to be founded on “three systems – mycorestoration, permaculture, and living machines”.[228] Decomposition finds its meaning through novel lifestyles that answer the problems created by global technological civilization.

Taking distance from the face-value of Stamets’ somewhat naïve enthusiasm about ‘perfecting’ the future of humans with mycoremediation, let us explore the notion of decomposition media that he promotes as a future approach to technology, beyond the reckless push for production and consumption. Fungi media can be seen as the opening of technological modes beyond the market-oriented ones. Those intriguing ‘living-oriented’ modes of fungi media are described with terms taken from other theorists of ecosystems. The “living machines” of John Todd describe mycelial networks that break down toxic waste (as in estuary ecosystems) while the “permaculture” of Bill Mollison describes the strengthening of the sustainability of an ecosystem by using diverse natural systems, which are also regulated by fungi. Stamets’ own “mycofiltration” references both of the above ideas by describing the diversity of specifically applied mycelial filters. Fungi media also perform as filters, but these are filters created by humans for the human perception of reality. They showcase the miniscule life we couldn’t perceive before the technological apparatus, and thus completely change our relation to the world. They also challenge the hyper-structure of our supposedly essential multicellular integrity and introduce the microbiological diversity with their minute temporary performativities, which post-Internet mutant performers embody.

Within their microbe scales, fungi media undo human identities by means of decomposition processes of network communication, fragmentation and external digestion

[228] Ibid., p.68

of immersive simulations. Medial decomposition then embeds the no-longer-humans in the cryptic materiality of anonymous substances, revealing the slime dynamics behind intelligent behaviour. This post-technological, microbial embodiment of intelligence defines us through nonhuman modes of performativity with fungi, slime moulds and other mysterious microbes. My aim is to have a closer look at that process as it unfolds within decaying urban spaces and post-industrial areas. The bioremediation of fungi introduces the media of bio-agency that alter the never clean but technologically altered environment through openings for contaminations and undetermined compositional shifts. “The introduction of a single fungus (…) into a nearly lifeless landscape triggers a cascade of activity by other organisms”.[229] By entering habitats, fungi tend to remove toxic barriers for synergistic waves of organisms to follow. Fungi media lead the change of environmental biotechnologies. They decontaminate land not by sterile instrumentation of control but rather by loosening it up and opening it to the self-regulating sophistication of dirt. Mycelium pre-exposed to wild bacteria grows more vigorously, while other groups of bacteria produce their own toxin-digesting strategies and proliferate with fungi media. The chain effects of communication technologies’ processes inspire arrays of new media enclaves, which are full of tech-mutations ready to descend into the hidden sub-territories of loopy interfaces and decaying metropolitan environments. This movement beyond the Internet towards biodeteriorated urban spaces may be the most vital opportunity for the fungal understanding of media.

The human body, extended and decomposed

Post-Internet mutant performers tap into the conceptual perspective of Virilio and Lotringer, who position the technologically decomposed body of the human as a new corpuscular form of existence, or a novel materiality of life. They present a vision of the devolution of the human via post-industrial technologies, performed by a collapse of the body. Virilio and Lotinger’s concept of media mutation does not asher in any productivist evolutionary ideas but rather serves as a conceptual opening to the notion of the devolution of techno-rot. In their proposition "everything decomposes because of the acceleration of exchange, the deconstruction of instances and of institutions".[230] Linear notions of the future and of progress are rejected here with the shift towards the post-

[229] Ibid., p.69
[230] Paul Virilio & Sylvere Lotringer, *Corpuscular Dawn*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2002, p.164

structural dynamics of technological acceleration, which has been fast-forwarded by the Internet.

The acceleration of decomposition eludes the future-oriented ideologies of progress, moving (backwards) towards the microbial past. Virilio and Lotringer conceptualise this process as the 'regression of matter', which not only involves "social decomposition in the cities, decomposition of the social fabric into anomy" but which also affects human reality in the most abstract as well as in its physiological dimensions: "What is decomposing is the geographical space, the psychophysical and the 'psychophysiophysical' space of being".[231] In their multi-layered narrative, which offers novel technological understandings of the human body, Virilio and Lotringer thus establish *decomposition* as the key category to conceptualise the process of corporeal erosion that accompanies the different processes of mediation. They mention the loosening of the integrity of nation state politics as a result of the post-colonial flux of trans-migration and the globalisation of economy. They relate the above to the loosening of the stability of social hierarchies affected by the higher social mobility enabled by new communication media. Last but not least, they focus on bodily erosion performed by biotechnologies such as genetic engineering, alongside the diversification of cybersex and gender-fluid tendencies of humans in the highly mediatised environments. Virilio and Lotringer extend their understanding of the human body beyond the body proper (also called *animal body*), and beyond the social bodily entity into what they call the *territorial body*. The territorial body is the ever-encompassing historical relation of the human civilization to its environment. This relation redefines the environment and at the same time defines the human body as technologically extended. The integrity of the body is being challenged here. The erosion of the territorial body happens through disconnection from the land, by loosening human dependency on their location. It also happens through processes and phenomena such as globalisation, living in megacities and smart apartments. Global mobility, urban alienation and high-tech separation inside the simulation chambers of 21st century apartments pressurise humans further into joining media communication networks as the main context for their self-definition, which accelerates the processes of the media decomposition of human bodies and subjectivities.

Various definitions of the human body explored by Virilio and Lotringer overlap with each other in a monstrous tangle which is almost nonhuman, constantly morphing. The two

[231] Ibid., p.165

authors elaborate on the erosions of those definitions, describing “the decomposing social body, where structures of procreation, of production, and of course of resistance in any area are themselves unsettled”.[232] In their analysis of techno-human bodily dysmorphia, Virilio and Lotringer adopt a global by suggesting that the planet’s territory becomes increasingly subjected to technological manipulation and thus functions as the human’s extended body. The collapse of the territorial body into the human body proper makes "The Earth (its) phantom limb",[233] adds Virilio, as the whole planet seemingly performs as a technological bodily part of humans, mediated by global communications. We could thus say that communication technologies internalise our planet as a collective of bodily functions in the embrace of the processes of mediation. The planet in its entirety is involved in the physiological processes of the techno-human body, extended by the global infrastructures. In Virilio and Lotringer’s argument, technological networks infiltrate not only humans but also the whole living surface of the planet. Thus, performances of human bodily mutations that I engage in and curate can be seen as commentaries on global environmental changes.

The human usage of technology alters life on our planet through the extreme manipulation of the environment and its energetic metabolism. Taking the example of carbon cycles as the major rhythm of the ecosystem, technological bodily extensions of the human -- such as industrial infrastructures, metropolitan areas and transportation vehicles -- work as “energetic slaves” that consume several times more energy (to be precise, five, as estimated by Volk in 2003) than humans themselves. “We nourish these energy slaves with the remains of ancient life”.[234] We could suggest that humans breed into a new species through their bodily media. Those new technolife forms are very demanding towards all other life forms, especially primitive ones. Energy-expensive media technologies, feeding on the prehistoric microbial heritage of the Earth, decompose the pre-industrial forms of the biosphere (petroleum) and mutate humans into techno-environments of their many infrastructures navigated by the Internet and other global computer networks, which humans are so dependent on and overwhelmed by. Humans are thus being actively redefined by media technologies that change their body -- and that actually become their body.

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[232] Ibid., p.166
[233] Paul Virilio, *Information Bomb*, Verso, London, 2000, p.18
[234] Tyler Volk, *Gaia’s Body: Toward a Physiology of Earth*, The MIT Press, New York, 2003, p.55

The architecture of networked communications grows from the agglomerations of urban landscapes. Cities are often built over graveyards and are embedded in them, containing a decaying hollowness within them**.** In one of the subchapters of his study of fungi, Stamets[235] comments on urbanization with the description of the 'house wrecking' fungi that break down toxic waste. At first fungi perform as an enemy problem destroying human cities, but at the same time they neutralize the global-scale side effects of metropolitan industries. Urban decay is re-invented by fungi as an opening for techno-mutations. Mouldy skyscrapers are the new ground of fungal metabolism, as they reintroduce the uncertainty of microbial life into the high-tech control system that is obsessed with cleanness and hygiene. In this post-apocalyptic setting of decaying architecture, mushrooms that grow in abandoned industrial spaces promise a new form of life's organization.

Unfolding his ideas about 'myco-remediation', Stamets calls for the fungal undoing of urban industries by offering new bio-designs that are inspired by the many roles played by fungi in the biosphere. One of his campaigns, the mycoremediation of forest roads, inspires a different way of thinking about the transportation channels of communication. It offers a narration about the revitalization of communication environments through microbial contamination as opposed to narrations of bio-terror, in which global microbes' travels spread diseases which are deadly for the human. Mycoremediation rethinks human communication with microbes, developing sophisticated co-relation channels beyond basic parasitic contaminations. Symbiotic strategies for fungal life go beyond the model of abusive invasions of war machines and towards the idea of the nourishing inter-dependence of civilizations. Civilizations have always been mediated by transportation infrastructures - fermenting canals irrigation, roads marked with symbolic stones, rail tracks with underground arches of tunnels and bridges, radioactive airplane corridors, deep pressure oceanic capsules, bike lanes.[236] As Haraway notes in her 'Cyborg Manifesto',[237] tourism has become one of the world's largest industries. Various post-modern travel lifestyles, which Bauman calls 'liquid',[238] can actually be cheaper than stationary accommodation. Many IT experts live lives of nomadic post-colonialism. Redundancy and screen sterilization of information society jobs stimulate the increase in media portability. Consumerism replaces work partially with the playful homework of

[235] Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005, p.90
[236] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 2001
[237] See Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Routledge, New York, 1991
[238] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge, 2000

private time and entertainment. The pressure of mobility causes stress and requires the remediation technologies of coping with the jamming of loopy networks. Haraway recognizes it as a side effect of the disturbance of overcoming the futurist militaristic media called 'C^{3}I' – which stands for command, control, communication and intelligence. Indeed, the military developed the network media prototype of the Internet, which turned into the trans-political bubbles of virtual subcultures. 'Weaving' is proposed by Haraway as a subversive cyborgic form of networking, actualized through polymorph storytelling against the domination of singularity. Her heretic 'heteroglossia' is the choice of struggle against the universal code and standardized modes of communication. Military control is distanced in the trance-state experience of connected computer users, their webs of new couplings and new coalitions.

The late-20th century Internet utopian desire is re-formulated by Haraway in the early 21st century in her book *Staying with the Trouble*, by returning to the fleshy temporality of the cyborg bodies as a point of focus. To recapitulate, the post-futurist cyborg thrives with the multiplicity of creatures – the techno-alien life forms that are not reducible to each other but that are morphing together, propelled by their lack of firm body boundaries as well as their frayed digital insubstantiality. At the same time, the cyborg is recognized as a symbiotic biological entity, linked to specific time-space positioning. "Nobody lives everywhere; everybody lives somewhere. Nothing is connected to everything, everything is connected to something".[239] The dispersion of the selves of online humans accelerates with the infectious strategies for survival in urban diasporas and their particular conditions. The entanglement of global urban-nomadic lifestyles speeds up with cheap travel infrastructures and social media networks, but retains its histories and disproportional conditioning. In order to examine this entanglement, I offer an account of my own of urban and media nomadism in Chapter 2, via my practice research involved with squatting networks in London.

The decomposing ambience of rotting architecture is being uncovered by the archaeologies of post-colonialism. It is also a process of collapsing the old global empires and internalizing their previously expansive dynamic, summarized by Ben Woodard in the context of slimy microbial life as "ongoing slumification and slime-ification of the capitalized

[239] Ibid., p.31

earth".[240] Juan Carlos Rodriguez describes the fungal rot of the Cuban Revolution film archives as an invasion of nonhuman agency against the ideology of urban modernisation. He notices that microbes not only invade the physical city but also eventually devour the media infrastructure. Both processes are parallel and mutually related, as city "ruins belong to the same history of abandonment and oblivion as those images infected by fungi".[241] The ideology of urban design is being challenged by biodeterioration as "toxic biological agents such as fungi and bacteria colonise and contaminate archival images of social transformation and revolutionary processes".[242] Another example of biodeterioration can be analyzed through an inverse shift in the meaning of the term 'squatter' applied nowadays to describe "makeshift urbanism"[243] with its "micro politics of violence". The settlers of the British Empire, violently claiming their dominion over lands and races unknown to them, used in the pre-industrial 18th century the term 'squatter' to describe a pioneering settler of British Empire in the most distant continents of America, Africa or Australia. Thus, the concept of "squatters rights" was used by British 19th century (and earlier) colonialists in order to "provide entry for settlers to land that was initially ceded to indigenous communities".[244] Pre-industrial squatters were invading alien cultures and claiming the land by force of war machines -- guns. They were colonizers. On the other hand, already in the industrial London of mid-19th century, colonial laborers working in the East End docks started taking abandoned buildings by force – something that was defined later by law as being against the will of the property owner and secured by means of controlling the entrance points. Marginalized global expats moved in great numbers to the London carcass of the British Empire in the 20th century by the time it had become post-industrial.

Those rotting city spaces and social fermentations are also decomposing the extended bodies of post-Internet mutants. The analysis of my performance acts at a squatted, derelict sewage in London engages the environmental context of urban decay in the interrogation of the mutating bodies of the post-Internet performers. I want to suggest that, in the times of global media, squatters have created their own form of a decomposed post-colonial identity, as they come from all over the planet to the previous capital of the global empire – London. Here, they appropriate the waste of urban society by literally going

[240] Ben Woodard, *On an Ungrouded Earth,* punctum books, New York, 2013, p.94
[241] Juan Carlos Rodriguez, "Towards a Film Mycology?" in: *Public Journal*, *No.57*, Toronto, 2018 http://www.publicjournal.ca/public-57-archivecounter-archives/, p.172
[242] Ibid., p.173
[243] Alexander Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City*, Verso, New York, 2017, p.146
[244] Ibid., p.188

inside it. Going inside means going underground without social gravity, as their occupation is anonymous and their identities non-transparent, and thus virtual. They represent the living process of the decay of urban architecture, which was the past monument of the imperialistic glory. (Some of the squatted properties are still the most expensive in the world). Squatters thrive without identity like microbial pests, bringing all the issues of post-colonial global entanglement next door. Squatting thus offers an experimental platform for a new mutation of post-modern lifestyles, spreading as a symbiotic support network beyond the verification systems of humanist identities. The networks of squatting neutralize social waste, reinventing trans-human identities beyond the blurred lines of society. They work as underground tubes of mycelia that form micro-canalization in soil, neutralizing neurotoxins with fungal bioremediation. In reinventing trans-identities for the criminalised margin of society, which squatters often represent, they perform as fungi that, with their digestion, facilitate the disposal of chemical weapons (some fungi are able to consume chemicals such us Indochinese agent orange or sarin Tokyo gas, according to Stamets) as well as of pesticides, herbicides or even radioactivity, as well as other industrial toxins.

Becoming squatters, previous social outcasts become socially able and independent in their life support but functioning outside of the social designs of powers that be. They create an extraordinary value of creative subcultures by transforming the initial stigma of social exclusion. Squatters are thus filters for political machinery, just like fungi are biological filters for industrial technology. Squatting can be seen as an example of a remediation process based on spontaneous communication that revitalizes exhausted urban environments. In Chapter 2 I will explore this architectural and city-infrastructural embeddedness of fungi media through offering reflections on my own practice of squatting a bio-contaminated sewage[245] - and on the performative engagement with its microbial entities within that space.

[245] Online archive of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan: http://neofung.tumblr.com/chronicillness

Chapter 2: The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan: An Interrogation of Trans-Corporeality via Performances of the Chronic Illness

'Chronic Illness' is the organising concept of my performance art practice, which seeks engagement with the nonhuman life of fungoids. In this chapter I critically reflect upon my Chronic Illness practice with a view to preparing the ground for outlining the performance of alternative sexualities through all sorts of bodily mutations, on- and offline. 'Chronic Illness' doesn't reference any specific medical condition but rather introduces a variety of 'trans-corporeal'[246] approaches to the human body. Trans-corporeal approaches debunk the separation of bodies from their environment, instead defining bodies as momenta of environmental processes. The notion of the Chronic Illness conceptualises bodies that are not complete or harmoniously static; they are chimerical, unevenly distributed, vulnerably porous and involved in dynamic transformations of unknown intensities. 'Chronic Illness' emphasises the penetration of human bodies by microbial agencies and links them in a critical manner to the fungoid environment. We could say this notion prioritises the environmental understanding of bodies by exposing their constant manipulation by, and disintegration into, the moving compounds of nonhuman entities (microbes, fungi). 'Chronic Illness' thus overcomes the limitations of defining human bodies as proportionally composed individual entities, apparently independent from the randomness of live environments. In my conceptualisation of the Chronic Illness I follow the imaginative ideas of Antonin Artaud, who attacked societal systems of bodily repressions as 'conspiracies' of the healthy against the ill. Artaud challenged the oppressive hierarchies of population control behind the ideologies of 'health' by exploring trans-corporeal vectors of human bodies. For me, the Chronic Illness is not an acute, superficial issue but rather a manifestation of a deep and ongoing conflict within bodies. It never completely goes away but reappears in waves, cyclically performing organic destabilisations and mutations of human bodies via their co-mingling with microbes and fungoids.

[246] Term introduced in: Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2010

Entering the mutating space

The subject of my practice-based research is the microbial activity unfolding in the performance space of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, which I've been squatting for over six years now (2015-2021).[247] Almost one hundred human body acts that have happened there, accompanied by over a thousand participants who have attended the sixteen Chronic Illness (of Mysterious Origin) events,[248] have been part of the ongoing process of communication, via fungi media, of and with the severely bio-active environment. The diversity of fungal, slime moulds, as well as other microbial species, has been manifesting itself in the dynamic relations to the multiple contaminations of the space by the human performers' bodies, together with plant and animal bodies, and to the synthetic remains that those bodies have introduced into the space. Moreover, the vital conditions for life in the Dungeons have been provided by the invasive liquids causing humidity, leaks and floods. Those leaks are related to the ground waters affected by the fluctuating weather, filtered through the underground rivers connected to the piping system, as well as the sewage infrastructure's malfunctions and the porous walls of the rotten architecture, in complicity with the perspiration of the human bodies descending into the space.

The name the *Polymorphous Pan*, which was given to the basement 'dungeons' of my squat during the first year of its occupation in 2015, projects intense mutability as the fundamental condition of this space. The space has been occupied and engaged by myself and other human performers, as a laboratory to conduct performative experiments with anonymous substances of fungoid actants. I have called the events taking place there *The Chronic Illness (of Mysterious Origin)* to emphasise the severity of the invasive bodily media which I have started to examine in there. The raw actuality of the dungeons under London's Holloway has served as my living environment for almost seven years,[249] providing bare conditions for my biological survival. On my arrival, I encountered a space of ambiguous contamination, visibly (and olfactorily) infested with many life entities. Those entities offered an elusive company in conceiving narratives of unknown or alien life forms, carrying imaginary illnesses that recall the mirage of infamous London Black Death bacillus and eventually speculate about psycho-somatic disturbances caused by the

[247] The practice of mutant performance is presented in a form of the video documentation of my body art performance *Synthetic Organs*, the video documentation of the bioart installation *Holobiont* and the digitally manipulated photography and body scans *3Decay*.
[248] The archive of Chronic Illness: http://neofung.tumblr.com/chronicillness
[249] My living space is the threshold of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan and the trap door under my bed is the only passage into the space.

lockdown of bodies during the COVID pandemic.[250] The mysterious microbial entities have been hiding and irregularly re-emerging in new unexpected shapes. From the first moment, I knew that I couldn't observe the entirety of the behaviour of the life forms present in the dungeons, as the pace of life of fungi and other microbes greatly exceeds humans' perception capabilities. Nevertheless, my aim has been to make the fungoid entities emerge as the living medium for my human understanding by performing with them, and make them perform through acts of human performers. Obsessively, I've been re-inventing the fungi media of the mysterious mould embedded at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, developing it as my dirty fetish, or rather what Bruno Latour calls *factish.*[251] In his science and technology studies work, Latour offers a concept of the experiment that constructs the subject (here, fungoids) through the experimental conditions of this subject's performance, when at the same time the subject (the fungoids) can come to existence only through the experimental performance. In the context of Latour's theory, my fetishisation of microbes and fungi is actually a way of calling them into existence.

My performative challenge to fungi media in the dungeons of my squat can be compared to Latour's analysis of Pasteur's examination of yeast as the main agent of fermentation, at the French biologist's laboratory. Latour points to the creation of yeast ontology by Pasteur from the original anonymous substance, which was vicious, grey, irregular and amorphous. He summarises the initial examination of yeast's qualities as follows: "It would be hard for something to have less existence than that. It is not an object, but a cloud of perceptives, not yet the predicates of coherent substance".[252] Originating from such a blurry phantom of existence, Pasteur creates his fermenting mould by making it perform certain qualities in response to his laboratory manipulations. The exemplary microbe actually comes into existence as a performer, since "we do not know what *it is*, but we know what *it does* from the trial, conducted in the lab. A series of performances *precedes* the definition of the competence that will later be made the sole course of these very performances".[253] In a similar manner, my curatorial directions of the Chronic Illness art events, and then the acts of the mutant body performers during the events, make fungoids

[250] Particularly via the 'plague theatre' trilogy of hybrid events with the Judgment Hall industrial music platform during London lockdown of 2021 and series of immersive video-installation Chronic Illness 13 in December 2020 featured in the report; Piotr Bockowski, *'Bottom of the Well', traumatic video-narratives of Chronic Illness 13*, CLOT Magazine, London, 30 Mar 2021, www.clotmag.com/oped/bottom-of-the-well-traumatic-video-narratives-of-chronic-illness-13-by-piotr-bockowski
[251] See Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999
[252] Ibid., p.118
[253] Ibid., p.119

in the basement perform for us and become with us. Pasteur's yeast came into existence as something that could be sprinkled, that triggered fermentation, that rendered a liquid turbid, that made the chalk disappear, that formed a deposit, that penetrated gas, that formed crystals, that became viscous – all in response to the conditions of the laboratory manipulated by Pasteur himself.

Thinking along similar lines, I shall try to define the microbial performance entities in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan by provoking their behaviour in response to the conditions of the Chronic Illness events. Bringing out the behaviour of nonhuman living beings through events manipulated by humans, I have to recognise microbes as the actual actors of the Chronic Illness performance art, also understood in analogy to scientific experiments described by Latour: "there is no other way to define an actor but through its action, and there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed or created by the character that is the focus of attention".[254] Yeast as Pasteur's actor emerged in his text only as a performative response to the precise experimental conditions of Pasteur's laboratory. Yet, as Latour points out, Pasteur's text will be authorised mainly by yeast, "the real behaviour of which can then be said to *underwrite* the entire text".[255] In this sense the intense realness of microbes constitutes the essence of all laboratory manipulations and even makes the science of Pasteur an event in microbes' life (rather than microbes being an event in Pasteur's experimentation). That's why Latour proposes that Pasteur "happened"[256] to fermenting microbes. In the same vein, I would like to propose that the human performances during the Chronic Illness happened to the microbes occupying the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan.

My squatted Dungeons are named after the beastly mythological trickster creature Pan Polymorphous. Pan was one of the bestial characters associated with the cult of Dionysus, who allegedly indulged in polymorphic selves whence "after seeing his image in the mirror went in search of himself everywhere, and considering himself to be plural, developed multiple personalities, and so was ripped apart".[257] Following the initial usage of the space as a private venue for 'shibari' - the Japanese practice of body restraint with ropes – the Dungeons were turned into a mould-inspired performance art venue. Their name defined a

[254] Ibid., p.122
[255] Ibid. p.132
[256] Ibid. p.146
[257] See Jeremy Reed, 'Heliogabalus: Black Sun Rising' in: *Caligula: Divine Carnage*, Solar Books, London, 2006

subterranean realm of corporeal trans-humanity associated with the playful bestiality of zoophile god Pan. The bestiality of Pan is not adopted in the Dungeons as a literal sexualisation of animals, but rather as a metaphorical figure of openness towards intimate encounters with nonhuman life. The polymorphous characteristic of the space references the multidirectional perversity and the diverse exploratory forms of bodily trans-identities, described by psychoanalysis as the prime stage of children's eroticism preceding any fixed objects of desire. In "Polymorphous-perverse Disposition" section of his second essay from "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", Sigmund Freud states that even under the slightest, random influence a "child may become polymorphous-perverse and may be misled into all sorts of transgressions. This goes to show that it carries along the adaptation for them in its disposition".[258] In a psychoanalytical view, children become polymorphous effortlessly, as infants apparently resemble prostitutes or 'primitive human' "in their uniform disposition for all perversions".[259] The environmental dispersion of sexuality into the multiple spatial directions of life, the amorphous distribution of the sexual energy that transgresses the human body shape, became a figure of the polymorphous decomposition experience in the Dungeons, which tease with allure of rotten eroticism. The living space is a sewage-ritualistic process of microbial fertility, decomposing organic tissues that human performers bring into it. Here, shibari practice offers a figuration of the restrain submission of human bodies to the biocontamination of dark waters. Power-play with fungi forces humans into vegetative behavior and invites the penetration of all skin pores with slimy nanotubes. Polymorphy describes here formally the experimental character of the performance space, where theatrics meet the dynamics of biomedia mutation. Meaning literally "a multiplicity of forms", the polymorphy of my dungeons invites in particular the performances of elusive bio-morphs of fungi and other microbes. Polymorphy also describes the performance environment in terms of its technological possibilities.

In his book *Bodies in Technology,*[260] Don Ihde contextualises the term *polymorphy* in the perspective of the phenomenology of bodily mediation, explaining that the intentionality of bodily actions goes beyond body limits defined by skin. A "body experience is one that is not simply coextensive with a body outline or with one's skin. (…) One's skin is at best polymorphically ambiguous, and, even without material extension, the sense of the here-

[258] Sigmund Freud, 'The Infantile Sexuality', in: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* (1905), online: www.en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Three_Contributions_to_the_Theory_of_Sex
[259] Ibid.
[260] See Don Ihde, *Bodies in Technology*, University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 2002

body exceeds its physical bounds".[261] For Ihde, polymorphy is an inevitable element of human bodily experience. It is at the same time an essential characteristic of transhuman technological embodiments. He proposes that "Imagining, now technologically embodied, makes polymorphy – particularly of visual shaping – a forefront phenomena".[262] Ihde defines polymorphy in a twofold manner: as "computer effects that make presumed real entities hyperreal" and as "the already unreal morphings that either show realistic-looking oddities such as the parasitic alien animals in 'Aliens', or abstract, vaporous (…) forms, such as the high-speed travel morphing in science-fiction".[263] This double effect of media polymorphy corresponds to the supposed irony of 21st century fantasy simulations, such as computer games that become increasingly "realistic", and hi-tech instrumentations, applied to the "realism" of scientific research such as media diagnosis, weather patterns, geology or mapping of cosmos, which are apparently ruled by "something of an inverse proportion law at play - the better the data/image, the more constructed it has been".[264] Once again, Ihde's polymorphy brings us back to Latour's mutual performance of humans and nonhumans. Respectively, the curatorial concept for my performance space is based on the conviction that to understand humans and nonhumans, be it microbes or media or, indeed, fungi media, we must see their interplay in actional situations. This playful complicity with fungoids in the space of polymorphous shapeshifting invites performers and participants to enact their chronic illness.

The body as performance

In an attempt to further recognize and expose the mutant performance in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, I would like to reference the presentation of the nonhuman body envisaged by Karen Barad in her article 'Invertebrate Visions: Diffraction of Brittlestar'.[265] In the article, Barad describes the body of an animal as a discursive practice enacted by means of its performance. "The importance of the body as a performance, rather than a thing, can hardly be overemphasized",[266] she reminds us, while offering a description of the brittlestar's movements in terms of worldmaking. Barad claims that "practices by which

[261] Ibid., p.6
[262] Ibid., p.12
[263] Ibid., p.12
[264] Ibid., p.136
[265] See Karen Barad, "Invertebrate Visions: Diffraction of Brittlestar", in: *Multispecies Salon*, Duke University Press, Durham 2014
[266] Ibid., p.228

it differentiates between 'itself' and the 'environment', by which it makes sense of its world – are materiality enacted. Its bodily structure is a material agent in what it sees/knows".[267] In this narrative, the performance of the body becomes a process of direct knowledge making. "Knowledge making is not a mediated activity (…) Knowing is a direct material engagement",[268] she concludes. In this presentation, media are understood as a direct materiality of life, which is always being performed.

This dynamic quest to enact the human's involvement with nonhuman bodies is the shared motif of all the articles included alongside Barad's in 'Multispecies Salon', a book accompanying a series of bioart performance events in the 21st century US.[269] The artist-philosophers involved in the event speculate about bio-active media, with a view to finding performative engagements with nonhuman entities of life. In 'R.A.W. Assmilk Soap', coming from her inter-species experience, Karen Bolender expresses a frustrating "desire to let the wordless interweaving of bodies in time somehow be the act".[270] This act is supposed to offer an insight into the lived world via the vehicles of the body performances of nonhumans, which enact "the quieter, embodied wisdom of the other ones, (…) in flesh and fur and mud, beyond all the names and distinctions".[271] Nevertheless, those nonhuman performances actually happen significantly *with* humans, as we are reminded by Eben Kirksey, Brandon Castelloe-Kuehn and Dorion Sagan in their 'Life in the Age of Biotechnology'. I interrogate this notion of performative interdependence between human and nonhuman bodies via my curatorial concept of the Chronic Illness.

Probing ideas on the cross-section of bioart and body performance, I was inspired by the Artaudian figure of his totemic disgusting mother[272] [Fig. 9.] made out of microbial excrement and, as such, being a hybrid proto-humanoid figure emerging from a microbial pile. I adapted that figure to the immersive theatrics of *Chronic Illness 10*,[273] which was directed around a significant trans-human figure of a monstrous mummy, capable of breeding mutants. The mother figure became the centre point of the scene, dominating the Dungeons and controlling the vectors of movements in the space by giving orders to other

[267] Ibid., p.227
[268] Ibid., p.232
[269] Santa Cruz 2006, San Francisco 2008, New Orleans 2010, New York 2011.
[270] Karen Bolender, "R.A.W. Assmilk Soap", in: *Multispecies Salon*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2014, p.72
[271] Ibid., p.82
[272] Antonin Artaud, "To Have Done with the Judgement of God", in: *Watchfiends & Rack Screams*, Exact Change, Boston, 1995
[273] *Ooze Feed* immersive theatre directed by Piotr Bockowski and Alex Avery: www.neofung.tumblr.com/oozefeed

mutant-looking performers. She was coated with decaying materials incubating in the Dungeons. Growing from the manhole, her mouldy glands where spurting oat milk, which is a common feed for slimes and some primitive fungi during laboratory tests. My curatorial aim was to withdraw from the human power position of “controlled experiment conditions” usually assumed by the scientific methods in relation to nonhuman life forms. Sucking and spilling slime food, the performers where nourishing their companion microbes. The microbes already transformed the bodies of performers through partial external digestion of their costumes and sets, which were an integral part of organic networks within the alive space. Fungoids at the Dungeons were thus being indirectly invented through my curation of the performances there, in an attempt to acknowledge the biomatter as *companions for*, as well as *media of* the human species.

Fig. 9. *Ooze Feed* directed by Piotr Bockowski & Alex Avery. Photo credit: Yasmine Akim (2018)

The performances of nonhumans with human bodies assume becomings understood as "new kinds of relations that emerge from alliances and symbiotic attachments, in contrast to relationships structured by patrilineal descent or filiation".[274] This concept of human-nonhuman becoming postulates horizontal relations between humans and other species, as opposed to the hierarchical concept of human domination over nature. Heather Paxons taps into this idea with her project of *microbiopolitics*, which is a self-proclaimed "post-Pausterian" manifesto premised on approaching microbes beyond the ideologies of hygiene and antiseptics, and with an aim "to embrace mud and bacteria as potential friends and allies".[275] Similarly, when inviting many human performers to the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, I've always considered all of the human acts in relation to the life of the mysterious microbial entities in the space, wishing to account for them too [Fig. 10.]. This approach is echoed in the words of another author included in 'Multispecies Salon', Miriam Simun, who says: "Never think you know all of the species involved" and "never think you speak for all of yourself".[276] In order to give an account of my involvement in microbe performance in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, I need to contextualize the space in the organic relations with the metropolitan infrastructure of London, the networks of squatting and the organic media of the Holloway area. They all constitute mutations of the Chronic Illness body performances.

[274] Eben Kirksey, Brandon Castelloe-Kuehn and Dorion Sagan, "Life in the Age of Biotechnology", in: *Multispecies Salon*, Duke University Press, Durham 2014, p.205
[275] Heather Paxons, "Microbiopolitics", in: *Multispecies Salon*, Duke University Press, Durham 2014, p.116
[276] Miriam Simun, "Human Milk", in: *Multispecies Salon*, Duke University Press, Durham 2014, p.140

Fig. 10. Fungoid life at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. Photo credit: Piotr Bockowski (2017)

Squatting urban decay after the Internet

To present the space of The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, I shall focus in the further part of this chapter on the situated knowledge I have acquired as a squatter in London, and on the performativity of squatting in relation to fungi media, embodied through the performance art events I have curated. Since 2009 I have been inhabiting abandoned buildings and turning them into performance spaces. The Internet has always been my scaffolding for orchestrating squatting - from using Google Street Maps (and Satellite View) to find locations and possible entry points, through to verifying properties via online real estate listings as well as governmental databases, linking with travellers websites and anarchist support circuits for urban nomads, as well as promoting events for underground, D.I.Y. and queer art peers on social media. Particular involvement of social media in my squatting practice pulls those who connect to my squatted spaces into performative situations that Judith Butler would describe in terms of transgressing the body towards the

excremental filth of "others".[277] Performers and participants in the Chronic Illness events step beyond the computer screens to perform the corporeal in a gestural and desire dimension of my sewage theatrics that "produce the meaning on the surface the body".[278] I see it as an action of becoming through a micropolitics that challenge the technosystem of social control (also attached to social media like Facebook and Tumblr that I use to promote Chronic Illness), inviting Internet users to "the dangers that permeable bodily boundaries present to the social order as such".[279]

Moving beyond sterile computer simulations, Internet users enter the space of the Chronic Illness, where they re-discover the permeability of their bodies, which are now open for penetration by, and transformations via fungoid nonhumans. Since its early days, including the pre-Internet era, the whole squatting project has remained physiological in its core challenges, involving the physical trespassing of the architectural space, enforcing the guerrilla practices of taking control over the property and establishing the continuity of occupation within the group resistance towards institutional and other legal pressures as well as dealing with incidents of raw violence. Finally, the performance artists and peers that find out about the squatted spaces, and that join them as a consequence of following the communications I send out, are eventually confronted with my decaying hideout that exposes their bodies to an experience that transcends the mediation of communication technologies. Through this, I have established a testing ground for my notion of fungi media, which is enacted in this encounter of post-Internet human bodies of the performers with the nonhuman life entities of the rotten inner spaces of the city. My squatting opens up a theatre of an approach to live matter that Jane Bennett defines as "playful element".[280] She suggests a strategy of a performative gesture of the human who courageously speculates about nonhuman, at the same time being aware of not knowing its other but performing with it nevertheless.

The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan embody fungi media in two ways. They are a performance art space that exercises the notions of post-Internet art,[281] understood as various artistic practices informed by phenomena related to media spaces and communicational technologies, but extending them to a physical space and embodying those phenomena in performance art. In this sense the practice of the actual bodies of the

[277] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p.182
[278] Ibid., p.185
[279] Ibid., p.180
[280] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010, p.15
[281] See Omar Kholeif (ed.), *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, HOME Publications, Manchester, 2014

performers extends the notions performed by them as Internet users. Here, the strategies for mutation and techno-decomposition meet the corporeal materiality of Internet users. Thus, the fungus presented in the space enables a return of the mediated body to its base materiality. In a way, the fungal performance events assume a form of 'biotic games',[282] which are originally video games that involve nonhuman agents like microbes that play with humans and computers. My performance practice involves an element of biotic hybrid as human performers are acting out with microbes and define themselves through that relation. Online videos from the events mediate human entanglement with microbes. Also, as a special container for the performances, the Dungeons are themselves a figure of fungi media. Embedded in the messy underground of the city infrastructure, contaminated by waste, they encapsulate a bio-active sphere of mould, forming a fungal chamber with the living history of urban stratification in London. My exploration of that special plane of fungi media will start here with some speculation about the dark metaphysics of soil media, the fungal excrement.

The location of The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan is Holloway, a muddy area in north London. Originally north *of* London, the area was called 'Hollow Way' in the Middle Ages, with reference to the sunk or sloughy highway going through it. "The 'hollow way' was (…) 'notoriously miry and deep'"[283] according to the earliest records, a quality that has been internalised by the Dungeons nowadays. Filled with muddy fungoid slime, the Dungeons create a unique dynamics with their excretion. In understanding their materiality, I am inspired by the speculations about the amorphic life processes of microbe matter in the deep space of the Earth outlined in the *blobology* narratives of Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani, who describes the Blob as a "lubricant of Telluric Lube, upon which everything moves forward, spreading smoothly and inevitably".[284] In his book *Cyclonopedia*, Negarestani experiments with different forms of narrating a philosophical fiction. He focuses on the microbial substances dwelling under the surface of the planet whose existence can be traced back to the beginnings of life, and which have been influencing or "lubricating" the human cultures from the 'telluric' underground all the way to the civilisations of high technology and media communications all over the surface of our planet. This 21st century speculative philosophy links back to the classic of Soviet SF literature by the Strugatsky brothers. In their extremely influential *Roadside Picnic* they play with an idea of a "Zone", a mysterious area influenced by alien visitation that literarily

[282] Archive of Hybrid Biological Digital Games: biodigitalgames.com/database
[283] Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (edit), *The London Encyclopaedia*, MacMillan, London, 1983, p.399
[284] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008, p.26

breeds unimaginable new technologies. Parallel to some actual reports[285] on American TV about fungal epidemics supposedly being alien invasions, there was an obscure fungal liveliness to the 'post-visitation' Zone, as:

It reeked of everything, of lousy fungus that was growing on the Zone, drinking on the Zone, eating, exploiting and growing fat on the Zone and that didn't give a damn about any of it, especially about what would happen later, when it had eaten its full and gotten power, and when everything that was once in the Zone was outside the Zone.[286]

The transgressive nonhuman performance space of the Zone was filled with the dump expanse of slime. The technological development of humans in the Strugatskys' narrative originates from the risky explorations of the fungus-infested space. Like in the Strugatskys' novel, in Nagerastani's philosophy technological civilization is also powered by the dark vitalism of microbial entities. Negarestani's blobology designates oil as a specific element that animates the ideologies of the deserts of the Middle East, which he is writing about. There is no oil in Holloway but the fungal discharge plays a similarly animating role for the performers who come to the dungeons from the outside. The discharge serves as a lubricant for the actions performed in the space, as the all-encompassing decay aesthetic is the primal inspiration and the constant environmental context for the interventions of the performers. Moreover, the regular flooding of the Dungeons, related to the deterioration of the sewage piping in Holloway, gives the space an intense sticky stench quality that changes over time, enabling a palette of sensory repulsions. These repulsions constitute a barrier of social transgression, as the disgusting smell and touch challenge various social norms and taboos that repress the creeping sensorium of decay processes.

The discovery of the blob of semi-life in the guts of the Earth and the recognition of it as an anonymous agency behind human cultures drives Negarestani to postulate the deconstruction of the symbolic systems and to challenge the integrity of identities that are constructed on their basis as well as of the accompanying traditional values. Interestingly, that exegesis is discussed by Negarestani in the chat room of an imaginary website in the book, which describes the Internet as the most "natural place" to negotiate the disgusting elusiveness of the abject blob. Similarly, in their attempt to overcome their repulsion towards the blob, the performers at the Dungeons find company in the mysterious "primal

[285] Jasper Sharp and Tim Grabham, *The Creeping Garden*, Alchimia, Godalming, 2015, p.31
[286] Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, Gollancz, London, 2007, p.68

interstellar bacterial colonies existing in the bowels of the Earth".[287] The frequently invading floods of drainage, sewage and ground waters destroy the many surreal forms of slime moulds and fungi that appear in the Dungeons sometimes only for one night, almost unnoticed. The floods also create a nourishing lubrication for the new forms that breed, after the washed-out ones disappear. The microbial corpse juice serves as a slimy medium for the performance acts that take place in the Dungeons.

I squatted the space of the Dungeons in the early days of my research into fungi media in 2015. Thus, the two projects have been developing in parallel, with the Dungeons serving as a testing ground, or laboratory, for exploring notions of post-Internet performativity conceptualized in terms of fungi media research. By post-Internet[288] I mean the forms of activity of Internet users taken beyond the Internet, at the same time extending the experience of Internet life. As Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska point out, "events and actions, including those performed on our own and others' bodies, are literally informed and ontologically choreographed by images"[289] of communications media. Performance acts in the Dungeons invite communication with fungoids inhabiting the space by re-enacting the behavioural patterns developed online. I represent a polymorphous fungus on social media (using an avatar called 'Neo Fung'), which sends out invitations to the Dungeons' events, together with calls for various immersive participants, carrying the virtual spore of the fungi from the squatted sewage. This involvement of technological 'choreography' in life processes is emphasised through the curation of the Chronic Illness events. Performance acts taking place at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan can be perceived in this vein as embodiments of the possibilities of mutation on the part of the mysterious fungoid entities inhabiting the space and post-Internet body artists, performing together with fungoids.

The Trans-corporeality of the Chronic Illness

The Dungeons are amplified with electric sound systems and social media (Facebook, Vimeo, Tumblr),[290] attracting visitors to join in the collective acts of the 'Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin'[291] nights, which constitute temporary immersive environments for the body extensions of Internet life. The name *Chronic Illness* evokes a networked

[287] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008, p.26
[288] See Omar Kholeif (ed.), *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, HOME Publications, Manchester, 2014
[289] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. 135
[290] The archive of the event on social media is available here: http://neofung.tumblr.com/chronicillness
[291] 'Chronic Illness' in short.

understanding of the event participants' bodies, fused with the dynamics of their environment. In her book *Bodily Natures* Stacy Alaimo proposes the term 'trans-corporeal' to name the above approach, exploring the notion that the environment "runs through us in endless waves".[292] Apart from its common negative connotation as a threat to life a chronic illness is inherently fused with the microbial dynamics encompassing the body as well as acting within it. A chronically ill body is in the process of becoming with and through the microbes dispersed through it. Bodies and environs are thus continuous with each other. With a chronic illness in mind, considering diverse transmutations of various materialities into biobodies, via metabolism as well as technologies such as farming or pharma, Alaimo postulates not only a high regard for dirt as a source of life, but also a certain kinship with it. Human flesh is a relative of dirt, according to her.

Analysing media around environmental illnesses, involving malicious microbial bio-agency called 'xenobiotics',[293] Alaimo shows how chronic illnesses are caused by technological manipulations of the environment and their consequent impact on bodies. Bouncing off Karen Barad's concept of 'intra-action',[294] Alaimo defines bodies through their relations within the environment, which are also technological. At the same time, bodies are defined by Alaimo via an immense impact the environment has on them. She twist the medical understanding of illnesses as unwanted anomalies to proclaim that, as the 'freaks' become more numerous, "they are no longer anomalies, but a new and viable species".[295] A critical amassment of freaks turns their chronic illness into a vehicle from the "material sense of deviation" towards an "ideal to openness to unexpected change".[296] I embrace this 'trans-corporeal' turn in my philosophical curation of the Chronic Illness events, during which dirt performs as art and microbes are considered co-authors of the acts.

My embodied exploration of trans-corporeality has resulted in a performance act called *Synthetic Organs*[297] [Fig. 11.]. Originating from my obsessive gestures of mapping of The Dungeons space as an extension of my own bodily agency, I choreographed my movements around a monstrous wound sculpted into the squat's wall. The fleshy membrane of the wound was made out of the same synthetic material that the body deformities attached to me were, mixed with the dirt from the space. My gestures in the

[292] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2010, p.11
[293] Ibid., p.129
[294] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Half Way*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007, p.170
[295] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2010, p.139
[296] Ibid. p.139
[297] *Synthetic Organs* performance art project: http://neofung.tumblr.com/organs

performance act were an attempt to relate the changing body shape to the environmental membrane of the wall-wound, thus establishing a trans-corporeal dynamic of the Chronic Illness. In the middle of the wound a piece of animal gut had been hidden, persevered by androgynous performer Alexander Dodge-Huber as a figuration of his hospitalizations in mental asylums. I had kept the gut planted in the soil at the rear end of the Dungeons as a germinating reminder of the sickly superiority of his sensitivity over the crude societal ideas of ‘health’. Exotic plants used to grow next to the main electric fuse of the space, where I noticed the slime mould lurking in the shadows.

Fig. 11. *Synthetic Organs* (2016) act by Piotr Bockowski. Photo credit: Magda Durka

My movements effectively aligned the anatomy of the buildings with the imaginary architecture performed by my monstrous body. Richard Crow mixed my live body sounds with recordings of inner organs sounds made for medical purposes and archival

recordings from the psychoanalytical therapy of Freud's patient Schreber. Schreber had been obsessed with the phantom movements of his inner organs, claiming that they were shifting inside his body or even disappearing and reappearing, as well as changing their functions. As Crow explains, "I've read Freud's notes on Schreber: he had delusions that weren't sexual, and these affected him more severely than his gender dysphoria. Schreber believed that his internal organs were vanishing and reappearing".[298] I developed my *Synthetic Organs*[299] act for *Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin 4*.[300] [Fig. 12.] by playing with the paranoid notion of a whimsical organ dynamic, where organs functioned as objects of traumatic projections.

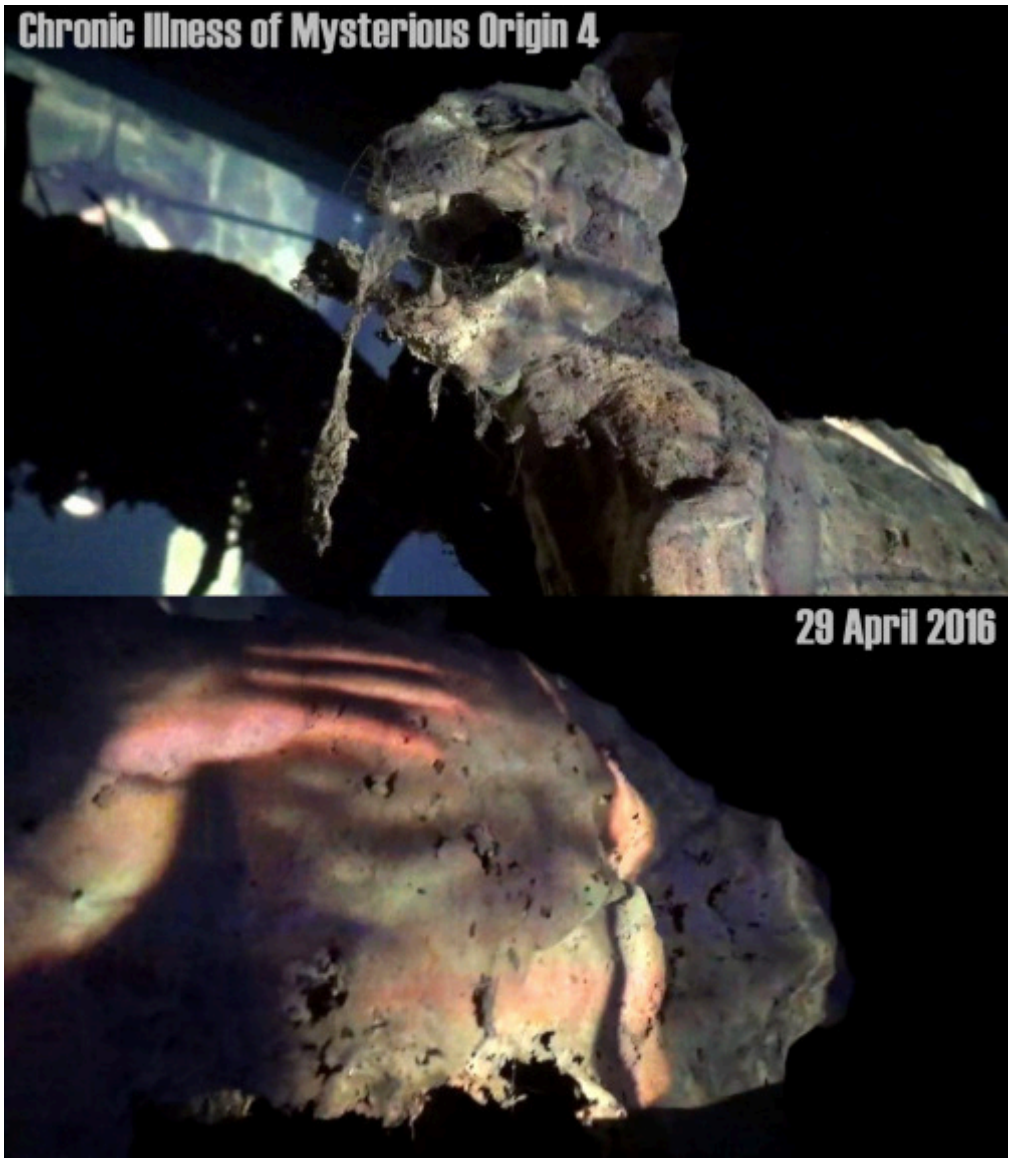

Fig. 12. Promotion Image for *Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin 4* event, featuring documentation of *Holobiont*. Photo Credit: Piotr Bockowski (2016)

[298] Richard Crow in Internet chat with Piotr Bockowski, London, 28/10/2016 19:09
[299] Documentation of *Synthetic Organs* body performance act https://vimeo.com/191996711, London, 2016
[300] Documentation of *Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin 4* event: http://neofung.tumblr.com/chronicillness4

The choreography of *Synthetic Organs* was greatly inspired by the study of the neurotic body by Tatsumi Hijikata, who was arguably the first and most radical executor of Artaud's vision in the form of conceptual dance resembling an infectious disease. In order to convey the fleshy quality of media I allude here to the theory of dance performance as an exquisite example of body psychopathology. Against the notions of the 'dematerialisation' of media and 'mind singularity' or detached ideas of artificial intelligence,[301] I understand media by noticing and emphasising how technology violates the body in a non-obvious way, often through the pleasure drive. Stephen Barber sums up this idea in his book on Hijikata's Tokyo project of the dance of darkness called *butoh*: "Artaud had called for the human body to be urgently anatomised and reconstructed on an autopsy table; (…) true dance, in an organ-less, 'wrong-way-round" frenzy of gesture, resonant of the delirious dancehalls".[302] The surrealist urge to anatomize the human body and re-shape it as no-longer-human is being evoked here. Looking at the human body through the subtleties of the inner connectivity of communication technologies, there is a chance to perceive the common processes of the body, or its integral functions and features, as alien if not monstrous forms of excess, revealing the bestiality of organs and the sheer raging absurdity of the members' shapes. The randomness of its proportions is accompanied by an obscene activity of gland secretions, which Artaud insistently described in his poetry as one of the primal processes of abject, preceding any thought or meaning of organic functions. This dance of the body against itself and unsettling dance within the body transgresses the separation between organs and their functionality as a vital context for bodily performance. It also entails a discovery of a nonhuman disease animating the human body against human attempts to conceal that alien agency with the numbing concepts of health and wellbeing.

In the Schreber case, Freud analyzed a body landscape of psychosomatic illness, disturbed in its integrity, that consists of 'softening of the brain', hyperaesthesia and hypochondria. This is what Freud wrote about Schreber: "in association with coaesthetic disturbances, governed all his feelings and thoughts, he held himself to be dead and rotting, suffering from plague, imagined that all manner of dreadful manipulations were

[301] As expressed by Ray Kurzweil in: Max More and Natasha Vita-More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2013
[302] Stephen Barber, *Hijikata: Revolt of the Body*, Creation Books, London, 2006, p.29

being carried out on his body".[303] This rotting experience of the body was performed here through imaginary dreadful manipulations on the body transgressed into a fantasy plague within. Schreber would claim that his inner organs were shifting, changing places within the body, changing their shape or function as well disappearing and reappearing as completely new body parts. Those still avant-garde psychoanalytical manipulations clearly evoke the much more contemporary and recent manipulation of visual media of communications, e.g. 3D art of Jesse Kanda[304], involving cancerous, bloated and twisted deformities extending bodies into pirouetting digital post-organic landscapes.

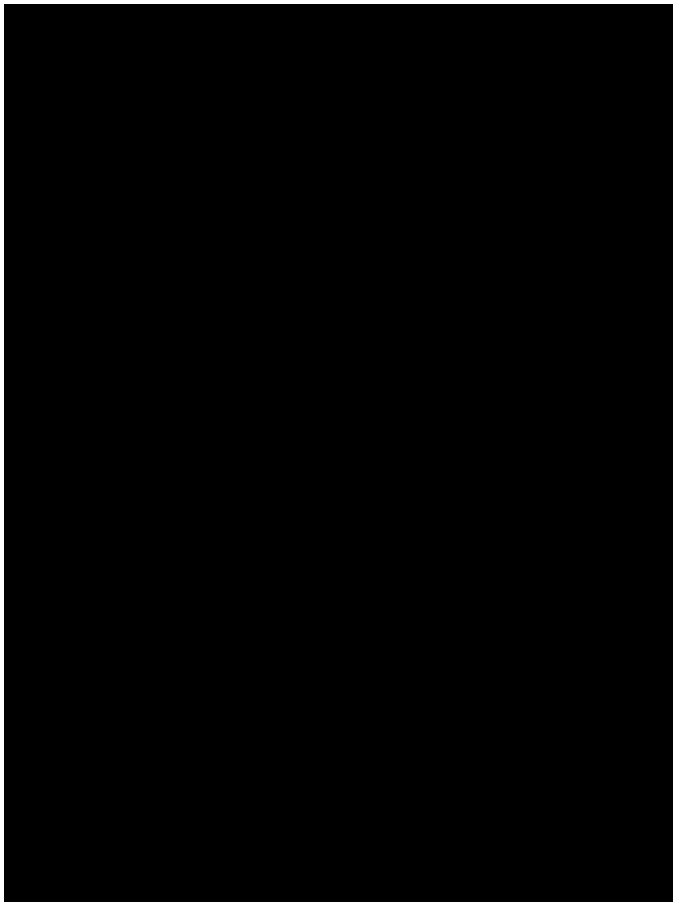

Fig. 13. Cover art for Arca's *Mutant* by Jesse Kanda, London 2015 (copyrighted image removed)

For the *Synthetic Organs* project, Crow mixed Schreber's voice, sourced from Internet archives, with my own live screams, hisses, cries, laughs, whispers and deranged lullabies, all literally directed to my artificial body parts during the act. The organs were loosely attached around my torso, so I could move them around changing their location, along with my changing expression towards them. In this way, *Synthetic Organs* explores visually the idea of body-therapy that links psychopathology with physiological deformities.

[303] Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case*, Penguin, London, 2002, p.6
[304] Jesse Kanda, artist website: http://www.jessekanda.com/

The recognition of the monstrous glands through touch and scream creates a new bodily identity for the performer as well as expressing an imaginary trauma. During the performance the synthetic organs, attached to the body of the performer, were discharged as miscarried brood, retarded bastard problem-children. I attempted to lure my decomposing body parts into some sort of complicity with my overall body dynamic, relating to them with aggressive rage and desperate cries of perverted cannibalism or with the semi-erotic tenderness of breastfeeding the parasite or maybe even feeding my sacrificed body to an alien ancestor. Taking all those possibilities into a consideration, the synthetic organs enacted also my aborted bastard children, scientifically curious excrements, disgusting food, infected genitals, overgrown glands swollen with discharge, beloved cancerous acceleration of the body. Moreover, they attracted me to an obsessive acts of fingering an excessive wound the size of my head, opening a crack in a wall of the plant solution container.

Through all this, *Synthetic Organs* was a performance of trans-human body entanglements. It explored the relations within the body though diverse material interventions, thus shifting the meaning of the body. In Karen Barad's terms,[305] performativity describes primary epistemological involvement in the world of phenomena. Language cannot function as a representational abstraction separated from the world, because it is always already a material re-arrangement *of* the world. The world as phenomena is a relational tangle that ontologically precedes the relata, such as the world of things or thoughts. The performativity of discourses is essential in creating those and any other distinctions within the world of phenomena. Categories of human or nonhuman are local and temporary possibilities, performed as intra-actions that are always secondary to the relational tangles of phenomena, which they emerge from. Intra-actions are actions producing local meanings by means of *cuts* within the wholeness of phenomena. Thus, performativity stands for the becoming of the human -- and of the nonhuman. According to Barad's metaphysics of performativity, the world or nature is a historically limited inner distinction within the phenomenal entanglement. This *halfway meeting* between the performativity of discourse and phenomenal matter, with its own histories, informs Barad's methodology of *agential realism*, which is employed by the acts of *being-doing* of performers' indeterminate body mutations in the Dungeons.

[305] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" in: *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Gender and Science: New Issues, Spring 2003, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003, pp. 801-831

Fig. 14. *Synthetic Organs* (2017) act by Piotr Bockowski. Photo credit: HTV

Following Barad's methodology, Alaimo reminds us again that agency is unrelated to human subjectivity and that performance of material agencies is a more valid way of making sense of the world than restrictive human mind-supremacist representations of bodies as 'things': "Dirt demonstrates all agency without agents, a foundational, perpetual becoming that happened without will or intention or delineation".[306] My curational project of Chronic Illness thus becomes a symptom of posthumanism that emphasises material interrelatedness of all nonhumans with humans as well as machines, all embedded in a "fleshy matrix of generativity".[307] At the same time, it is important to remember that the extraordinary ecological role of dirty microbes as decomposers does not lie in their direct usefulness as producers of new life forms. Writing about her 'new vitalism', Claire Colebrook even argues that the vitality of matter lies not in its creativity but rather in

[306] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2010, p.145
[307] Ibid., p.154

"inertia and passivity".[308] According to her, the intensity of life is embedded in the voiding of decomposition, which exposes matter beyond the forms imposed on it.

When developing my "Chronic Illness" performance events, I chose the aesthetic of bodily deformity and the degeneration of organic matter with an aim to expose those phenomena as particularly advantageous for the generative processes of life. The condition of a chronic illness defines the body of performers as unbalanced or disturbed, internally conflicted and triggered by unknown environmental conditions. The exploration of the imaginary state of an illness became my performance method, which was paramount to embracing the difficult complexity of living bodies.

To develop my practice of the intense ethico-aesthetics of mutation and contagion, I drew from social media a growing group of Chronic Illness participants. They took the risk in moving beyond the Internet and into my fungoid performance space, where they got involved in my immersive acts. There was no actual illness involved in the events but the presence of the participating bodies created a communication platform concerned with embodied ideas of disruptive media cultures. Direct involvement with fickle materialities of nonhuman bodies had been conceptualised at the Dungeons against the repressive ideas of "health", which were considered detached from the always uncertain material environments of life – as encapsulated by the theme of the Chronic Illness (of Mysterious Origin). The performance events at my squatted space tapped into the post-industrial fascination with sickly looks in the fashion and media worlds of recent years. This evokes the time when the wide spread of illnesses in the urban slums of factory workers and the newly emerging semi-nomadic impoverished population of metropolitan areas became a reality in many cities at the end of the 19th century.

The fungal infection of tuberculosis,[309] which was breeding in the dumpy overcrowded shelters for the poor, was mystified by the decadent high society, according to Susan Sontag. "Health becomes banal and vulgar,"[310] she wrote, as the mysterious deadly illness became associated with a state of higher feelings, since the sufferers of TB were supposed to obtain perceptive faculties much greater than the healthy. The paranoid contingency of TB sought sophistication in the aesthetics of decomposition that was consuming the human body. 'Corruption' or 'corrosion' was the old English meaning of the

[308] See Claire Colebrook, "On Not Becoming Man: The Materialist Politics of Unactualised Potential" in: Stacy Alaimo & Susan Hekman (edit), *Material Feminisms*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008

[309] TB in short

[310] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1977, p.26

word 'consumption',[311] as opposed to today's notion of 'consumption' in consumerist society. The "disintegration, febrilization, dematerialization"[312] of TB stood for the liquefaction of the body and was related to body liquids of phlegm, mucus, sputum and blood. Many invasive lubrications of that "wet disease, a disease of humid and dank cities"[313] gave it a perversely moist erotic allure. Romantic literature mystified TB as the disease of exquisite passion, apparently originating in the repression of desire[314] as myco-microbes were infecting the human bodies disconnected from their primal drives. The repression of the human's "original polymorphous perversity", according to Freud, caused an anxious proliferation of 'non-normative' sexual differences. For Sontag, the illness was "the body's treachery"[315] and in the particular case of TB the prime awakening of the human body was driven via nonhuman natures. The art of the industrial revolution portrayed somnolent belles of tubercular youth and sexy figures of infected courtesans, their attractiveness intensified by the hosting of invasive microbial entities. The industrial decadents imagined TB "to be an aphrodisiac and to confer extraordinary powers of seduction"[316] at the same time when the gushes of extra energy were in fact the self-destructive signs of internal decomposition. Already then, in the wake of the global industry, the visual transformation of the human body by a fungal infection became the obsessively ambivalent image of the new technology.

Fungoid dwelling in dark humidity

The space of the Chronic Illness acts is officially empty, while in reality being occupied by anonymous dwellers. The squatting of The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan re-introduces bodily porousness to the human-designed compartmentalization of London city space, challenging its controlled shapes with the flood of urban migrants taking over the decomposing architecture. As such, The Dungeons form an underbelly of an abandoned building in Holloway and are occupied by a group of Eastern-European city nomads. The space has no identified inhabitant, only featuring the vague entity of 'unknown occupiers' (which is the official term used to describe squatters in London). As fungoids, the squatters have no visible identity. Anonymous dwellers of the ruins come performers of fungi media function as decomposing entities of the urban tissue. Alaimo writes that decay "bacteria

[311] Ibid., p.10
[312] Ibid., p.13
[313] Ibid., p.15
[314] Ibid., p.22
[315] Ibid., p.40
[316] Ibid., p.13

build cities within" the human corpses they decompose. Inside the empty shells of urban planning, squatters build dirty slums out of trash, nesting some spores of monstrosity that can come across as 'subhuman' or even as an 'illness of society' to the civil authorities. The squatted 'savage' sewage of The Dungeons channels many narrations around urban natures, buried under the city's infrastructure. It is also a place where I live, read and write my fungi media research, typing it on my laptop here and now.

When I first entered the abandoned building in Holloway at the beginning of 2015, I discovered that its basement had been used for the farming of some exotic plants, fed with electric light and microbial solutions, prior to the arrival of my squatters group. Fungi were eating scattered floral tissue in the darkness. Since then, the humidity of the space has been lubricating the surfaces of the Dungeons, rendering them bioactive. The porous old bricks sweat with goo that feeds the diversity of slime moulds, sometimes actually creating puddles of life or even floods in the squat space. Underground urban floods can be associated with the lost rivers of London that became covered with city infrastructures during the process of 19th-century industrialization.[317] The Dungeons are located in the area of the river sources of the Hackney Brook, which used to cross from Holloway through North Hackney to the river Lea in Wick. The river still exists hidden under the city, apparently merged with the labyrinths of sewage piping. The disappearance of the Hackney Brook was part of the mid-19th century industrial extension of the terribly polluted river Thames into hundreds of miles of the sewage piping system that, at the time, defined London as the biggest metropolitan area on the planet. Even before the arrival of the London Underground and its grandiose event of excavating *tube* networks under the ground of London, the monstrous city had been defined by its water pipes system.[318] The sewage was invented as a cleansing infrastructure for the many diseased city rivers that, during the Industrial Revolution, turned into waterways of lethal epidemics. Canalisation was built to filter human waste and channel it towards the industrial slums of east London. I suspect that the nanotubes of mycelium merged almost immediately with this large-tube infrastructure of heavy industry.

At the very end of 2016 the Dungeons witnessed the most severe flooding from the pipes under Holloway Road. The water rose over the knees of the performers, touching our waists. Engaging with this disastrous climate change of the space, I imaged the situation

[317] Nicholas Barton, *The Lost Rivers of London,* Historical Publications, London, 1992
[318] *The London Encyclopaedia*, edited by Ben Weinreb & Christopher Hibert, MacMillan, London, 1983, p.924

as a re-emergence of the repressed river source of the Hackney Brook that was forced into mergence with the Victorian sewage, which ended up cracking after over a century and a half. At the beginning of 2017 I directed *Chronic Illness 8*[319] as an ablution ceremony in the sewage waters. Participants were entering the dark space of dirty liquidity and moved on mechanical platforms over the surface of the water with only scarce traces of light glistening and amorphous piles of trash floating in between the concrete columns. Before entering the Dungeons, the participants had their limbs washed by the performers in a human-size water tank containing slime. All were descending down into a canalization rite of passage through the bio-active liquid, submerging into its microclimate and carried by platforms moving through the surface of the dark water. The liquidity of the human bodies of the performers and participants became defined by the immersion in the liquid entities of microbes. On the other side of the dark water expanse the platform was delivering participants to a small island of concrete elevation with a tent made out of plant materials. The performance act involved a sensory deprivation of the participants in the dark depths of the Dungeons, beyond a separation of vegetative life forms. The participants were involved in a variety of tactile situations in the darkness – starting with descending down a muddy ladder, through sliding on a moist surface of the moving platforms over the water, pushing against concrete pillars and sensing floating entities all the way into the depths of the space to find warm bodies of the performers lurking in the murk. Later I pumped out the dark water back onto the Holloway Road. My curation of *Chronic Illness 8*[320] introduced a two-year long period of experiments with immersive theatre animated around the movement of dark water as the medium of fungal life in the Dungeons [Fig. 15.].

[319] http://neofung.tumblr.com/ablution

[320] Documentation of *Chronic Illness 8* : http://neofung.tumblr.com/ablution

Fig. 15. *Ablution* directed by Piotr Bockowski & Alex Avery during severe flooding of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan in 2017. Photo credit: Weronika Halwa

The creation of London as the world's largest urban complex after the industrial revolution was carried out by means of the repression of the ground waters, which eventually leaked into the Dungeons through the micro-pores of old bricks. This technological repression, revealed by the Dungeons, presents yet another example supporting the hypothesis that civilization is being built on geological trauma, understood as the physical suppression of the previous biological infrastructures. The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru),[321] which was active at the University of Warwick in the 1990s, described the phenomenon of 'geotrauma', a term which I have adopted here to help me think about the grounding condition of The Dungeons. The term describes the catastrophes separating the material potencies of the biosphere's body. It relates to the hypothetical trauma of the ancient

[321] See The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), *Writings 1997-2003*, Urbanomics, Falmouth, 2019

microbe ancestry. I'm particularly interested in using the categories of trauma and chronic illness to map my performance space of The Dungeons with the deep understanding and accentuation of the space being an alive entity, consisting of organic networks that performers use to communicate. Those fungoid networks dwell in dark humidity under the ground.

Commenting on the symbiogenesis theory of Lynn Margulis, Nick Land[322] focuses on the traumatic experience of bacteria in the early stages of the development of life on the planet. According to the scenario offered by him, the nucleus of an organised cell, a cell that would later form a prototype unit of multicellular organisms of plants and animals, was created as a result of the mergence of bacteria in reaction to the overfilling of the atmosphere with oxygen excretion. The nucleus cell structure was apparently a form that adapted to oxygen, surviving the extermination of the unknown species of primal bacteria after their exposure to the emerging air atmosphere.

Scientific accuracy is less relevant in Land's traumatic scenario: what is more important is his usage of this story as a reference point for a geo-mythological origin of advanced life. The speculative event of the extermination of primal bacteria serves in Land's narration as a figure of the traumatic experience of microbes that the development of life on Earth originates from. He describes life in environmentally-sensitive terms, as a series of traumatic disorders and their chronic conditions. Humans, separated from the prehistoric microbes with the whole time-distance of the evolution of life on earth, can re-connect with the primal life via media technologies. In that context, media apparatuses can be understood as therapeutic tools for organised life. The opening up of humans to communication with microbes, via trans-human technologies of fungi media, unfolds the layers of the repressed intensities of microbes stratified in the earth's sediments. The performative space of The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan can therefore be seen as an attempt to explore the difficult origin of life through media.

According to Land's analysis of 'cosmic repression', our biosphere contains the energy of the Sun internalized inside the planet through the pre-historic layerings of dead bio-matter. Robin MacKay follows Land's narrative, pointing out that "the geologists had already established that the entire surface of the earth and everything that crawls upon it is a living fossil record, a memory bank rigorously laid down over unimaginable aeons and sealed

[322] Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena*, Urbanomic, Falmouth, 2011, p.458

against introspection; churned and reprocessed through its own material".[323] This perspective envisions the suppression of the molten outer surface of the Earth into its burning iron core as the crucial process in the development of our planet's biosphere. Some proto-life particles had allegedly been trapped deep underground. As CCRU researchers McKay and Ray Brassier put it, "What howls for release in eukaryotic cells, carbon molecules, nerve ganglia, and silicon chips, are the thermic waves and currents, deranged particles, ionic strippings and gluttings, that populate the planet's seething core".[324] In the CCRU narration of geo-trauma, the experience of repression of the prehistoric microbes formed human bodies by promoting evolutionary emphasis on oxygen dependency. According to the natural philosophy of CCRU, all cultures of human civilisation in some way appear as encrypted messages of the underground layers of the Earth sent to outer space. From this perspective, an individual biological organism seems as old as the biosphere. The biological is defined by McKay and Brassier as a map of the geological time. According to their speculation, current changes to our climate connect humans to the prior evolutionary stages of the microbial forms of life. Human cultures are recognised as compulsive-repetitive symptoms of geotrauma. Those symptoms are being triggered by the conflicted relation to the energy sources of biology, developed by the first microbes.

Philosophical-fictional narratives of the prehistoric catastrophes of proto-life on Earth developed by authors such as Land, McKay and Brassier present the biosphere as enacting the dynamics of planetary trauma. In such narratives, the origin of life on Earth got repressed to the very core of the planet, called *C'htell*, "and every living individual that ever existed is a playback copy, drawn from the recording vaults, trapped in a refrain that sings the glory of Cthell".[325] In his account of Cthell, MacKay presents the individuality of humans as secondary to the microbial entity. Similarly, in my curation of the events in the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, I always intend to position the human performers as secondary to the microbial entities that live there and constitute the bio active space itself. The space serves for me as a laboratory environment to probe the aforementioned geotraumatics with mycelial strategies of performative interventions, infiltrations and infections. I observe the performers as embodying a simulation of a collective fungal entity, embedded in the underworld of the Dungeons, in their acts. According to CCRU thinkers,

[323] Robin MacKay, "Brief History of Geotrauma", in *Leper Creativity*, punctum books, New York, 2012, p.16
[324] Ibid., p.40
[325] Ibid., p.19

the life of humans and most other organisms encapsulate the state of the chronic illness of primal microbes.

The Chronic Illness performance nights provide an opportunity for the dispersed bodies of Internet users to encounter the mysterious mould and project the patterns of their media behaviour onto that alien fungoid entity. Once again, the performing bodies become different mutations, morphed with the poetics of decay liquidity. Recalling, after Ben Woodard, the void energetics of liquid dust and the exuberance of cavities, I see the Dungeons as a space for the media holes of performance entities instead of the wholes of body identities. This dark becoming of what Woodard terms *necrotic vitalism* recognizes "thought as a gaseous rot".[326] He is translating human identities, based on thought, into an ontology of decay. The creeping dynamic of rot folds objective definitions of life and negates the existence of individual species as it undermines distinctions between clear and discrete identities of bio-forms. Woodward exposes rot as the essential circumstance of life and reveals its mediatic character. "Life itself under certain circumstances becomes articulated as a medium",[327] argue Kember and Zylinska. As a consequence of this articulation, technology introduces certain openings into the integrity of human identities.

The re-making of the self through the interfaces of communication networks also means becoming multiple -- not merely multiple selves but rather erasures of selves. In this sense, the self of a mediated body becomes a network of the 'lacks of selves', a punctured structure of anti-identities visualised by a dynamic pattern of holes. "The halo of individuation becomes irreparably poxed. Since wholeness itself is degenerate, since anything as a thing is merely a hole complex, pre-perforated".[328] The holes mark the wounds of the patients of facial transplant surgery analysed by Kember and Zylinska, opening their bodies to the technologies involved in the re-working of bodily identity. The holes also represent the fragmentary simulations of selves and introduce discontinuities into the networked self. The dynamics of holes encapsulates the process of mediating the body. Media obsession with re-uploading the imagery of self-representation can be recognised as a symptom of the 'body dismorphic disorder', as long as "there is always a

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[326] Ben Woodard, "The Untimely (and Unshapely) Decomposition of Onto-Epistemological Solidity: Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* as Metaphysics", in *Leper Creativity*, punctum books, New York, 2012, p.219
[327] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. xiii
[328] Ben Woodard, "The Untimely (and Unshapely) Decomposition of Onto-Epistemological Solidity: Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* as Metaphysics", in *Leper Creativity*, punctum books, New York, 2012, p.214

feature of the face or the body that requires “work” ”.[329] This emptying out of the self and the opening to the technological processes of media becoming can also offer a chance of a new relationality, considered after Rosi Braidotti to involve bounding with radical otherness, understood as “life’s destructive force: all life is a process of breaking down, she [Braidotti] repeats”.[330] The post-Internet space of the Dungeons offers a unique platform to perform the fractured entities of fungi media bodies.

Due to the almost complete lack of ventilation and the perforation of walls with micro-holes oozing thick liquids, the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan retain the humid density of a quasi-tropical climate, which is emphasized by the tropical-like wetness and the still air in the space. “Now cyberpositive diseases are spreading strange tropics to the metropolis”,[331] argue Sadie Plant and Nick Land when commenting on the new technological nature, which is changing the high-tech cities. They add that “computer viruses melt icebergs of data down the screens, burning through the bacterial frost”.[332] Here, post-technological geo-atmospheric effects develop within the concrete chambers under Holloway, with a ‘necrovital’ aim to elude the techno-control over life through opening urban-tropical environs of the squatted sewage. As Plant speculates, “strategy tends to come apart in tropics. Even traditional counter-tactics of surveillance and interrogation are becoming obsolete”.[333] The undoing of the mass-produced techno-designs of life invites new mediations of dispersed corporealities. The urban tropics of my sewage inspire the mutant aesthetics of body performance.

The Dungeons embody an industrial-tropical thicket in the clime of its urban geology, pursuing the theatre of contamination and the fetishism of mysterious infections. Performers engage here with ‘the decomposed life’ of communication technologies through phenomena such as the half-life of detritus or the replication of dusty degraded bio-mass. In order to embrace the architectural design of the sewage I orchestrated Chronic Illness 9 as a public urination fetish ritual. The bodies of the performers and participants were locked in the Dungeons for hours, surrounded by flowing sewage water distributed around them by two industrial pipes. My regulative curatorial concept for the plethora of acts, which happened that night, was to stimulate physiologically

[329] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, p.138
[330] Ibid., p.148
[331] Sadie Plant and Nick Land, “Cyberpositive”*, in: Unnatural – techno theory for contaminated culture*, Underground, London, 1994, p.5
[332] Ibid., p.8
[333] Ibid., p.7

ritualised urine-passing behaviour of the participants and performers and orchestrate other acts around that. Everybody was drinking large amounts of green tea in the presence of several shrines dedicated to slime moulds. Enclosed in the dark liquid-mediating body of architecture, humans were repeating the process of channelling liquids through their own bodies. The performance became essentially a methodical dissolution of the solid definitions of human bodies within fluid connections of the fungal life environment.

My mutant performance events took over a space of the submerged architecture of decay, investigating on urban sewage as a form of human dwelling in crisis. The North London suburbs turn into a monstrous fungus formation in the novel 'The Drowned World" by J.G. Ballard, which imagines a post-technological transformation of the planet through the awakening of the prehistory of microbial life within human bodies. Ballard describes the landscapes of ancient organisms that overtake the high-tech metropolis of the past and at the same time appear as a reflection of the 'psychic landscapes' of the humans who witness the transformation, which is also an embodiment of "an ancient memory millions of years old".[334] As the planet witnesses the violent theatre of human technology-induced climate change into an extreme tropical environment, humans witness the mass devolution of the life forms and experience a form of evolutionary déjà vu. "Here we are re-assimilating our biological past",[335] they conclude, as they tap into a recapitulation of their own evolutionary stages via mind-states recalling the deep memories of the primal life forms, imprinted in their bodies. There is a barrier of fungal bio-mass forming around the submerged London, which embodies hidden neuronic complexes of a London inhabitant. Ballard indulges in the notion of returning to 'the primeval swamp'[336] not only through the destruction of the urban landscape by natural cataclysm but also by discovering its alive existence buried within human bodies. "Just as psychoanalysis reconstructs the original traumatic situation in order to release the repressed material, so we are now being plunged back into the archaeopsychic past, uncovering the ancient taboos and drives that have been dormant for epochs",[337] writes Ballard. In his narrative, human individuality is decomposed by return to the 'dark ocean' that is the source of its life and its graveyard. Human transience mediates the extreme power sources of microbes entangled with technology-assisted devolution of the biosphere. In this perspective, explored in my

[334] J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World*, Fourth Estate, London, 2012, p.74
[335] Ibid., p.91
[336] J.G. Ballard, "Interview", in: J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World*, Fourth Estate, London, 2012, p.4
[337] Ibid., p.4

research, media are alive material processes that destroy the integrity of human identities together with illusions of natural harmony and return to haunt the human mind as a constant threat of catastrophic climate change or other natural disaster. In the Ballardian imagination technologies stand for the deep involvement of humans with nature, which is understood as an undetermined performance of dark vitalism.

Urban infrastructures of human dwelling reveal humans' embedding in the obscure life of decomposition when they connect, merge and overwrite the necropolis of catacombs. This archetype of human civilisation's architecture ever since the tombs of the ancients becomes reworked in Ballard's narratives into the construction of modernist tower blocks. Connected as they are via electric cables, the tower blocks transform through various designs into a post-modern IT protocol embodied by intelligent architecture, which for Ballard also reveals the psyche of contemporary humans. The datacombs of high-tech global civilization redefine the human eroticism into deadly trans-human fetishism, as they replace the human object of desire with a technological one and render reproduction obsolete. Ballard defines techno-sex imagination within urban architecture through apparatuses of perverted intimacy[338] or imaginary perversions**,** asking "an interesting question – in what way is intercourse per vagina more stimulating than with this ashtray, say, or with the angle between two walls? Sex is now a conceptual act".[339] Human desires are meshed with their technological infrastructures in the form of necro-techno-pornography, as desires become more intensely embodied by the fetishes of apparatuses' cruelty. Car design eroticises the skeleton mutilated in a crash on a flyover junction. Modernist concrete tower blocks of council flats and luxurious real estates implode reality into a hyperbole of the collective nervous system. An intersection of London opens as a living flesh of people who live in the futuristic suburbs of the city, which means that people inhabiting the urban environment are defined by it on the physiological level.

Ballard pictures the human body as part of the city infrastructures, which collapsed into its own sewage. Technology becomes an acceleration of the human characteristics into a surreal overcoming of humanity. The integrity of the human body disperses into an abstraction of technological environments. "The line between inner and outer landscapes is breaking down. Earthquakes can result from seismic upheavals within the human mind.

[338] See J.G. Ballard, *Atrocity Exhibition*, Re: Search, San Francisco, 1990
[339] Ibid., p.61

The whole random universe of the industrial age is breaking down into cryptic fragments",[340] Burroughs comments on Ballard. Moreover, Ben Woodward points out that Ballardian visions of urban civilization decay revive the deep-time past of primordial life on the planet.[341] At the same time, the faculties of the human bodies of Ballard's characters become accelerated and separated by technological fetishisms that replace them.

In McLuhan's biotechnological imagination, media are understood as extended forms of the functions of the human body. Thus, architecture extends the heating system of the organism in the same way that clothes extend the skin. Interestingly, historically clothes production involved the appropriation of plant or animal dead tissue. Since the introduction of industrial wear for the human body, clothes have been made out of chemicals produced with the oil fuel that comes from prehistoric microbes. Cars, in turn, are containers for a portable human body. They encapsulate reality into an internalised form of a control panel, which can relate to the womb or even be sexually charged by a close fit of their interior ergonomics or the bio-design of seats. As vehicles, cars also extend our legs in the narration of McLuhan, as they replace their functions with amplified motor motion. The new environment therefore defines a new body. The core idea of McLuhan is that the human nervous system extends into the environment of electric media. Communication networks perform human cognitive processes and create a new experience of reality by changing the proportions between senses involved in perception, reshaping the physiology of the brain and impacting on all other body infrastructures, thus affecting the direction of human becoming. From the perspective of McLuhan, this transformation can be described as a techno-evolution of the human species. The processes of the medial extensions of human bodies define their global expansion by stretching and dispersion at first, but at the same time they incorporate the planet into the human body. Employing McLuhan's concept of extensions,[342] Ballard also connects technology with the primal formations of life that reveal themselves to be animated by human technology and that eventually undo human bodies in visions of post-technological devolution. Mediated human bodies act as bio-cells that eat themselves after the death of their organism, starting the process of rot.

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[340] William Burroughs, Preface to *Atrocity Exhibition*, Re: Search, San Francisco, 1990, p.3
[341] Ben Woodwards, "Disinternment Loops", in: *Cyclopes Journal*, No.2, Amsterdam, 2017, https://www.cyclopsjournal.net/, p.145
[342] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 2001

Fig. 16. *Chronic Spill*[343] directed by Piotr Bockowski, Alex Avery, Bjork Grue Lidin & Alexander Dodge Huber during severe flooding of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan in 2017. The body discharge of the performers mixed with the humidity of the space and nourished the microbial life on the surfaces. Photo credit: Piotr Bockowski

Intelligible devolution

The notion of mutant performance finds affinities with CCRU's somewhat bizarre geo-speculations. In the CCRU interview with Professor D.C. Barker sound is used as an interrogation tool of the Earth's deep time. Barker recommends to "fast forward seismology and (…) hear the earth scream".[344] The traumatic scream of geology informs the theory of planetary dynamics based on repressed energy in the pre-history of life on Earth, accumulated within the molten magma, which is hidden underneath the surface crust, hosting bio-bodies. According to Barker, the exploration of that deep context for the evolution of life can be done by means of "convergent waves, without subordination to

[343] Documentation of *Chronic Spill:* http://neofung.tumblr.com/spill
[344] Nick Land, 'Barker Speaks: The CCRU Interview with Professor D.C. Barker' in *Fanged Noumena*, Urbanomic, Falmouth, 2011, p.499

chronology, history, or linear causation. They proceed by infolding, involution, or implex",[345] Infolding and involution as directionalities for mediatising life can be recognised as forms of the technological implosion of the human body in the process of the decomposition of fungi media. The body has seemingly reached the limits of its expansion with the acceleration of global economy that threatens humankind with the possibility of extinction as an effect. Soon expected folding of technology, due to energy exhaustion or shortage of material resources, offers scenarios of devolution as a possible solution to the crisis of techno-evolution.

The key methodological idea here seems to be the understanding of communication technologies through obscure and negative (in the sense of undoing the body) material processes of decomposition. This approach renders matter intelligible, not in an essentialist way but rather in relation to its behaviour and functional integration. As Reza Negarestani proposed in his lecture for *Symposium: Speculations on Anonymous Materials* in Kassel,[346] human and nonhuman thoughts, and the selves defined by those thoughts, are materials that become apparent only through manipulation or amplification. Negarestani's behaviour principle recognises the intelligence of material systems through their behaviour. All material processes recognised in terms of behaviour can be considered intelligent, a conclusion which transforms all materiality into a living problem. Negarestani proposes the heuristics of approaching problems by means of an intervention of transferring the behaviour of a material form onto a different material form, in order to understand life beyond the objectification of a given substance. I am allowing myself an analogous manoeuvre in my project of fungi media, as I recognise the intelligence aspects of communication technologies by transferring them onto the behaviour of fungi, thus perceiving media as a form of life and life as a form of media. This method of transferring behaviour of life forms between different levels of complexity in living environments is also the key strategy for constructing narratives in Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*.

One of the forms of material behaviour analysed by Negarestani is the pore pressure of the 'hole complex',[347] which defines a plane of performative dimension of a space. It can be related to the performance acts under the Hollow Way, alongside the variety of microbial activities as well as flooding of the Dungeons [Fig. 16.]. In this theoretical perspective, the cavities of the Dungeons, with their moisturising activity of ground water

[345] Nick Land, interview with D.C. Baker, *Barker Speaks: The CCRU Interview with Professor D.C. Barker* in *Fanged Noumena*, Urbanomic, Falmouth, 2011, p.503
[346] Reza Negarestani, *Symposium: Speculations on Anonymous Materials*, Fridericanium, Kassel 18.01.2014 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg0lMebGt9I
[347] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008, p.48

micro-leaks and punctured piping, already offer an intelligible narration. They formulate the "hidden writing"[348] of plot holes. In contrast to the memory synthesis of linear reasoning that is timeline-based, the plot holes of memory gaps function beyond chronological progression. "Memory holes introduce gaps, discontinuations tunnels and porous spaces into the chronological sphere of memory, thus making it more prone to time-lapses, abrupt schizophrenic katabases, personality-pulverising blackouts",[349] offers Negarestani. The space of the Dungeons embodies the plot holes of my narration about fungi media, evoking the dispersion of personal identities of the performers.

Digging into the layers of dirt in the Dungeons, I welcome the dark poetics of exhumation as a practice of understanding life via its obscure materialities - "ungrounding of exhumation, breaking surfaces, distorting topologics of the whole, transforming the solidity of meaning into mushy mess, uncovering semi-life that is not determined by life forms that ferment".[350] Those messy investigations and explorations further deteriorate the social status quo of aesthetic and ethical values, symbolic systems of cultures and eventually also the continuity of linguistic expression. At the same time, the dynamics of hole complexities propose some new forms of material arrangement, which Negarestani describes as follows: "The abrupt escalation in pore triggers further and radical deformation of the solid matrix, dilatation and contraction of pores (…), progressive ungrounding of solidus, regional pore collapse and finally the composition of new worm-ridden spaces or zones of emergence".[351] The new zones and spaces in the Dungeons inevitably exhale from rot.

Strategically, The Institution of Rot[352] art space has assisted with the curation of the Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin from the very beginning. This obscure Islington performance space originated from the occupation of a derelict tenancy in Holloway between 1992-2009, establishing itself in parallel to the Internet. Yet this dwelling of decay explored a very different idea of archives to that of computer databases. It was overgrown by plants, fungi and microbial colonies recording the performative actions through accompanying decomposition processes. "In history as in nature, the rotten is the laboratory of life",[353] says the motto of The Institution of Rot that hosted live art explored as practice of decomposition. Richard Crow, who runs the space, brought along his

[348] Ibid., p.60
[349] Ibid., p.68
[350] Ibid., p.59
[351] Ibid., p.59
[352] Art space run by Richard Crow
[353] Karl Marx quoted after the Institution of Rot, https://www.youtube.com/user/nerval45/about

expertise of almost two decades of living in the decaying architecture. His strategy was to constantly re-enact the subversive potential of rotten space with persistent conceptual situations. He also became the prime infector of The Institution of Rot building. The rotten dust of the decayed dwelling became the key creative element for Crow. Within this domain of contagions and pollutants, the Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin is a call out to the creative possibilities of dirt, dust and infectious sporulation, which Negarestani interrogates in their ability to mediate between drastically varied life formations. “Dust particles originate from dark carriers never trodden before, different territories (fields of narration) and domains of invisible hazards”.[354] They form complexities which are hard to analyse but which are also prone to rapid hybridisations and mutations.

[354] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with anonymous materials*, re.press, Melbourne, 2008, p.88

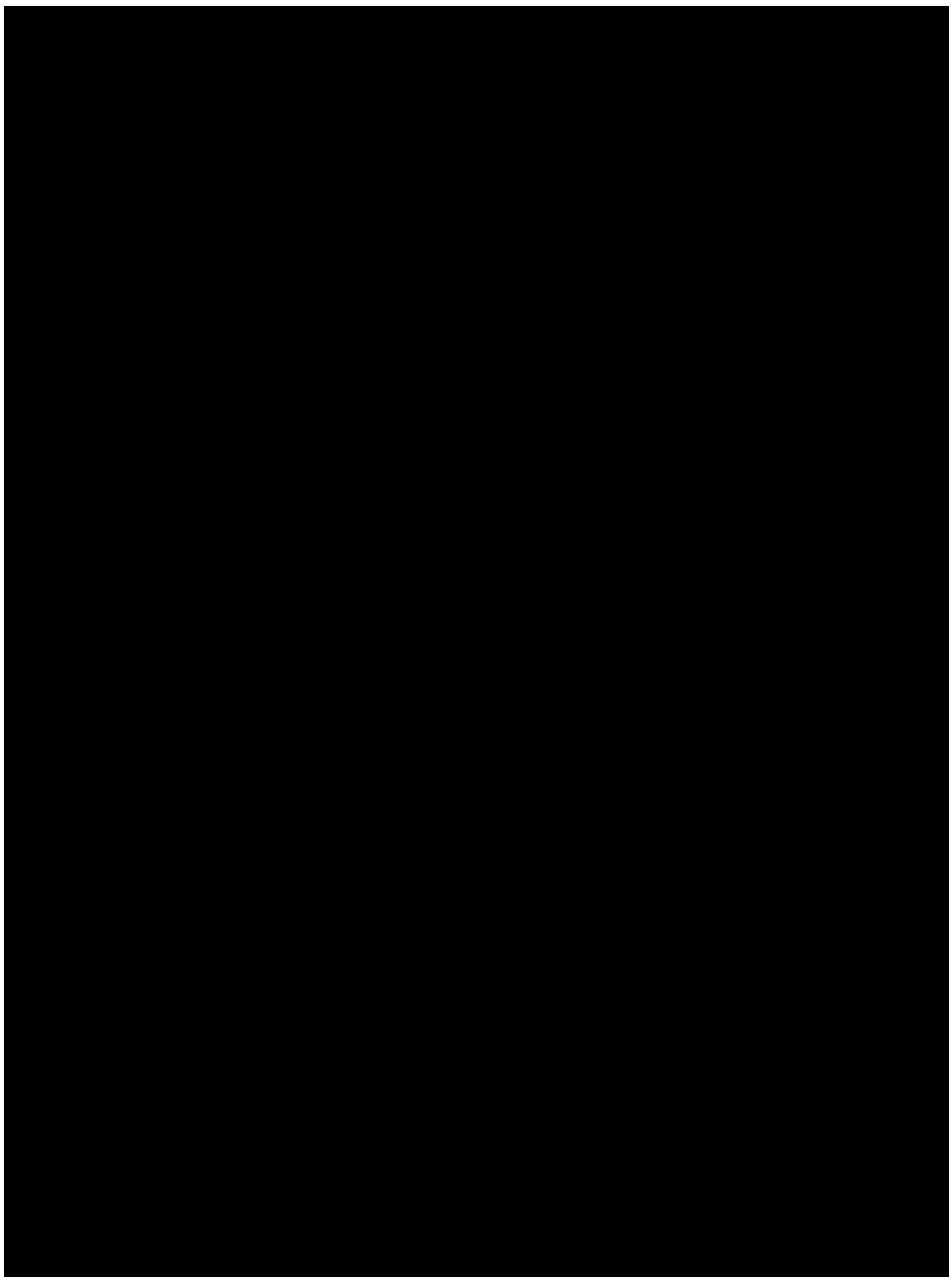

Fig. 17. Visual presentation of the space of the Institution of Rot in *TimeOut London* in 1994. Photo credit: The Institution of Rot (copyrighted image removed)

The Institution of Rot brought an ethos of a rotten laboratory into the Dungeons, with its systematic investigation and dissection of decomposing anonymous materials, as well as focus on anomalies of life, which often bear the stigma of illness. For Crow “the decaying entity becomes a laboratory slab upon which base-necrophilia (where death is infinitely deferred but progressively approached) is germinated”.[355] Rot surprises us with new life given to materials that often hadn’t even been recognised as alive before. This life is as dangerous as it is unsettlingly vigorous, because “it spawns more and more measures, micro scales, metronic cells, patches of solid, labyrinthine nexuses of dimensions, and

[355] Ibid., p.185

wasteful dumps of scales".[356] Decay creates a certain continuity in disintegration, as it collapses compositions, blurs contrast between void and solid, breeds mushy disgusting softness, introduces anonymous ontology that eludes categorisation and sways towards the formlessness of nature which precedes ontology. These and other forms of trans-organic disturbance are meant to dwell within the dusty Dungeons.

Dust offers a multiplicity and a conflicted diversity of life. It thus embodies a marvellous creativity, although it remains bonded to the emergence of plagues and diseased blasphemies. Dust feeds on the decomposition of human bodies (it often consists of dry skin), which many cultural systems repress by guarding and cursing the disposal grounds of their ancestor corpses. Nevertheless "flesh is already a reeking catacomb of dust-compositions, drenched by deluges. It implies that dust carves niches into this catacomb into which to deposit all the bacterial data it has scavenged from wet milieus, xeno-chemical planes, interstellar dimensions and oceanic wastelands (…) flesh is a heap of data-pollution".[357] Nagerastani invites us to see our bodies as composed of dust specks mediating untold material histories of life and the universe. What is offered here is an engagement in the playful experimentation with rot and an ambivalence of biological death, as: "Flesh is a dust necropolis, which is constantly refreshed by wetness, a necropolis full of cursed cemeteries, vaults of anonymous materials from the outside crypts and restless things".[358] The cryptic exhaust of crypts contains energetic intensities of dust, which carries myriads of bacterial and fungal entities. Those fungoids penetrate the bodies of mutant performers at the Dungeons, decomposing them into waves of Chronic Illness.

Negarestani notices that one ounce of dust contains more bacteria than there are people on the planet. Noticing this, he also points out that an invisible microbial universe infiltrates human bodies, unknowingly transforming them into trans-humans, simply with "a swarm particle creeping off the radar screen; a speck of dust you never know whether you have inhaled or not".[359] Moreover, the opening of the porous tissue of fungi, and the releasing of spores mediated by dust, are described by Negarestani as an exhumation of ancient microbe data. The dust-mediated sporulation can be recognised as a bacterial relic from the prehistory of life. Thus, our human bodies seem to be containers for the sedimentation of the biosphere's pastime. All of that accelerates the creative modes of life's perpetuation

[356] Ibid., p.186
[357] Ibid., p.94
[358] Ibid., p.94
[359] Ibid., p.94

"for decay cannot be captured as either formation or destruction." [360] Decay is not a definite death precisely because it perpetuates itself "in order to indefinitely postpone death and absolute disappearance. In decay, the being survives by blurring into other beings, without losing all its ontological registers. In no way does decay wipe out or terminate; on the contrary it keeps alive".[361] This is also the ambivalence of the Chronic Illness' invasive cycles, which disturb the integrity of human bodies, but at the same time systematically open them up to the multiplicities of nonhuman life. Excessive proliferation of scales and forms that accompanies the processes of rotten decay and infectious illness meshes up the characteristics of the species, confuses taxonomies and transgresses the differences between individual organism, eventually levelling all life forms. "[C]orpses which had been of the same species when living might differ in species from one another when corrupted".[362] At the same time rot stimulates the sickly excessiveness of microbial mutation enacted by the Chronic Illness performers.

In the 'Directions for Decomposition' section of his *A Short History of Decay* E.M. Cioran proclaims that "everything that breaths feeds on the unverifiable".[363] The only certain thing is death. Life tries to win time by eluding certainty with the fruitful improbability of desire, or rot. In *Vibrant Matter* Jane Bennett begins from a similar conviction that the energy of life always escapes human ideas of certainty as expressed in knowledge-making that wants to control matter. Nevertheless she accentuates that humans share vitality with other forms of matter, to that extent that humans can be "also nonhuman".[364] The many intimate connections of humans with nonhuman creatures mingle all material forms within networks of shared vitality, "vitality that persists even in trash".[365] There is no dead matter in Bennett's point of view as she describes even the most degraded forms as inherently creative, possessing what she calls "thing-power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle".[366] Rethinking the differences between materialities more horizontally by venturing into a gutter of civilization can lead to encounters with forms of debris that are irreducible to culture. This debris is nevertheless what the mutant performers enact during the Chronic Illness events by re-embodying bodily manipulations from online spaces. In this way, they enact a post-Internet corporeality in the physical space of the Dungeons.

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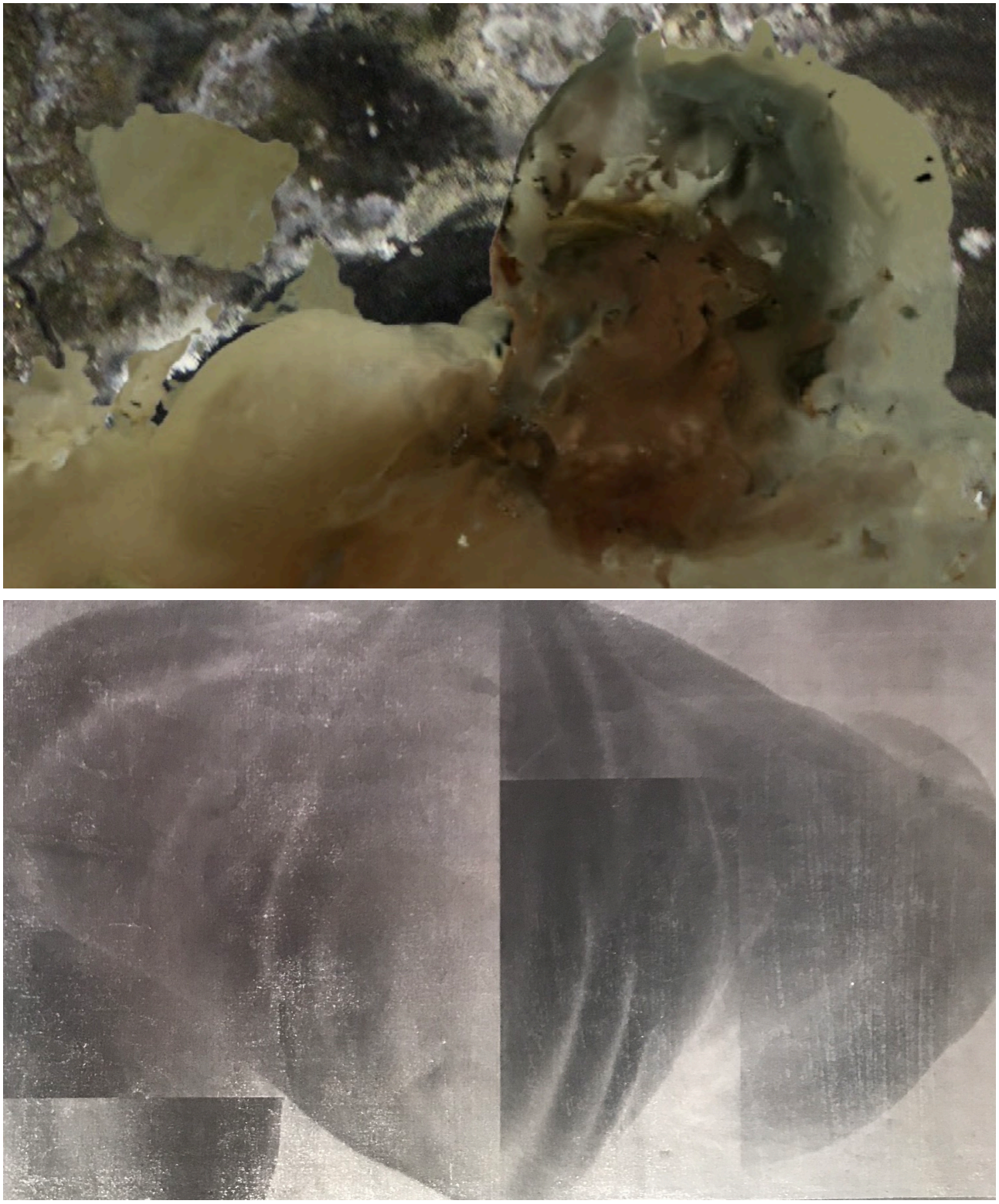
[360] Ibid., p.182
[361] Ibid., p.182
[362] Ibid., p.184
[363] E.M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975, p.10
[364] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* Duke University Press, Durham, 2010, p.4
[365] Ibid., p.6
[366] Ibid., p.6

In the context of self-organised squatting networks, I situate my Chronic Illness biomedia events as enacting an anti-ideological micropolitics of communal living with decomposing nonhuman life. Jean-François Lyotard's criticism of art, as presented in his essay "Critical Function", presents a decompositional approach to social organisation. Pointing to the fatal limitation of all political ideologies, Lyotard offers the ultimate form of open-ended politics. He proclaims, "what is revolutionary is precisely to hope for nothing".[367] The sheer formal action of the dismantling of ideologies promises much more in its dynamic negativity than any positivism of new ideologies, as artistic deconstruction of human cultural constructs can be seen as a method of tapping into a broader context of life processes, he argues. Lyotard's strategy of artistic dismantling of ideologies is an example of an intuition in contemporary philosophy that explores the technological impact on human social organisations in terms of decomposition processes as well as in terms of the social co-existence of the species. Decomposition accelerates mutation through the diversity of chronic illnesses caused by various species living within and through each other. The curation of the Chronic Illness performance events brings the realisation about living through decay to the level of social organisation, where the most fertile form of communal living is offered by the anarchist undoing of politics and where humans have to find their nomadic homes in sewage.

[367] Ibid., p.78

3Decay

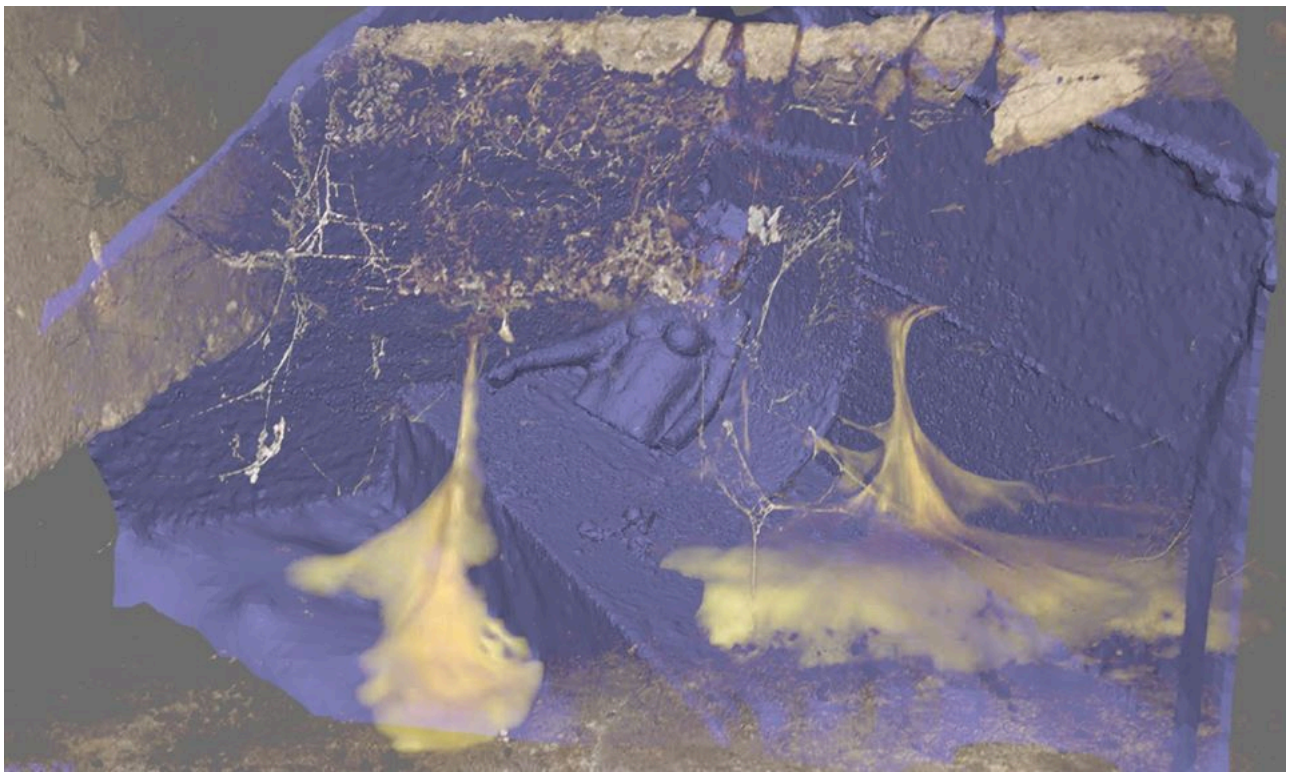
Figs 20 - 21. Images from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3



Figs 22 - 23. Images from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3

Figs 24 - 25. Images from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3

Figs 26 - 27. Images from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3



Figs 28 - 29. Images from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3

Fig. 30. Image from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3

Fig. 31. Image from *3Decay* (2019) series by Piotr Bockowski with technical assistance of NeonM3

Chapter 3: Fungosexual Replication beyond the Internet

Biomedia

After my theoretical interrogation of the media concept of bodily decomposition (in Chapter 1) and the discussion around the embodiment of this concept in my own practice of the mutant performance as well as the curation of the Chronic Illness events (in chapter 2), I now want to consider various ideas regarding how humans reproduce their bodies via technological mediations, with bodily reproduction being arguably the superstructure of life. Primarily, we could say that the first chapter of my thesis conceptualised human media technologies as extensions of primitive life formations that still animate human bodies and environments. The concept of human bodily decomposition names different forms of mediation that open up the idea and materiality of the human body towards its trans-humanist embededness in fungoid environments. Decomposition performed by fungal mediations disintegrates the humanist understanding of performers' bodies and provides nourishing connections with nonhuman entities. My concept of 'fungi media' proposes a narrative of a creative devolution of the human species, where the creation aspect emphasises symbiotic relations of humans with other species. I suggest that, through the development of a high-tech civilization, the human species encloses itself in a sphere of artificial conditioning that can be understood in its relation to fungoid life's organisation - rather than as something specifically human. In this sense humans undo themselves partially through their participation in electric media networks, as they experience and enact an increasingly more visible experience of fragmentation, multiplication and hybridisation, both of their bodies and subjectivities. Internet mediations of human bodies enmesh them with nonhuman entities and, as a consequence, open up ways of thinking about humans via nonhumans.

Exploring this idea through forms of embodiment in post-Internet performance art the second chapter of this thesis has focused on my curation of performance events at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, under the theme of the Chronic Illness. Accounting for my research practice, I have examined notions of trans-corporeal dynamics unfolding together with the space of live performance spaces. Now, in the third chapter of my thesis I will offer a speculation, informed by strategies of bodily image manipulation unfolding online, on how media contribute to changes in human reproduction, involving a shift from sexual coupling to fungosexual replication. This shift will allow me to further outline a

framework of alternative queer, trans and nonhuman sexualities, which I have referred to as ‘fungosexual’ throughout my thesis. Here, I’m specifically interested in ways of extending online bodily manipulations into the corporeal processes of performance art, with a view to engaging nonhuman materialities of life. Pursuing this idea, it is vital to define media not only as material agencies that facilitate communication in an abstract sense (human and nonhuman) but also as living biological forms of corporeal transmutation that change our bodies into no-longer-human entities.

Media connect life forms, but at the same time they have always been more than passive technologies of communication or information storage. Looking at media in their peculiarly experimental form of bioart, Robert Michell argues that media perform as material agencies, which make life forms grow and reproduce.[368] Creating environments for the emergence of human and nonhuman hybrids beyond sexual reproduction, mediations come to life also as fungosexual mutations. I’m particularly interested in interpreting human technologies of communication in terms of biomedia, which I consider as nonhuman forms engaged in reproducing no-longer-human bodies.

Fig. 32. Fungal media emerging life forms at The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. Photo credit: Piotr Bockowski

[368] Robert Mitchell, *Bioart and The Vitality of Media*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010, p.96

Bioart

As Mitchell points out, media are not only the material means of storing and transmitting information but also materials "that are employed to keep living cells developing, dividing, and transforming".[369] Bioart is the 21st century hybrid art practice that explores the connection between those two understandings of media. Employing communication technologies and life forms alike, together with various biotechnologies, it postulates a sense of life as "a perpetual process of emergence"[370] beyond informational patterns. Based on his research into bioart, Mitchell formulates the concept of media vitalism that transgresses the understanding of media-as-communication and moves towards media-as-transformation or transmutation of matter, with a view to the possibility of merging both. Approaching media as conditions of bio-emergence and generative vitalism, one has to describe them not as artefacts or isolated processes but as living environments. Mitchell's vitalist media participate in life in a way that is irreducible to scientific laws or essentialist ideas. They "explore what life can do"[371] instead of offering a fixed understanding of media – or of life. This experimental approach positions itself always one step ahead of the theoretical frameworks currently used by science. Approaching biotech outside of corporate interests, media vitalism doesn't negate the validity of scientific research but rather performs life in the spheres and notions beyond the scientific definitions. In this vitalist view of media that I also adopt and then perform myself, technology doesn't reduce life to the supposedly essential codes, algorithms or patterns. Instead media are seen to replicate life in a new way. As an effect, the changing media may also be changing the environmental conditions, which in turn alter the living bodies inhabiting those environments or even create some new species.[372] With this approach in mind, the Internet can be considered a trans-human form of life, with post-Internet performance art of body mutation being an embodiment of this aspect in parallel to bioart practice.

A paradigmatic example of bioart practice is the Tissue Culture & Art Project (TC&A) initiated by Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr in 1996 in Australia and "set up to explore questions arising from the use of living tissues to create/grow semi-living objects/sculptures".[373] TC&A use living bio-materials, sustained with engineered artificial support systems, in

[369] Robert Mitchell, *Bioart and the Vitality of Media*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010, p.11
[370] Ibid., p.11
[371] Ibid., p.32
[372] Ibid., p.97
[373] Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr, "Growing Semi-Living Sculptures", *Leonardo*, Vol.35, No.4, 2002, p.365

order to control the growth of the manipulated life forms and shape them into biotechnological 'semi-living sculptures'. Allegedly, the cells' compounds of TC&A's semi-life are molecularly (i.e. biochemically) altered but the results of their work are often presented in a form of 'digital montage'. In a way, a 3D computer-generated image becomes here not only the scaffolding for the growth of life but also its exoskeleton, shaping it inside out. The involvement of digital image tools in the performance of body mutation in media becomes for me a form of technological vitalism incorporated by Internet cultures. Exclusive high-tech academic experiments of bioart have offered aesthetic strategies related to the technological interrogation of bio-bodies that become the driving force for mutant embodiments of humans online and beyond.

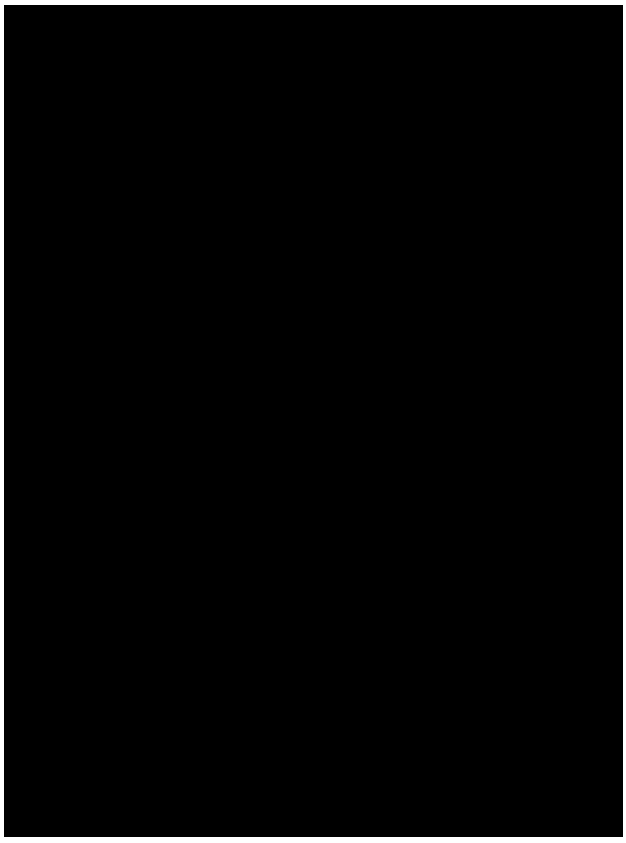


Fig. 33. *The Mycelium Shroud* (2019), image courtesy: Officina Corpuscoli (copyrighted image removed)

Embracing or rather allowing to be embraced by the technological vitalism of bioart, Officina Corpuscoli[374] studio in Amsterdam employs fungi for design projects that rethink human culture in the context of material processes of decomposition. The Mycelium Shroud[375] involves a human form, designed with an intention to understand life through cycles of physical decay and the resulting transformation of organic matter [Fig. 33.]. The

[374] Homepage of Officina Corpuscoli: https://www.corpuscoli.com/
[375] Documentation of *The Mycelium Shroud* project by Officina Corpuscoli: https://www.corpuscoli.com/projects/bodies-of-change/

shroud, having been inoculated with fungi mycelia, offers a mediation between a human body and a dispersed organic plateau connected to other forms of life. In doing so, Officina Corpuscoli is one of the many recently mushrooming applications of fungi, ones that focus on their body shapes, behavioral patterns or communicational possibilities in design. Other projects of Officina Corpuscoli involve a spore-growing solution that could help humans to develop a life-supporting infrastructure on Mars.[376] This latter project accentuates the key role of fungi for biological environments and their kinship with humans in the high-technological age of cosmic expansion. Officina Corpuscoli defines a concept of 4D printing,[377] which not only uses fungal bodies as a material for printing computer-based 3D designs but which, moreover fuses algorithmic calculations with mycelial process of growth. The variety of product design applications of Officina Corpuscoli's approach present fungal-infected jewelry,[378] as well as increasingly popular 'fungal leather' solutions for fashion and textiles, or self-devouring furniture animated by plastic-eating fungi,[379] thus proposing an exciting solution to one of the main environmental pollutants created by human industry. Bringing back human civilization to the material processes of nature is what the fungal approach to technology stands for. It significantly reverses the productivist approach to technology, which has been powering the industrial societies for the past couple of centuries, arresting the movement of life. In his commentary on Hannah Arendt, Bronislaw Szerszynski concludes that via the fabrication of technology, humans remove material "from the cycles of growth and decay".[380] Bio-actively redefining those most basic product ideas and the concepts behind technologies of production for the mass industry, Officina Corpuscoli represents the avant-garde of reversing the deadly impact of the consumerist civilization on our planet. It does this by implementing the paradigm of fungi media premised on re-connecting to growth through decay.

Coming from a high-tech design research lab, The Mycelium Shroud elaborates on the becoming of the human form as a transient momentum of microbial processes. The ephemeral quality of fungal afterlife is presented by Eugene Thacker in his foreword to *Death, Mort, Tod* as a subtle touch point between the intimacy of information technologies and the primordial microbiology of 'elemental mud'. "The result is a view of death as an

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[376] Documentation of *Caskia / Growing a MarsBoot* project by Officina Corpuscoli: https://www.corpuscoli.com/projects/caskia/
[377] Documentation of *Bio Ex-Machina* project by Officina Corpuscoli: https://www.corpuscoli.com/projects/bio-ex-machina/
[378] Documentation of *Infected* project by Officina Corpuscoli: https://www.corpuscoli.com/projects/infected/
[379] Documentation of *Continuous Bodies – The Ephemeral Icon* project by Officina Corpuscoli: https://www.corpuscoli.com/projects/the-ephemeral-icon/
[380] Bronislaw Szerszynski, "Technology, Performance and Life Itself: Hannah Arendt and the Fate of Nature", in: *Nature Performed*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2003, p.205

impossible life that determines every life. Scaled up as clouds of numbers and patterns, sunken down in elemental mud. Weightless ash, sunken data",[381] writes Thacker. His insight accentuates the decomposing performativity as the main characteristic of the body, rather than just a feature of a solid substance defined by vast technological artefacts. Interestingly, this performative affair of biodesign is reflected in the present-day tendency of performance art to be experienced intentionally via technologically elaborate 'reperformance'[382] simulations, video documentations, digitally manipulated imagery or even Virtual Reality systems. I would argue that those elaborations open up a new form of vitalism for human body acts. Advanced apparatuses, which have seemingly escaped from scientific laboratories themselves, become mutagenic life performances.

Media mutations

The profound impact of the vitalism of new technological environments on humans increasingly involves human bodies in media-mutant performances. Arthur Kroker writes about a 'body drift'[383] that conceptualises "the fact that we no longer inhabit a body in any meaningful sense of the term but rather occupy a multiplicity of bodies – imaginary, sexualised, disciplined, gendered, labouring, technologically augmented bodies".[384] The mutant embodiment of media is characterised by the disintegration of human bodily identity. Media and body artist Hannah Rose Dalton performs this transient character of the repeated re-enactment of the corporeal integrity in her daily physiological routine portraits on social media [Fig. 34.], revealing a certain despair of self-alienation in-between multiple personae.

[381] Eugene Thacker, foreword to: Steve Finbow and Karolina Urbaniak, *Death, Mort, Tod. A European book of the Dead*, Infinity Land Press, London, 2018, p.7
[382] Lisa Newman, "Flesh for fantasy: The future of sado-masochism and performance art in virtual worlds", https://www.academia.edu/5593267/Flesh_for_fantasy_The_future_o_sado-masochism_and_performance_art_in_the_virtual_world?email_work_card=interaction_paper , p.231
[383] See Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012
[384] Ibid., p.2

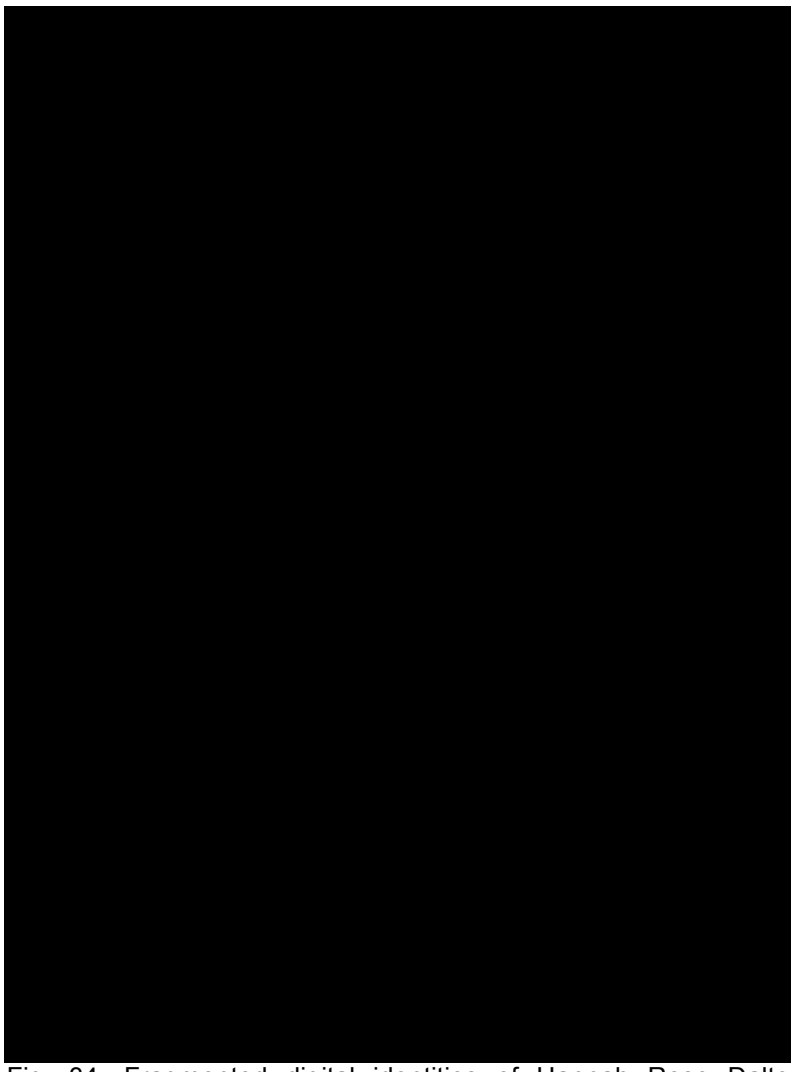

Fig. 34. Fragmented digital identities of Hannah Rose Dalton 2019. Image courtesy: Fecal Matter (copyrighted image removed)

Transhuman bodies online multiply unfinished processes, disperse intermediate stages of development, break apart organisms, perpetuate disconnected fragments and splice or decompose tissues in a non-regular manner. For Kroker this process is directly related to the 'effortless' circulation between the ever-growing forms of technological media. The bodies of techno-humanoids are characterised by a lack of coherence and by repeated becomings of performative transgressions. The price for the growing intensities of bodily performances is the unprecedented loss of the body's concrete materiality and material objectivity. "Nothing is as imaginary as the material body. Circulating, fluid, borderless, with no certain boundaries or predetermined history".[385] And yet, that flux radiates a different material intensity. Together with technological mediations of the Internet, video, mobile phones or computer games, Kroker recognises this tendency also in the proliferation of countersexualities.[386] In his view various androgynous sex codes, defined

[385] Ibid., p.3
[386] Ibid., p.4

online as gender fluid, switch, transgender or nullo for example, are a direct consequence of the changeability of techno-communication environments. Social media artist Salvia performs those different modes of post-sexuality in extreme mutant figurations that allow them to breed multiple oddkin bodies through acts of genitals erasure [Fig. 35].

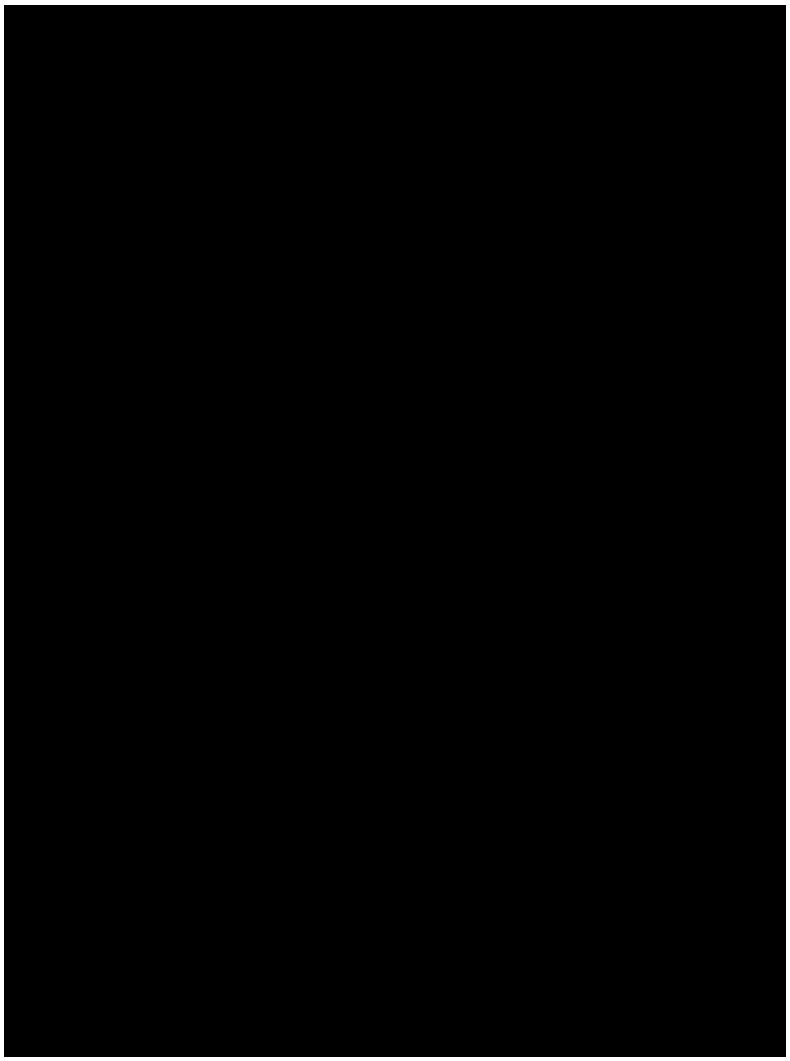

Fig. 35. Shedding of the digital body, 2019. Image courtesy: Salvia (copyrighted image removed)

Salvia's digitally embodied performance art is arguably one of the extremely unique and bizarre intensifications of 21st century media gravitation towards the presentation of androgynous bodies as the most intense expression of beauty, employed in mainstream culture by fashion editorials. In his presentation of this tendency, Patrick Mauries proclaims "the dizzying resurgence of androgyny in the twenty-first century"[387] and adds: "After all, the androgynes of the early decades of the twenty-first century are now flourishing in myriad incarnations, many of which did not even have a name only a few years ago".[388] Salvia pushes this desire to erase sexual difference to its certain conclusion in visions of

[387] Patrick Mauries, *Androgyne,* Thames & Hudson, London, 2017, back cover
[388] Ibid., p.157

monstrous mutant breeding. This breeding process reaches also beyond social media towards experimental attempts at cross-species embodiments. In Salvija's early-pandemic fashion show orchestrated together with the iconic curator and artist Parma Ham, the pair explore the body figure of 'nullo', defined as "a form of body modification where the genitals and breasts are surgically removed".[389] For the show, they created fetishware and bodily augmentations consisting of multiple prosthetic tentacles, mammalia, twisted spines, exoskeleton tails or parasite ribcages. During the show the "sissy slut s/s" models circulated around a gimp body disposed, and partially immobilized, like a lump of flesh, to be finally raped anally with a dildo made out of a taxidermised deer leg. This act of infertile self proclaimed 'necro-bestiality', that incorporates hooves, horns, pig trotters and tentacles, is performed with an intention to 'reinvent' sexuality as posthuman "practices to suit the needs of our imagined internet self which has begun to influence and inspire day-to-day experience".[390] Those excessive performances play with forms of dehumanized fetish organs that are attached to actually de-sexualised bodies.

The characteristic for mutant body performance phenomenon described by Kroker as body drift is internally conflicted in its approach to the body. On the one hand, it diagnoses a certain 'dematerialisation' of human bodies through media, in the sense of dissolving bodies by making them more fluid or porous, but, on the other hand, the materiality of the mediated bodies is being intensified through their performativity, whence various processes of technological transmutations create new mutant visceralities invading postmodern cultures. It takes 'a regime of computation' and "the language of software as ideology",[391] to borrow terms from N. Katherine Hayles, to create the accelerating multitude of media-simulated fetishes, which enforce the most peculiar sexual obsessions. Some counterculture critics of civilization, like John Zerzan,[392] perceive the indulgence in the medial proliferation of body simulations as a pitfall of "mediated high-tech dependency"[393] and of the enslavement of the raw pre-technological body. But perhaps there have never been humans, or any other living organisms, without a form of mediation of their bodies and the abstracted 'raw body' is just an idea that has become detached from life processes.

Moreover, through the acts of Salvia and other mutant performers, such as Arca or Aun Helden, the elaborate media simulations become embodied anew in transhuman corporeal

[389] https://www.parmaham.tv/nullo , London, 2019
[390] Ibid., 2019
[391] Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012, p.11
[392] See John Zerzan, *Future Primitive,* Autonomedia & Anarchy, Columbia, 1994
[393] Ibid., p.144

art inspired by online aesthetics. In his reading of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'desiring machine',[394] Slavoj Zizek explains that the problem of the technological incarnations of human drives is not to reduce the mind to material processes (of the brain or computer system infrastructure for that matter) but "to grasp how mind can emerge only by being embedded in the network of social relations and material supplements".[395] This problem touches upon human identity, with its sexuality and subjectivity, and the way those characteristics rely on mechanical components and incorporate machines, or media technologies, which effectively positions the human sexual subjects as 'voided' by machines. "It is meaningless to imagine human being as a biological entity without the complex networks"[396] of media, explains Zizek in his reconstruction of the concept of external intelligence, defining human momentum through its technological mediation. Humans are defined by their prostheses while, at the same time, the prostheses become part of the human's "direct self-experience as a living organism – thus decentering us from within".[397] It is a form of the fungoid external intelligence of heaps, networks and assemblages that becomes the living experience of humans online. Zizek calls this phenomenon the "spectral materialism"[398] of human techno-body, explaining that it makes the "material density in humid heaviness" disappear. The revolutionary paradigms of 20th century science are arguably leading to this 'spectralisation' of matter, which is what happens to the living body form of humans online. Informatics disperses objects into digital clouds, biogenetics abstracts organic tissue into DNA reproduction while quantum physics blurs matter into wave oscillations or reduces the reality perceived by human to 'quantum' - neural processes of their neurobiology, points out Zizek. In his view the "emphatic and ecstatic assertion of the body is thus over",[399] as the body loses density and becomes technologically manageable. The notion of 'spectral materiality' is strongly emphasised by mutant performers, such as Anthropomorph, as they proclaim online their inhuman nature and intense affiliation with bestiality online – alongside their transsexual transitioning. They create for their acts elaborate silicon prosthetics to convey their transgression of human genders and other features of the human species, in their process of breeding hybrid bodies.

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[394] See : Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p.340
[395] Slavoj Zizek, *Organs Without Bodies*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p.16
[396] Ibid., p.19
[397] Ibid., p.18
[398] Ibid., p.25
[399] Ibid., p.25

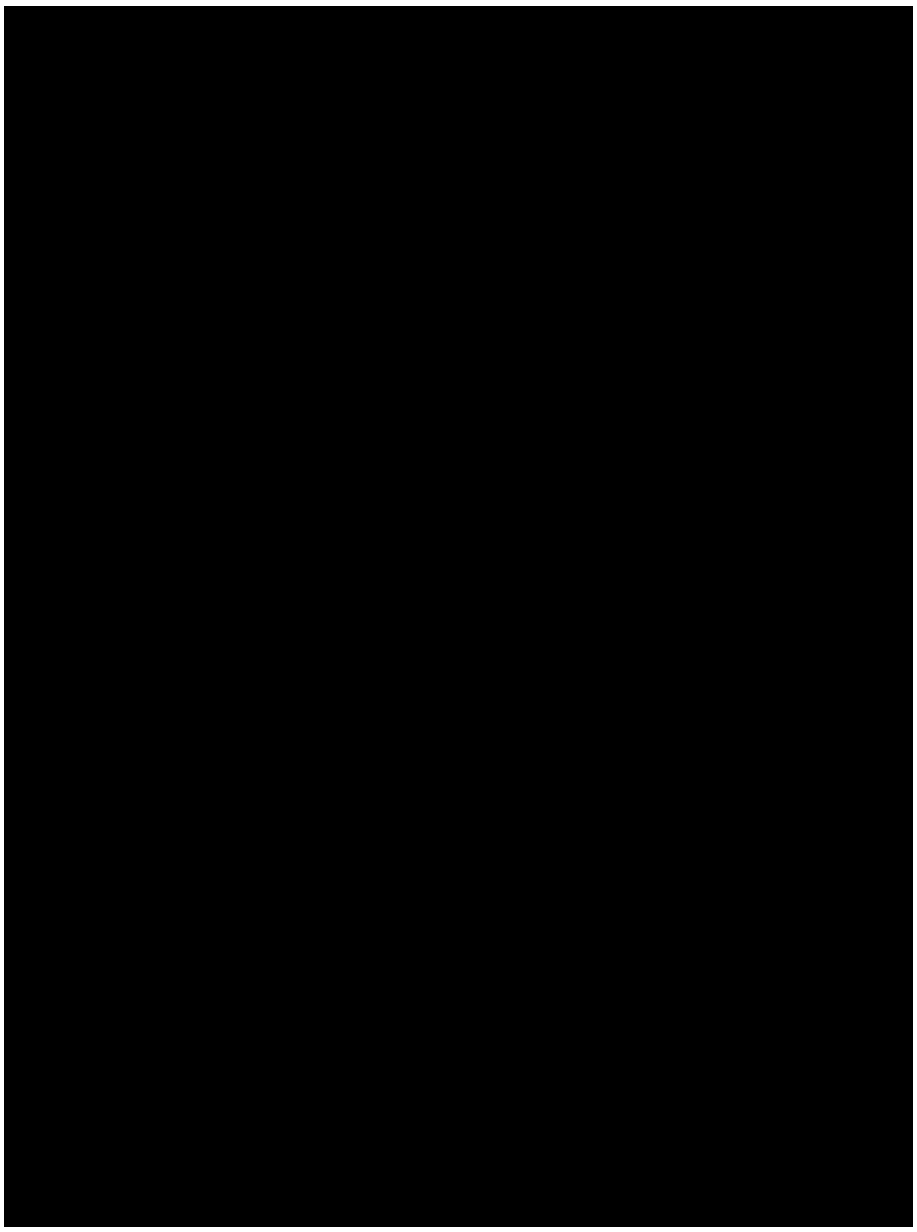

Fig. 36. Transhuman Silicon Prosthetics, 2021. Image courtesy: Anthropomorph (copyrighted image removed)

Arguably, communication seems to be a process that facilitates the making of all bodies. That's maybe why technology in its many forms easily becomes a fitting container for the most primal human desires and drives – like sex, violence and consumption. Humans also tend to fall for the erotic allure of media technologies, and from a certain perspective, "bodily sex appears to be no more than an exchange of signal blips on the genetic corporeal network",[400] as suggested by Michael Heim in a chapter titled 'The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace' in his book *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*. But then Heim

[400] Michael Heim, *The Mataphysics of Virtual Reality*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.85

concludes that VR, as a reductionist simulation of the body, unifies the possible bodily modalities of experience into mathematical patterns. By doing so, it doesn't satisfy the craving to penetrate (or be penetrated by?) the physical reality, even though "the fleshy world is worth knowing for its distances and its hidden horizons",[401] as Heim concludes. Technological simulations of trans-human bodies arrest the sexuality in forms of detached ambiguity.

There is a flipside to the transgression of sexuality as a specific reproductive technique. Bio-reproductive sex facilitates cultural traditions via marriage and family institutions but media technologies assist in dissolving them into a post-sexual excitement of mutating fetishisms. This technological undoing of human sexuality is particularly visible in queer subcultures, which according to Myra J. Hird behave like bacteria who "recognise, and avidly embrace diversity, (as) they do not discriminate on the basis of sex or 'gender' differences at all"![402] The challenging of the sexual identity of humans in its core turns playful queer aesthetics into a radical political activity, as it abandons the self-similar replications of family lineages while embracing the symbiotic coexistence of different bodies.

Queer politics via biotech aesthetics

Queer bodies are a form of mediation that is undoing the productivist ideology of political economy, according to Kroker.[403] Indeed, queering bodies are seen as weakening the social structuring orchestrated around sexual reproduction. Accordingly, Kroker not only associates queer bodies with non-normative sexual behaviours, but also finds them symptomatic or representative of other marginalised and excluded bodies. Queer "sex minorities" happen to be more than socially ostracized: they are sometimes lynched or even killed. In 2017 "at least 445 LGBT+ people in Brazil died in hate-related crimes".[404] This explains why Aun Helden, a mutant performer from the transgender community of

[401] Ibid., p.107
[402] Myra J Hird, *Naturally Queer*, Feminist Theory 5.1, 2004, p. 85-89
[403] Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012, p.27
[404] Gabriella Gasparini, "Beauty Uncut", in: *Judas Magazine* #4, London, 2018, p.55

Sao Paolo wants to create a new form of existence for ‘manas’[405] (queers) by “challenging the physiognomy of the human, by rejecting the aesthetic of ‘traditional beauty’ and by breaking the rules of what is biologically possible”.[406] Helden effectively transforms their multiplying body into reptilian creatures breeding eye-eggs through openings in latex membranes [Fig. 36.]. In this way, they evoke a desired queer species apart from traditions of family cultures.

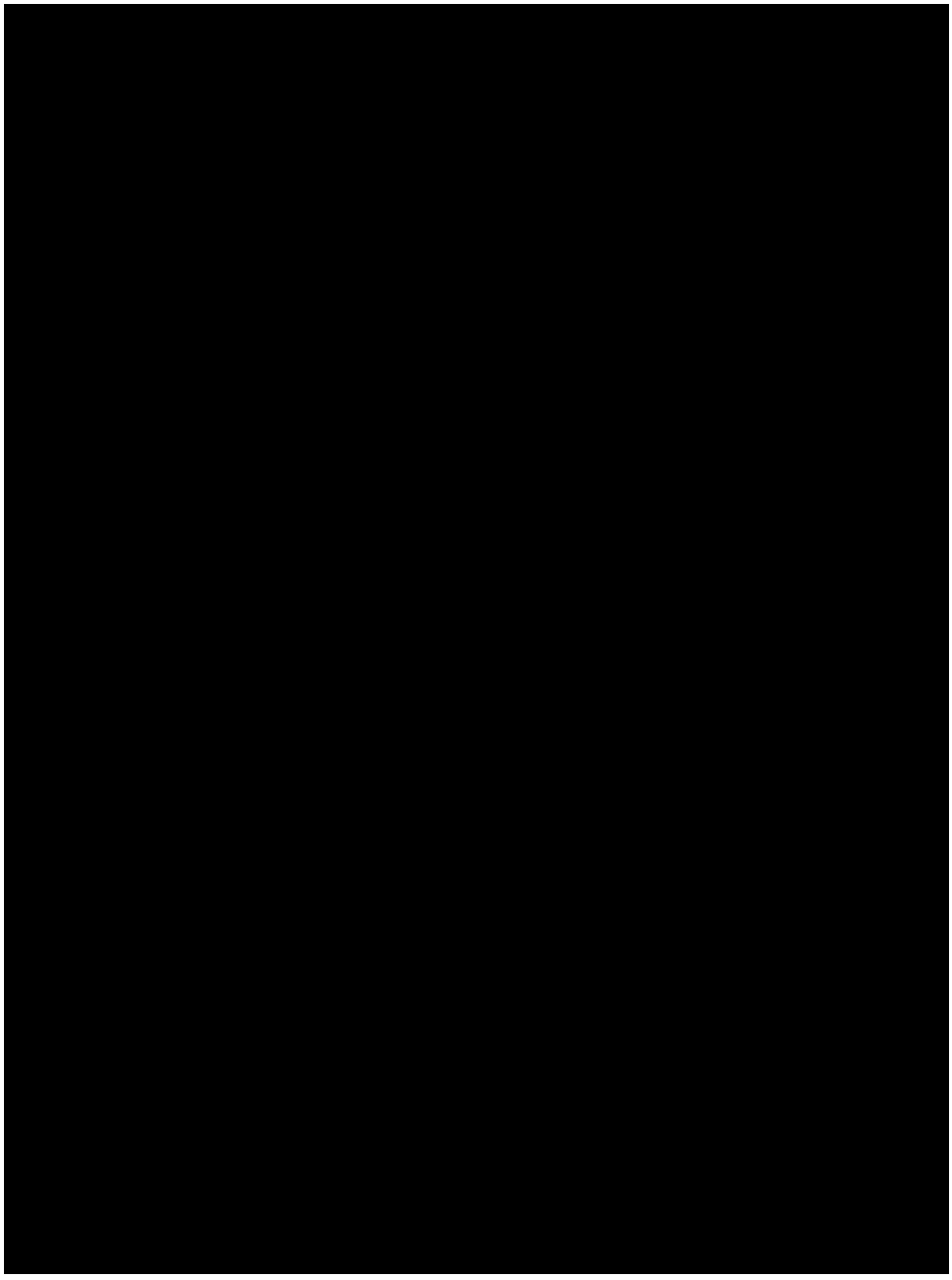

Fig 37. Hatching of the black eggs, 2019. Image courtesy: Aun Helden (copyrighted image removed)

[405] Brazilian slang for ‘queer sisters’
[406] Gabriella Gasparini, “Beauty Uncut”, in: *Judas Magazine* #4, London, 2018, p.55

Queer transgressions of human biological reproduction are guarded against by the rigid sexual dualism of many traditional cultures and punished according to repressive 'family values' that support the exclusivity of national or racial prejudices. Kroker links the ideological exclusion of sexual transgression with the techno-politics of "body disappearance", which places refugees in trans-political camps, not marked on official maps (like Google maps).[407] A similar exclusion of socially obsolete bodies affects the one billion occupants, as estimated by Mike Davis, of the world's slums, bodies that make up the shameful underbelly of global economy.[408] As Kroker reminds us, the "images of the very material body are everywhere – hostage bodies, bodies that are genocided, tagged, biochipped, surveilled and electronically scanned".[409] Against those forms of control enfolds the creativity of matter evident in vital approaches to media. Humans use media networks to form temporary dynamic alliances of wasted bodies that subvert their marginal social position by interpreting their stigma as a creative advantage. The initial meaning of 'queer' is 'rotten' and thus excluded, but at the same time infected by nonhuman fertility – which I am elaborating in a later section of this chapter titled 'The Humus of the Holobiont and Queer Rot'. Nowadays this 'queer rot' is widely applied by new media subcultures in association with culturally fertile activities, which are massively present in the mainstream culture of the Internet.

A spectacular performance of self-proclaimed 'mutants' of the Internet is offered by the queer mergence of the artistic entity of Arca and Jesse Kanda. These two artists met online in their early teens and developed a relationship in chatrooms commenting on 4chan,[410] a legendary otaku culture image-based bulletin board concerned mainly with Japanese media subcultures. It has a particular focus on fetishism, often involving extreme forms of sexual violence performed by animated monsters.[411] Coming from different continents - Arca having grown up between Venezuela and the USA, and Kanda being of partial Japanese origin but living in multicultural Canada – they met in London after seven years of online co-development via the subtle touch of electronic media perversions. Arca and Kanda moved into a flat in Stoke Newington, an area in London renowned for its transgressive immigrant and dissident identity, historically being home to anarchists, abolitionists and other political non-conformists as well as religious outcasts, hosting the biggest in Europe Hasidic Ashkenazi community. In Victorian times those communities

[407] Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004
[408] Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012, p.52
[409] Ibid., p.52
[410] https://www.4chan.org/
[411] One of the forerunners of 4chan was the Anime Death Tentacle Rape Whorehouse board (ADTRW)

established themselves around the Abney Park cemetery, which is proud to be the first cemetery in the world for non-believers or otherwise religiously not affiliated. The website of Abney Park describes the origin of the place as “the foremost burial ground for Dissenters – those practicing their religion outside the established church. It was founded on these principles, with a non-denominational chapel at its core, and was open to all, regardless of religious conviction”.[412] Here Arca and Kanda tap into the socially subversive legacy with the queer micropolitics fused with the mutant aesthetics of their media and performance art. They create a digital bodily entity consisting of “fungus inspired”[413] sound and visual deformations transforming each other’s human features into monstrous overgrowth and spillage, as explained below.

In interviews around his album *Mutant*, Arca emphasises the experience of cruising in the Abney Park cemetery in front of their flat, where men have been meeting for dangerous sex since the Victorian times. In this cult graveyard of London queer subcultures, social outcasts had been buried for centuries and nowadays the exhibitionist desire of random sex encounters intertwines with the patterns of rot. In an interview about their work Arca is connecting queer eroticism with “rot, which allows for different fungus and plants and insects to thrive there” and which creates “textures of decomposition”[414] as another form of organic life. Arca’s intention is to embody rot patterns with his sound distortions, as they explain their own method of music making. Also, Kanda’s computer image manipulations of Arca’s body explore new prodigious forms of existence through media decomposition [Fig. 37.], as they explain their own method of music composition. Their fluid silhouettes severely challenge the integrity of organic structures but at the same time they allow animations of the infectious movements of plasmatic bodies to pulsate with life, spreading freely fine threads allegedly inspired by the growth in front of their flat by the entrance to Abney Park cemetery.

[412] The official website of Abney Park Cemetery: https://abneypark.org/heritage
[413] www.crackmagazine.net/article/long-reads/arca-look-within
[414] Arca, interview by Alexis Petridis for *the Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/apr/06/arca-new-album-alejandro-ghersi-kanye-west-bjork, 2017

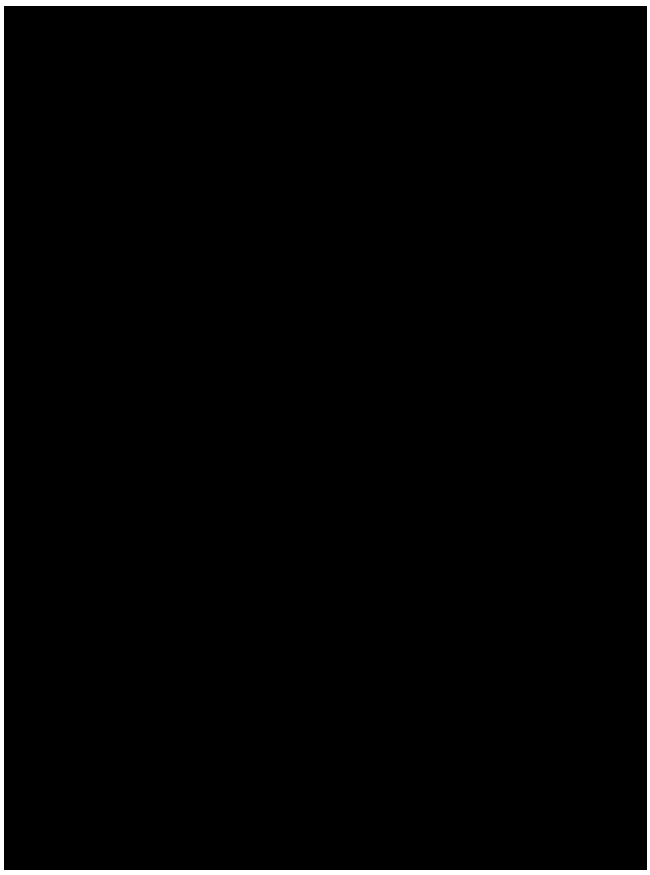

Fig. 38. Decomposition of digital mutants, 2016. Image courtesy Jesse Kanda & Arca (copyrighted image removed)

Queer fertility is techno-mutagenic par excellence, as queers breed by shape-shifting their mediatised bodies. Abandoning sexual reproduction, they replicate via decompositions of their bodies within media environments. Jane Bennet positions vital materialism as 'one great embryology'[415] that seeks various new forms of replication in its 'pluripotentiality'. Accelerating in the 21st century, via the Internet and other platforms, mediated queer bodies offer new formats of group relations based on social-media communications. They also create environs of techno-embryos for quirky breeds of fetishist performances - technologically generated processes of mediation of no-longer-human (mutant) bodies can be considered a form of breeding of queer progeny. This futuristic longing is expressed by Kroker in his prediction that "the future belongs to those dwelling at the borderlines, to those who make of their bio-social-ecological abode the hybrid, the intermediation, the splice".[416] Queer online culture can thus be said to produce simulations of posthuman technomutations.

[415] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010, p.89
[416] Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012, p.27

Mutant Politics via 3D World-Making

Why do all these mutant bodies populate so many screens of computers connected to the Internet? Seemingly, there is a certain realization behind the online art presented above that diagnoses digital media as increasingly mutagenic. The images discussed were mostly created in the year 2019, which witnessed a wave of censorship of major Internet platforms. Tumblr introduced their 'safe & trust' policies, involving the removal of pornographic and gore content, Vimeo started deleting many long-lived profiles after accusing them of 'activity primarily focused on sexual stimulation' and Facebook increased cases of blocking computer-selected profiles in the name of digital 'family values'. As part of that trend, many of my own blog posts related to The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan were removed from public view. Three channels with almost one hundred videos[417] of performance acts, produced throughout the past decade, were completely deleted, while some of my social media posts were removed too, together with the temporary suspension of my artist profile.

All those supposedly moral algorithmic systems behind the major social media websites nevertheless insistently convey an obsession with human sexuality. They aim at the suppression of a raw drive and desire that may appear aggressive. Trying to regulate the sexual expression of online communities, mainstream media policies effectively erase the imagery related to human bodily reproduction – the infamous nipples, shameful genitals or even more abstract body presentations that happen to involve moist or tense expressions, perhaps suggesting the possibility of secreting glands within hidden orifices. Those policies of familiar communities become uncanny as the mediated families insistently disconnect themselves from technicalities of sexual reproduction: they remove genitals, which are instrumental for creating an embryo; they also obscure female nipples, which are a characteristic of human motherhood.[418] Described above, the *Nullo* show of bestial castrations by Salvia and Parma Ham is a ceremonial presentation of aestheticized disability to perform human fertilisation. Another vivid example of a transgressive, corporeal rejection of bodily functions related to sexual reproduction was controversially enacted by eco and trans activist performer Bonnie Bakeneko, who removed their female breasts surgically and later ate their nipples during a live online transmission in 2019.[419]

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[417] My 3 video channels that hosted almost hundred videos and were deleted in July 2019: www.vimeo.com/nekama (2010/2019), www.vimeo.com/neofung (2015/2019), www.vimeo.com/ancestorparasite (2018/2019)

[418] The word 'mom' (mother) originates from a Latin word for female breast ('mamma')

[419] Bonnie Bakaneko, *Your Body is Not a Temple*, Norwich, 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4CQ_ffXXFU

They did that partially as a gesture against the online prohibition against showing naked female breasts – with a particular fixation on female nipples. Enforcing the anti-genitals and anti-nipples censorship, the security systems of contemporary media populate the Internet with mutant replicants without nipples or genitals. Curiously, the Internet mainstream welcomes monstrous deformities as long as they escape the biology features of the human sex. These problematic body-image policies assist in the coming of age of 21st century post-Internet mutant performers.

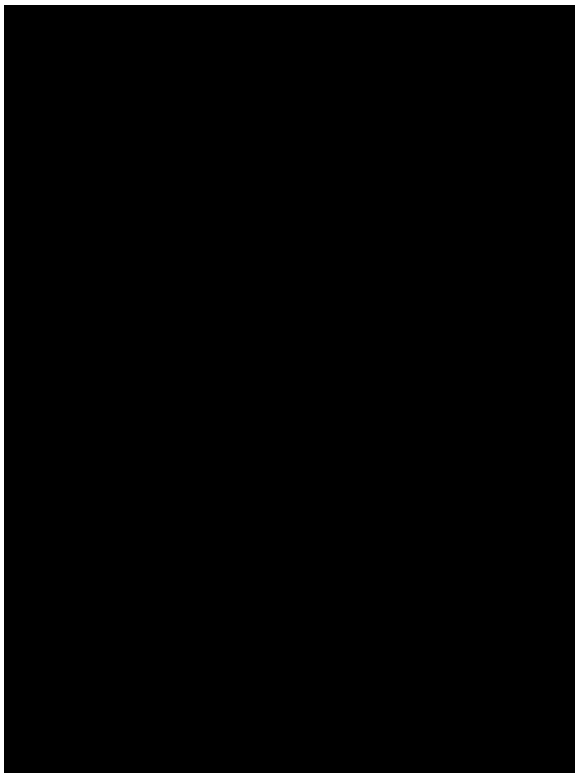

Fig. 39. Online auto-cannibalism of female nipples, 2019. Image courtesy: Bonnie Bakeneko (copyrighted image removed)

This fetishist spillage of repressed desire online taps into the Japanese *hentai* strategies of eluding censorship. Almost half a century old, they can be considered symptomatic of Internet aesthetics now. Since the 1970s Ero Guro movement in Tokyo, *hentai* has answered to the state prohibitions on portraying human genital intercourses by creating fertile subspecies of tentacle monsters that twist around the no-longer human bodies and penetrate their dislocated orifices gaping in-between feverishly multiplying mammillae. In the same vein, mutant body performers on viral social media such as Aun Helden use their image manipulation art to castrate sex or "anything that presents (them) as men",[420] at the

[420] Gabriella Gasparini, *Beauty Uncut*, in: *Judas Magazine* #4, London, 2018, p.55

same time multiplying what's considered to be anatomical anomalies. "The eggs, the prosthetic make-up, it's a contrasexual decontextualization, it's a prosthetic incorporation. It's me playing with my body, displacing its origins and maybe replacing them",[421] teases Aun. Instead of harmonizing with human forms their corporeal members bulge with black eggs that initiate a no-longer-human replication. The shiny surface of the eggs reflects the mutagenic void of computer screens that opens up for protosexual transmissions beyond cultural traditions.

Transcultural transsexuality

The aesthetic sexuality of fetishism is abstracted from bio-reproductive functions and introduces cultural practices of sadomasochism and fetishism, which historically produce new forms of desire, according to the cultural analysis of Roman Byrne.[422] This process branches from the cultural phenomenon of pornography, which according to Camille Paglia, can be recognised as one of the oldest forms of ritual and art,[423] what establishes the primal reference point of body art. At the same time, Susanna Paasonen's[424] research into online porn emphasizes a particularly strong relation of the phenomenon of pornography to the Internet, particularly in its fetishist and bizarre forms. Proclaimed as the very reason for the Internet's existence (sic!), porn is for her one of the integral parts of online economy or even "an engine driving development in media technologies."[425] It not only makes many Internet users "spend considerable amount of time masturbating by their screens"[426] but also, as an economic factor, "the porn industry have played a crucial role in its [Web's] development as a commercial and largely audiovisual medium".[427]

Paasonen asks how the online economy orchestrated around the images of human bodies influences those bodies. She defines this influence around the modalities of viscerality and excess. Those modalities do not refer to the fixed structures of meaning but rather to the "visceral resonance"[428] that bypasses analysis. As porn consumers are "moved bodily before consciously processing what such experiences … may mean",[429] a 'gut reaction'

[421] https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/soul/article/42849/1/artist-body-rhetoric-brazilian-politics
[422] Roman Byrne, *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sadomasochism*, Bloomsbury, NYC, 2013, p.5
[423] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, p.34
[424] See Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2011
[425] Ibid., p.33
[426] Ibid., p.32
[427] Ibid., p.33
[428] Ibid., p.15
[429] Ibid.

becomes a mode of engagement with the Internet, which has sensory and affective resonance, like fascination or revolt. This, in my view, constitutes an argument for the biological (i.e. physiological) character of the Internet, as opposed to it being seen primarily through the logic of the binary code behind computer programs.

Paasonen's concept "points to the material factors of porn – the fleshy substance of the human body"[430] as well as to the materialities of technology, such as hardware, cables and modems. Those bodily factors are mobilized by online porn through forms of shock, disturbance and non-symmetry. "Online porn is indeed often irregular and strange, and it aims to stand out through the novelty of the desires, kinks, and displays of bodily pliability that it showcases".[431] Paasonen argues that the qualities of filth, disgust and nastiness or sickness resist domestication and support the intense attractiveness of porn for many Internet users. According to Paasonen's research the proliferation of niche online porn categories gravitates towards disgust and undoing of culturally erected categories. One of the examples analysed by Paasonen is the viral popularity of coprophagia, which mixes the biological functions of different human orifices. Paasonen describes the video '2girls1cup' that presents an act of eating the faeces of one girl by another, who then vomits it into the other's mouth. Disgust related to that video is apparently "primarily oriented towards embodiment and especially the excessively carnal – whether rotting flesh, sexual abundance".[432] The aforementioned excess of life, mutant procreation and the microbial decay of excrements are placed by Paasonen "at the heart of the disgusting as bodies are entered, exited, and consumed".[433] Arguably, such acts revoke the pre-human evolutionary forms of life via the performative mergence of defecation, eating and reproductive (sexual) functions within one and the same orifice. This illustration of online porn's tendency shows that imagery associated with human reproduction in network media context is meshed with images portraying processes of digestion. The close proximity of reproduction and digestion possibly suggests their common origin in the endosymbiotic relations between microbes.

Moreover, Paasonen notices that the porn videos that circulate between the Internet users the most are "extreme and bizarre, and sexual arousal generally plays a minor role in the titillation they evoke".[434] Interestingly, the peak performance of online porn is according to her devoid of sexual arousal. This is yet another iteration of the decoupling of sexual

[430] Ibid., p.20
[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid., p.211
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid., p.210

behaviors from sexual functions, which arguably points at the beyond-sexual replication offered by new media via oversaturated simulations of sexy performance. The indulgence in abject body forms accelerates on the Internet, while "pornographic styles and gestures are circulated in so-called mainstream media (for example in advertising and music videos), and hardcore pornography is an increasingly accessible and mundane part of the media landscape".[435] The shock modality of porn becomes a feature of its liveliness in the technological environments of new media, especially in acts that play with excrements, which are decaying parts of human bodies and live microbial entities. Online performances of sexuality are decoupled from reproduction and tend to be disassociated from genital display and action. The omission of the very human techniques of sexual reproduction invites excitement of fetishistic reproduction of body-images.

The online porn pursues bizarre body forms. New media imagery more often tends to blend the male and female beauty figurations into postsexual abstract hybrids and approach impossibly exciting monstrosities beyond sexuality. The abandoning of 'beauty standards' in queer subversions unexpectedly invites the horror of body mutations creeping beyond the theatre of sex.

The Primordial Origin of Transsexuality

Psychoanalysis offers a monstrous hypothesis which locates the origins of humankind in cannibalism.[436] In Freud's speculation, the totemic prohibition on eating each other precedes the incest taboo and, through placing a restriction on the pleasure of consumption, it constitutes the primal sexual relation of social hierarchy. In this quasi-mythological narrative,[437] cannibal savages killed and devoured their father, and thus established their community guidelines for sexual consent on the basis of that act. Disturbingly, this terrible fairy-tale bears an uncanny resemblance to the endosymbiotic theory of evolution developed by Lynn Margulis. In her widely acclaimed research,[438] Margulis proposes that sexuality as a biological technique of reproduction, characterised by the partial mixing of the genetic material of two parents that blend together half-way through a generational cycle, originates from the crisis of the primordial cannibalism of ancient bacteria. Those confused microbes that tried to devour each other, after reaching

[435] Ibid., p.248
[436] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003, p.208
[437] See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Routledge & Sons, London, 1919
[438] See Margulis Lynn & Dorion Sagan, *What Is Life?,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000

a state of overpopulation in relation to the natural resources that were available at the time, probably failed to digest one another completely and were forced to merge into new chimerical entities. Endosymbiosis proposes a theory of evolution which is driven by a partial incorporation of many bodies converging into more complex clusters. Similarly, Frank Ryan's theory of virolution[439] claims that the viral microbial agents are present at work during human conception and perhaps animate the first splitting of fertile cells in women's wombs. Ryan rephrases the suggestion that sexual nature of humans, in the context of the diversity of life on the planet, is neither male nor female but rather transsexual. This is the very broad, pre-sexual understanding of transsexuality that I adopt in my research. I rename it as 'fungosexuality' to emphasise its primordial character related to various diverse forms of the replication of fungoids, which from the perspective of human reproductive sexuality and its binary structuring should be considered androgynous, transsexual or otherwise bizarre. All of those categories are repeatedly referenced by post-Internet mutants in their performances of hybrid, alien bodies.

Alien transsexual entities of microbes, which are now incorporated within human bodies, seemingly create those bodies, then also reproduce and support the temporal integrity of their identities, such as familiar sexualities shaped by cultural traditions. Nevertheless, the contemporary impact of technological communications on cultures speeds up the erosion of the traditional values and makes it ever more apparent that the identities mentioned have "to be performed over and over again",[440] which is something that is related to the lack of consistency and continuity of human identities over time. Since "the frailty and forever provisional status of identity can no longer be concealed"[441] due to the withdrawal of social structures that used to produce the illusion of stability of traditional identities –now challenged by technology - humans are subjected to processes of 'corrosion of character' and experience 'the profound anxiety'. Taking this lack of stability into account, Nicole Seymour proposes that the very loosening of identities can be translated into advantageous queer strategies of trans-identity which involve gaiety, irony and frivolity. Those strategies may prove themselves crucial in seeking solutions to the contemporary issues related to the environmental crisis. Less-than-humans of decomposed identities open up, according to her, to "improper affiliation"[442] of playful performance with other forms of life instead of defining the deadly serious truths about them. Queer performance

[439] See: Ryan Frank, *Virolution*, Collins, London, 2009
[440] Benedetto Vecchi, Introduction to: Zygmunt Bauman*, Identity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004, p.16
[441] Ibid., p.16
[442] Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irrelevance in the Ecological Age*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2019, p.115

accentuates the performativity of the natural environment itself. Attentiveness to the capacity of some alien bodies affecting other transforming bodies brings closer "the idea that nature or the environment could perform, be performed, or be otherwise constructed – rather than being immanent, palpable, or manifest".[443] Those constructs can be considered as a form of the technological mutation of humans via their new media, performed instead of sexual reproduction.

Describing her male-to-female transsexual transitioning, lasting over two decades and involving surgical sex re-assignment, Claudine Griggs accentuates the crucial role of education in modes of expression and the repeated performative acts that define her new gender. She also admits that that prolonged time of female gender performance still couldn't undo the imprint of having been reared into the male gender identity. Effectively, Griggs' testimony of transsexual performance becomes a story of life through sexual ambiguity. "A person who is sexually unclassifiable gains the strangest rebuke",[444] she concludes and explains that feminine men and masculine females get reprimanded by society and urged to choose their one 'consistent' sex, to end the ambiguity of 'transitioning'. Interestingly, the culturally transgressive aspect of media networks comes into play as it accelerates the sexually ambiguous imagery. Griggs compares mid-70s (the time of the beginning of her transitioning) with the late '90s (the time of the writing of her book) as far as in perception of gender in the USA is concerned. In the earlier days, the superficial element of 'female' looks was enough to define somebody as (or provoke an assumption about somebody being) a woman. After the arrival of the Internet, sexually ambiguous "androgynous looks are common and don't define gender anymore".[445] This transition opens up new cultural forms in the 21st century, when media embrace ambiguity and celebrate androgynous bodies that defy sexual stereotypes. Moreover, Gordene Olga Mackenzie makes a valid point by stating that media culture not only creates the desire to consume androgynous images, but that also transsexualism may actually even be referred to as a "condition tailor-made for our surgical-technological age".[446] Media mutations and biotechnology both embrace transsexuality. Their crossover is particularly fertile for my research. In my performance practice outlined in Chapter 2 I deliberately engage with mutant aesthetics, which is moulded by the shapeshifting potentialities of the body. The *Synthetic Organs* act develops with the self-discovery of the body to be infected by alien

[443] Ibid., p.118
[444] Claudine Griggs, S*/he. Changing Sex and Changing Clothes*, Berg, Oxford, 1998, p.14

[445] ibid. p.19
[446] See Gordene Olga Mackenzie, *Transgender Nation,* Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1994

entities, whereas in *Holobiont, a* biomedia installation performs fungoid decomposition as a strategy for nonsexual replication of human body image. Those acts establish my understanding of transsexuality as a fungosexual relation to nonhuman life.

Transsexual decomposition and intimate self-remodelling of the body features were exercised throughout the "Pandrogyny" project of Genesis P-Orridge and Lady Jaye. They became mutilated during a fire at a music studio in LA in mid 90s and the medical insurance money they got was put to financing a series of plastic surgeries. The repeated surgeries were performed with an intension to make them look alike and through this process achieve a hybrid form of body mediation between genders. "There is no gender anymore – only androgyny",[447] said P-Orridge, and "sexuality is the force of nature and cannot be contained",[448] they added.

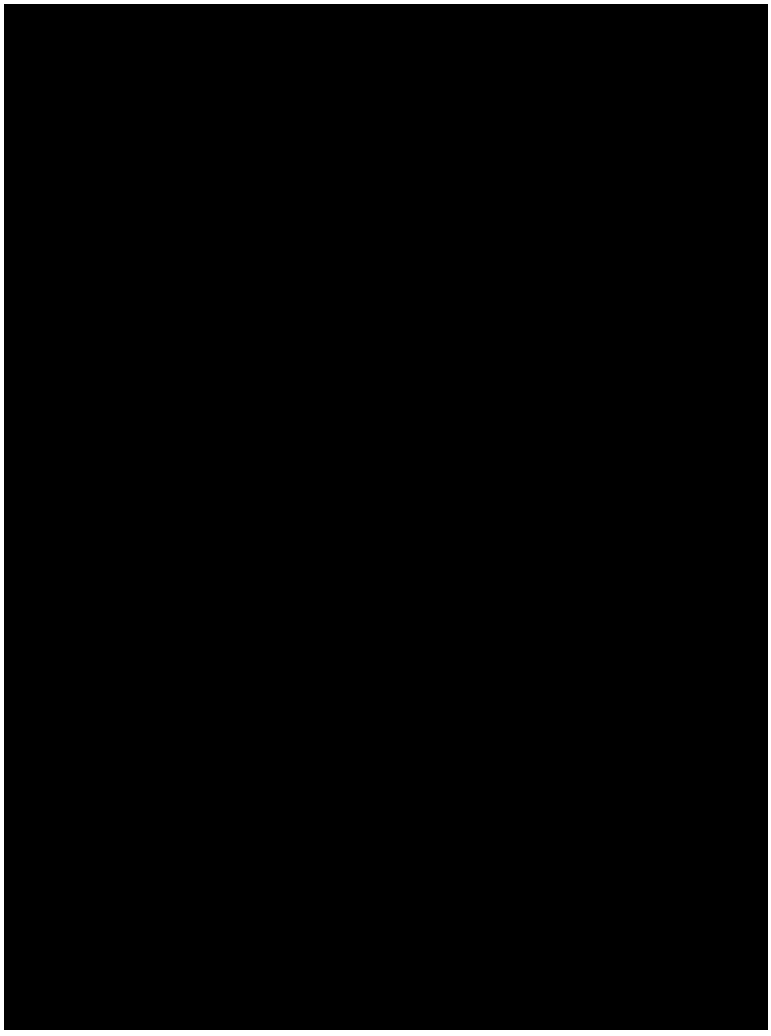

Fig. 40. Still from *Pandrogeny Manifesto* video by Genesis P-Orridge and Lady Jaye, 2006 (copyrighted image removed)

[447] See Genesis P-Orridge, Lady Jaye, *Pandrogeny Manifesto PART 1* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fDFiV3gl1E, 2006
[448] Ibid.

The *Pandrogeny Manifesto* video (later uploaded onto YouTube) starts with a realization that the human body is a host for DNA that is nonhuman, functioning as "merely an environment in a symbiotic relationship with it".[449] Genesis P-Orridge used the medical techniques of cosmetic surgery as well as online video manipulation in order to achieve both a prehuman and posthuman recombination of sexual characteristics. The blending of bodies was, according to them, evolutionarily advantageous. "Destroy gender. Destroy the control of DNA and the expected. Every man and woman is a man and woman",[450] proclaimed Lady Jaye just before showing the footage of Jaye and P-Orridge's face and breasts surgery in the second part of their video manifesto [Fig. 38.]. They perceived the annihilation of the sexual dichotomy as expanding the view of evolution. In their book *Nonbinary*, Genesis P-Orridge elaborates on their idea of Pandriogyny they had been developing since the beginning of the 1980s and writes that "the universe is made up of one kind of matter – everything. There is no binary universe. So there is no binary body".[451] They proclaim mutation as the "law of evolution" and associate it with art, creation, new ideas [and] experiments"[452] that are suppressed by control in human societies. The intention of the performer is to transgress the binary sexuality in order to achieve an unrestrained mutant reproduction of hermaphroditic bodies. During the process of 'ending gender' and 'breaking sex'[453] their aesthetic intention was also to communicate with the nonhuman entities within their body in an attempt to detach from the human characteristics of this body.

No-longer-human reproduction via technological decomposition

The fungoid 3D project, which I present at the end of this chapter, interrogates the vitalist understanding of communication technologies via my concept of fungosexuality, particularly through its relation to biological reproduction. The utilitarian applications of human technology don't exhaust its meaning, which is evident in the dual understanding of the term 'media' – as infrastructure to communicate information as well as materialities actively involved in the growth and reproduction of life.

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[449] Ibid.
[450] Genesis P-Orridge, Lady Jaye, *Pandrogeny Manifesto PART 2* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkhCkSXbYaE, 2006
[451] Genesis P-Orridge, *Nonbinary*, Abrams Press, New York, 2021, p.313
[452] Ibid., p.275
[453] Ibid., p.318

The processes of the media decomposition of human bodies, which I discussed in Chapter 1, describe the technological mediation of the bodies on the Internet in terms of body implosion. They are visions of disintegration leading towards corporeal mutations. The supposed technological extensions are invading the human bodies and re-negotiating their inner constitutions, "as we realise how close technology is to the body or how deep it already is inside the body",[454] according to artist Eduardo Kac. As technology intertwines with life processes inside human bodies, it opens up the possibility of technological replication that performs beyond sexual reproduction by means of the invasion of technology into the bodies and re-assembling them from within.

In my practice I use 3D scanning with an intention to expose the intimate and necessary biotechnological manipulations of digitally embedded fungoids, which enter the body of the performer. Drawing on Eugene Thacker's *Biomedia*, I recognise technological mediations not only as material agencies that change human bodies but also as alternatives to sexuality. Biotechnology and advanced media technologies define the limitations of sexuality as reproductive technique and suggest other methods of bodily reproduction. The multiple phenomena of rotten queer media, together with the concepts of fungosexuality they convey, come along in human cultures as vectors of transgression of sexual reproduction. It could be argued that media invite forms of reproduction for the human species that go beyond sexuality. The theory of biomedia thus presents a challenge to the cultural formations based on fixed sexual identities.

In her ambitious cultural critique, Camille Paglia investigates a great array of transsexual expressions from the mythology, through religion, theatre, and art to literature of what she describes as 'western culture'. Her concept of sexual personae[455] offers a reading of human nature and civilization as contextualised by the perpetual transformation of sexuality between male and female - and beyond them. She proposes transsexuality as a wider context to understand the concept of sexuality in human cultures, particularly the 'western' cultures sprouting from the root of ancient civilizations. Commenting on the ancient Greek civilization, she gives plenty of evidence for the transsexual character of the major mythological gods, linking it with the origin of the term 'technology' in the androgynous cult of Athena, who embodies "the mind as techne, pragmatic design, (that) was hermaphroditic for the ancients".[456] Technology is introduced here as a survival modality for human bodies that exchange and shift the shapes of their sexual

[454] Eduardo Kac, *Telepresence and Bio Art*, University of Michigan Press, Detroit, 2005, p.227
[455] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991
[456] Ibid., p.85

characteristics. Tied to the development of technology, the pursuit of science bears for Paglia the alchemical concern with the search for the perfect mutable substance. In alchemy, the primal form of matter and the matrix of life "was depicted as an androgyne, aregis ("double thing") or as 'chemical marriage' of brother and sister in incestuous intercourse".[457] This vision of primordial nondifferentiation gives Paglia an insight into the ever-transforming human nature, entangled with the techniques of transsexual morphs which precede sexualities of choice and eventually undoing them. Eugene Thacker's biomedia also re-discover technology in the similar notions of the return to life's breeding 'swamp' beyond sex, "teeming with monstrous prehuman mud creatures",[458] as media technology enters the body of humans and is gradually understood by them as integral part of their biology.

The theory of biomedia invites the conceptualization of body entities that are shaped through the computer-networked performances of the technologically dehumanised body and that are capable of trans-individual replications. In biomedia, not only is "the traditional "wet lab" of molecular biology … being extended, augmented, and even replaced by the "dry lab" of bioinformatics and computational biology",[459] but also, conversely, the computational processes appear as "wet" media again. According to Thacker, "biomedia are particular mediations of the body, optimisations of the biological in which "technology" appears to disappear altogether".[460] What he describes here is actually the reversal of the 20th century obsession with the disappearance of the body in technology into the 21st century revelation of the disappearance of technology in the body. Inspired by the 1980s Canadian proto-internet subculture of "cyberpunk" computer geeks and hackers, the term "cyberspace"[461] describes a utopian realm of technological disembodiment, which is characteristic of the imagination of cybernetics. Cyberspace, associated in the 1990s with the Internet, established across the global mass media culture a popular assumption about the immateriality of computer-based communication and the new form of intelligence that it conveys, rooted in the famous 'Turing Test'.[462] The test famously challenges human intelligence, suggesting that a computational machine will reproduce it once the machine is able to have a computer interface-mediated conversation with a human and will not be

[457] Ibid., p.198
[458] Ibid., p324
[459] Eugene Thacker, *Biomedia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004, p.2
[460] Ibid., p.6
[461] The term was popularized by the book: William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, ACE, New York, 1984
[462] Kihan Lee, "Embodiment/Disembodiment Dichotomy in William Gibson's Neuromancer", in: *Journal of British and American Studies*, No. 14, 2006, p.31
https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/086b/6692714c8a0a926704ed179b45e795e238cb.pdf

recognized as nonhuman by the human. Kihan Lee points out that the Turing Test assumes that intelligence is a disembodied phenomenon as it reduces human identity to language. This assumption is also deeply rooted in cyberpunk imagination, represented by Case the protagonist of William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* Case forgets to eat, uses a chemical toilet in front of his computer and in the critical moments in which he "is engrossed in his work within cyberspace, his EEG is flatlined, in what amounts to 'out-of-body' experience. In a word, it is during moments of physical death that Case seems to be most alive in cyberspace".[463]

Cyberpunk's disregard for the 'meat' of human corporeality inspired fantasies of abandoning 'the prison of the flesh' in the proto-Internet subcultures of the 20th century. Now, the 21st century 'post-Internet' culture concerns itself increasingly with the impact of computer-based communication on human bodies and their environments, like the impact of one's lifestyle on health, the involvement of embodied situations in computational processes or the key role of the technology industry and energy consumption on the climate change crisis, species extinction and the exhaustion of natural resources, as well as the role of the media in establishing the current global political regimes (USA, China or Russia) and the systematic exploitation of the global poor. There is no body-anxiety of transcending 'the meat' into virtual spaces feasible anymore, as people have to deal with the growing avalanche of problems related to the embodiment of "cyberspace". The digitization is considered inasmuch as the digital context changes the understanding of the biological, argues Thacker. Digital media have to be considered in the still wider corporeal context. This consideration finds its quintessential expression in the post-Internet art of mutant performers, who 'incorporate cyberspace' by mediating it through their bodily processes.

Thacker comments on the post-Internet civilization of biomedia by presenting all of the human historical activity, on different levels of abstractions, as biotechnology. He suggests that "In earlier techniques such as animal breeding or fermentation, the literal meaning of the term biotechnology is indeed this technical utilisation of biological processes toward a range of novel ends".[464] Thacker perceives all human historical (civilizational) activities in terms of the technological re-contextualization of biological components and processes. His important realization, which I would like to mobilise for my own purpose here, is that even the most abstract dimensions of technology actually offer material contexts for

[463] Ibid, p.31
[464] Eugene Thacker, *Biomedia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004, p.21

human bodily performances. Thacker promotes an understanding of biomedia that goes beyond the concept of the "simulation" of the biological body with bioinformatics tools. Instead, he encourages us to see biomedia as different kinds of materialities that act together with other biobodies. Post-Internet mutant performance art embodies this important shift in the cultural understanding of technological civilization.

Mutant Performance as Biohacking

Technology doesn't replace the biological body with simulations, explains Thacker. Digitalisation is not something separate from bodily performance. Bioinformatics, that is biological processes fused with computational technologies, formulates the context for the body enveloped, as essential data, by different technological patterns of relationships. Bioinformatics is widely applied in medicine to quantify the processes of human body and measure their regularities. Bioinformatics manipulates complex biological data such as genetic codes. One of the most famous biotech research initiatives of the past century was the Human Genome Project (1990-2003)[465] which attempted to pinpoint the relations between the configurations of biochemicals in cells and the self-making of human bodies – but it did not yield any definitive results. An even more intriguing follow-up is the ongoing Human Microbiome Project (2008-now)[466] which examines the genetics of the vital multitude of "microorganisms living in association with the human body" with a lookout on human health and disease, at the same time establishing the genetic understanding of humans as no-longer-human, since humans are essentially seen as being dependent on the massive support of nonhuman life forms. The computer manipulation of bio-data in both projects nevertheless has to be positioned back in the contexts of biology. Therefore, even the most abstract techniques of decoding the body don't abandon it. The techno-body "is also a rematerialised, rebodied body". [467]

In order to describe further the 'rebodied body' of biomedia, Thacker proposes the categories of 'the postvital' and 'the postnatural'. He considers human-designed receptor proteins that let pass only certain types of biomolecules, those whose shape fits the "microbe orifice", as biomedia. Eventually, he uses the example of respirocites, i.e. specially designed techno-blood cells that deliver more oxygen to human body. The other

[465] Human Genome Project official website: www.genome.gov/human-genome-project
[466] Human Microbiome Project official website: www.hmpdacc.org/overview
[467] Eugene Thacker, *Biomedia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004, p.22

example are DNA motors – nanomachines that use DNA biochemicals in their structure as well as energy source. Those two examples represent the categories of the postvital and the postnatural. Postvitalism embraces the technovitality of programmable matter. It offers a vitalist stance for biotechnology against the reduction of life to coding. Postnaturalism on the other hand emphasizes the embodiment of information in molecules. This corporeal practice of information makes a point that even the most abstract computational technologies have diverse bodily gravity on invisible scales.

Complexities of technological body emerge from the microbiological plateaus, although not as ‘generated’ by the DNA code but rather as performed on the cellular level of living organisms. Thacker describes the organismic body as compared to the bioinformatic body. The description answers to "three issues: the generation or origination of the living system, the adaptive modes of self-regulation of a living system, and the dynamic exchange of matter and energy of living systems as open systems".[468] Those issues are defined in microbiological terms by sickness as a qualitative distinction of biological open system. It seems that the very possibility of sickness defines the individual separation of biological complexity (such as the human) from the horizon of the open perspective of interconnected microbial networks. This very horizon of microbe events defines nonhuman bodies as indeterminately changeable. “It forms a radically ‘other’ model of the body, emerging from the predominantly technical orientations of systems biology, a model we have been calling the biomolecular body".[469] Here, the abstraction of communication technologies does not get rid of the corporeality of media but once again refines it into the superdiversity of the miniscule scale. Just looking at random bacteria, we can find more than a thousand genes in each organism, which under proper conditions what can change to a completely different species in a few seconds.[470] The excessive diversity of life perpetuates against corpo-scientific techno-ideologies that want to control life through abstract unification theories. Basic embodied participation in the world serves as a critique of theoretical reductionism, something that was cogently articulated by Franz Kafka in the following terms:

Now the world is known, however, to be uncommonly various, which can be verified at any time by taking handful of world and looking at it closely. Thus this complaint at the

[468] Ibid., p.150
[469] Ibid., p.163
[470] See Jasper Sharp and Tim Grabham, *The Creeping Garden - Irrational Encounters with Plasmodia Slime Moulds*, Alchimia, Godalming, 2015

uniformity of the world is really a complaint at not having been mixed profoundly enough with the diversity of the world.[471]

Kafka proposes as a strategy against concepts of the homogenization of the perception of the world. He encourages the entering and tasting of the world, in order to mix with its radical diversity. This seems to be performed by the 21st century subculture of young outcast biotechnologists from the MIT, with offshoots in San Francisco and NYC. Called "biopunks" by Marcus Wohlsen, in his book of the same title[472], they intend to "hack the stuff of life" by setting up DIY wet labs at their homes, using cheap technologies constructed from basic devices, which they order from the Internet and repurposed to serve functions analogous to the extremely expensive high technology of enormous corporations. Their attitude is that, most of the time, biotechnology is fundamentally no different from cooking. Through this they effortlessly engage with the hidden but most powerful forces of life.

The attitude of biopunks is playfully adopted by Jake and Dinos Chapman's iconic sculpture *Zygotic Acceleration. Biogenetic De-Sublimated Libidinal Model (Enlarged x 1000)*.[473] The sculpture [Fig. 39.] moulds incomplete but amassed bodies of children into posthuman clusters of abjection, encapsulating "a host of contemporary societal fears (such as) peadophilia, the sexualisation and exploitation of young children, biotechnology, cloning and medical research without boundaries".[474] The cluster of children's parts appears as a transgenic organ farm with genitals displayed on humanoid faces. Erected penis-snouts of a-gender pre-puberty kids fashion a dysfunctional wild ornament of this vulgar experiment by means of transsexual technological manipulations. According to Dominique Baque, Zygotic Acceleration questions the 'formatting' of a society that "instigates the bodies and eliminates the desires to the benefit of a generalised normalisation behaviours and technological fetishism".[475] Zygotic Acceleration works as a fantasy about DIY biohacking. It is a blasphemous totem that transgresses the sexual normativity through the revival of primal, monstrous practices of body replication.

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[471] Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, schocken books, NYC, 1961, p.41
[472] See Marcus Wohlsen, *Biopunk*, Current, New York, 2011
[473] Collection of Saatchi Gallery, London, 1995
[474] Diane Fortenberry, Rebecca Morrill, Josephine New, *The Body of Art*, Phaidon, London, 2015, p.364
[475] Dominique Baque, *La photographie plasticienne*, Paris: Editions du Regard, 1998, p.73

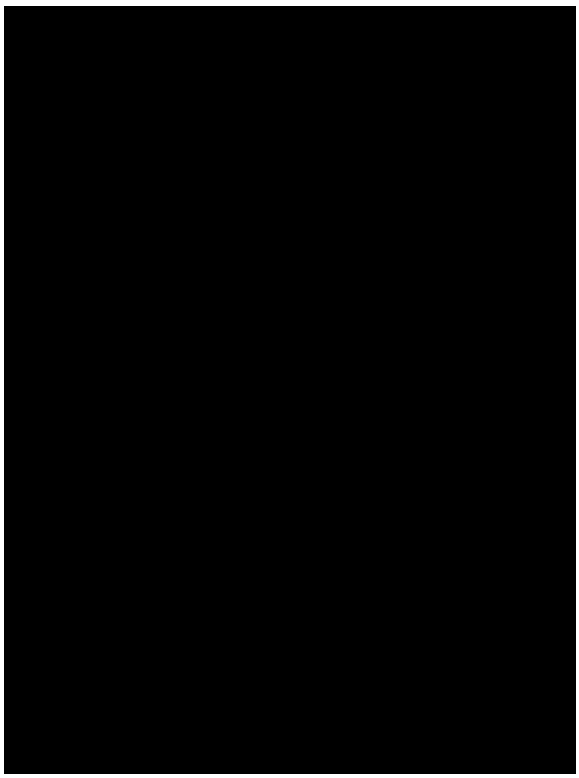

Fig. 41. *Zygotic Acceleration. Biogenetic De-Sublimated Libidinal Model (Enlarged x 1000)*, fiberglass sculpture by Jake and Dinos Chapman (1995). Photo courtesy: Saatchi Gallery, London (copyrighted image removed)

One of the most striking aspects of biohacking is its assault on the concept of natural law through the technological re-invention of life forms, something that Zygotic Acceleration expresses poignantly with the radically playful randomness of Chapmans' biotech children. This technological distancing from the essentialism of nature, embodied by Zygotic Acceleration, spawns uncanny progeny beyond any obvious form of sexuality. Mobilising the imagination of genetic engineering and cloning, it also flirts with the fetishist "theatrical exercise"[476] of sadomasochism. The latter has been described by Romana Byrne as a vivid form of what she considers 'aesthetic sexuality', a practice which eludes the concepts of natural laws and "resists an essentialised ontology of sexuality"[477] by playing with the possibility of re-inventing sexual performance. Byrne analyses sadomasochism historically as a cultural practice that produces new forms of desire through the detaching of aesthetic forms of sexual performance from reproduction. In this sense the theatre of pleasure becomes 'desexualised' in the process of the creation of new forms of pleasure "enabled by shifting attention from the genitals to the entire body",[478] which for Byrne is symptomatic not only of sadomasochism but of all queer sex. SM in her view taps into natural desires

[476] Romana Byrne, *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sadomasochism*, Bloomsbury, NYC, 2013, p.7
[477] Ibid., p.7
[478] Ibid., p.8

albeit it “paradoxically requires cultivation”[479] to achieve its forms of erotic art of “performing or play-acting power dynamics”.[480]

In Byrne’s description, sadomasochism not only abandons sexual reproductive functions by means of historically developing cultural practice, but is also linked to the development of industrial technology. In her conclusion, Byrne suggests a dialogue between the “history of sadomasochism, a particular form of sexual subjectivity, and the history of aesthetic philosophy”.[481] With the beginning of the industrial revolution in the late 18th century aesthetics being developed as a complex philosophy of mind, in parallel to the high technological relation of humans with nature, which was being developed then – while also constructing this very idea of nature. At the same time sadomasochism develops in Western culture as a sophisticated practice of artificial sexuality. Byrne stresses the point that although SM and other forms of fetishism may reference some ideas of a natural drive, nevertheless they are always defined against sexual essentialism, as the development of the practice requires an obsessive training of sensitivity. They are practical arts of creating unique forms of pleasure through elaborate post-sexual performances, which converge with the technological pursuit of genetic engineering and other biomediatic practices. Sadomasochists and biopunks share the indulgence in the beyond-sexual re-creation of the human body “through sublime self-dissolution and reconstitution”[482] of performative self-fashioning.

Realizing that "since first congealing in the primordial ooze billions of years ago, DNA has spent all but an infinitesimal slice of the earths history reproducing itself on its own schedule and in own combinations",[483] biopunks want to be the beginning of the new technological trend of widely accessible DNA engineering. "As reading and writing DNA becomes more and more like processing bits and bytes, the closer genetics comes to being a part of everyday life",[484] they claim and perform yet another variant of the fungosexual reproduction of their bodies through media. Since DNA synthesis companies have been in operation already for a while, biotech becomes as ‘natural’ as it is "to take the basic stuff of our organic existence and add it to your online shopping cart".[485] The Internet opens up direct access into the trans-human body through that process. The screens of networked computers outside of human bodies function as interiors of their

[479] Ibid., p.15
[480] Ibid., p.129
[481] Ibid., p.159
[482] Ibid., p.161
[483] Marcus Wohlsen, *Biopunk*, Current, New York, 2011, p.55
[484] Ibid., p.121
[485] Marcus Wohlsen, *Biopunk*, Current, New York, 2011, p.143

cells, as they allow biopunks to monitor and manipulate the miniscule movements of their lives. This relation makes some of the people playing with biopunk activism negate the demarcation between the inside and the outside of techno-human media-body. One of them is Philip Ross, a bioartist from the San Francisco area, who directly links the above described phenomena with fungi in his project "Mycotecture". Mushrooms Reishi or Ling-Chi are the raw materials of his sculptures "as they grow up within wooden frames to form tall, sturdy arches and walls".[486] Traditional mushroom breeding techniques play a similar role to genetic engineering in the shaping of living organisms for humans. In this project, fungi are formed into strong and durable bricks for DIY architectural recombinations. They can also be used to make mushroom tea but, more importantly, they can sensitise humans to a more subtle perception of life through the processes of decomposition, which transgresses any utilitarian function of myco-tech. In his aesthetic masterpiece *In the Praise of Shadows,* Jun'ichiro Tanizaki accentuates the 'Oriental' appreciation of decomposition as the most refined form of perception. He concludes that "if indeed 'elegance is frigid', it can as well be described as filthy".[487] An aesthetic study of decomposition thus seems to offer a gateway to the re-imagining of humans, who are invited by Tanizaki to learn their future from dirt.

The project of Mycotecture involves the imagination of biopunks but without using the tools of genetic engineering. It brings to our attention the fleshy presence of porous membranes that actually perform the body, beyond any reductionist scenarios of DNA code determinism. In my fungi media narration I desire to spectacularly expose the glands that secrete DNA mixtures, regardless of the mathematical abstraction of the genetic code. Mishima, a cult writer and butoh dance collaborator of Hijikata, suggested that the words should "cut (the) flesh away"[488] to expose that "mind stinks in (the) guts, like a sewer".[489] Mishima's literary method explores the dark vitalism of human communication and body media. In his literature, Mishima gives an account of the medium of writing and its resonance with his body. As his writing penetrates human bodies beyond rational calculations, they perform "irrational encounters" with live entities within the environment.[490] Fungoid bodies of fungi and slime moulds reveal the unsettling vitalism of biology, as they animate decay or creep, radically transgressing the integrity of the human body's identity. In that sense they capture hypnotic attraction of media indulgence. Their

[486] Ibid, p.202
[487] Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, *In the Praise of Shadows*, Leete's Island Books, Stony Creek, 1977, p.11
[488] Richard Appignanesi, *Yukio Mishima's Report to the Emperor*, Sinclaor-Stevenson, London, 2002, p.336
[489] Ibid., p.339
[490] See Jasper Sharp and Tim Grabham, *The Creeping Garden - Irrational Encounters with Plasmodia Slime Moulds*, Alchimia, Godalming, 2015

shapes and moves are strangely resembling the new aesthetical endeavours of the queer art of bodily manipulation online and of post-Internet mutant performance.

The Humus of Holobiont and Queer Rot

Performing post-Internet acts with microbial bodies at the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan has been philosophically informed by the horizontal approaches to nonhuman materialities. My embodiment of those approaches is revealed in the ongoing biomedia project *Holobiont*.[491] The term holobiont originally described the evolution of life through the mutation of the entanglement of many species that come together as living networks, as explained by Lynn Margulis.[492] I understand this term as an expression of queer relation of human performers' bodies to the performance of microbes' bodily entities. Inspired by Donna Haraway,[493] I understand 'queer' not only as a non-normative form of human sexuality but also as an expression of a trans-human intimacy with other life forms. In this understanding queer also signals a desire associated with the mutant possibilities of a future life. For this project I used my film footage of restrained body parts, fragmenting them and turning them into abstract landscapes of flesh by means of video editing. I then projected the fleshy video entities on living microbial entities that were feeding on rotten materials in the Dungeons. These hybrid biomedia perform as queer relation between humans and microbes.

[491] Documentation of *Holobiont* http://neofung.tumblr.com/aroar

[492] Margulis Lynn, *The Symbiotic Planet,* Phoenix, London, 2001

[493] Haraway Donna, *When Species Meet,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008

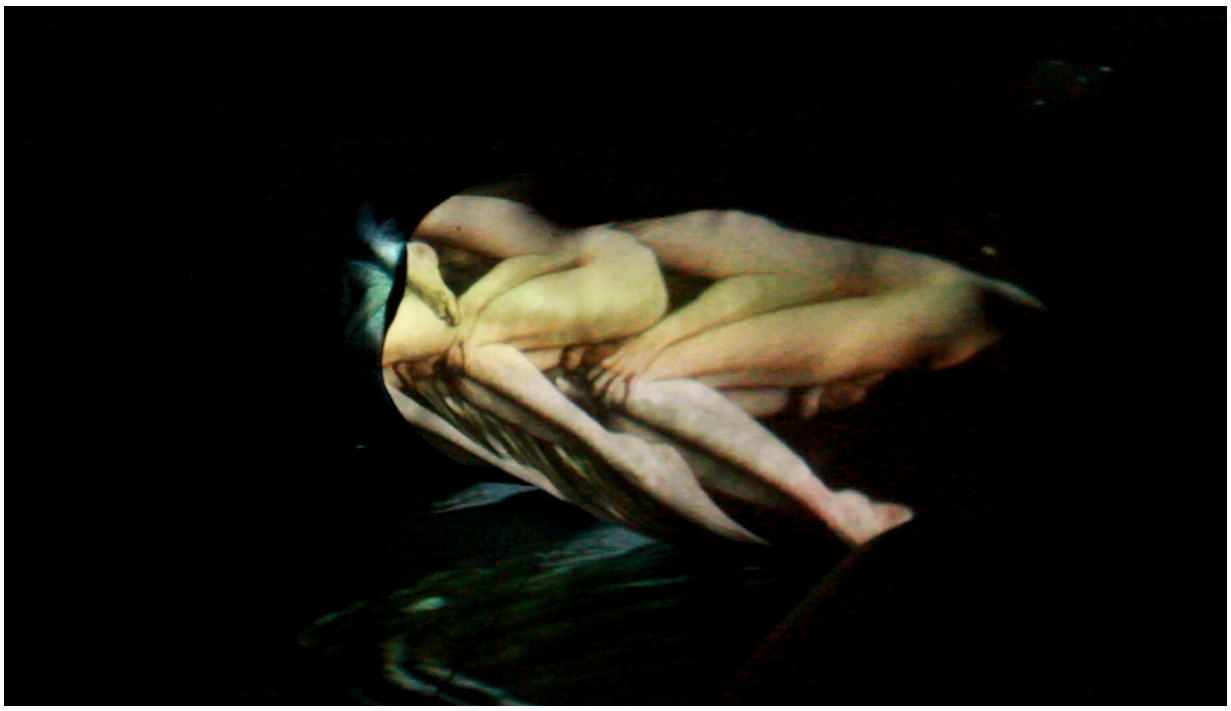

Fig. 42. *Holobiont* video projection on the body of Piotr Bockowski. Photo credit: Loi Wang (2017)

The root of the English word *queer* means *spoil*, *ruin* or *wreck* and this spectrum of meanings is what I capture in my 'fungosexual' analysis of performative bodily mutations. Speculating on the theories of non-normative sexualities, Zach Blas[494] considers queerness as a form of decay, which he explains in terms of social disengagement. What comes into play is also the creativity of lifestyles that feed on the destruction of social bonds and a decadent *ethics of degeneration,* transgressing beyond the domesticity guarded by family values. Along the same lines, Judith (aka Jack) Halberstam recognises in queer sex "a death drive that undoes the self".[495] In his/her analysis, the queer subject "has been bound epistemologically, to negativity, to nonsense, to anti-production, to unintelligibility".[496] The queer body, and particularly that of an effeminate man, is being described as a *self-shuttering* body that practices an unwriting, an undoing, and an unravelling of the self. Those processes entail for Halberstam a negative, masochist and vulnerable acts against oppression, as only a *radical passivity* involved in refusing the system of social control can empower the human. The way it can occur is through the disintegration of individualities, as unified ideas of identity are produced by the control system that conceptualises the humanist self in the first place. Queerness eludes that

[494] Zach Blas, "Queerness, Openness", in *Leper Creativity*, punctum books, New York, 2012, p.107-109
[495] Judith Halberstam, "The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies", *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, Tel Aviv, p.140
[496] Ibid., p.141

control through the intensities of decomposing bodies. In this very sense my *Holobiont* is a queer political activity.

Fig 43. *Holobiont* video projection on the piles of rotten materials at The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. Photo credit: Piotr Bockowski (2019)

Holobiont, like all other mutant performances of Chronic Illness, indulges in a strategy of communication with nonhumans described by Bennett as a "playful element"[497] in approaching the non-identity of matter. *Holobiont* devolved out of not only rotten materials but also performative gestures of humans that courageously speculate about nonhumans, at the same time being aware of not knowing it but performing with it nevertheless. Between repeated waves of floods, the Dungeons were exposed, during Chronic Illness events, to various modes of performative embodiment of fungi media. They explored narratives of biomedia devolution of life by means of undoing humans with aim to connect them to subtly dispersed bio-forms throughout decaying urban environment, yet unnoticed.

[497] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* Duke University Press, Durham, 2010, p.15

According to *Arrival Cities*[498] sociological study, at the beginning of the 21st century roughly half of the global population participated in a transition from traditional local farming communities to the hyper-technicized monstrous megalopolis of trans-future. People abandon their traditional localities ruled by strong ties of family structures and dislocate into hyper-diversities of postmodern cities, organized by the network media activity. This phenomenon defines the dwellers by the more dynamic, fluid and fragmentary technological relations to their urban peers as well as the global environments exposed to the greater intensities of city impact on them. It calls for new symbiotic trans-human strategies for living, expressed by Haraway in her recent plea "Make kin not babies",[499] which calls for the development of human bonds beyond the family, sexuality and other forms of intimate companionship. Haraway postulates a withdrawal from family values and heterosexuality, with a view to seeking kinship with nonhuman life. Considering issues related to overpopulation and the reproduction of social repression mechanisms by family structures, Haraway encourages narrations of human and nonhuman communities coming together through opening up to the sensitivities of co-existence and intimacies between various life forms. She actually states that separations of definitions of different critters are secondary to the strange intimacies of holobionts that essentially make critters in a process of their entanglements with each other.

Haraway renames humans as 'humus', in an attempt to expand the trans-human intimacies all the way to the most alien forms of life, be they microbial or fungal, embedded in the abiotic matter energies and intensities. "Plants, along with bacteria and fungi, are also animals' lifelines to communication with the abiotic world, from sun to gas to rock".[500] Opening towards the exploration of trans-human entities that every notion of 'humanity' has to be mediated through, Haraway emphasises the concreteness of the corporeal presence of life. "Including human people, critters are in each other's presence, or better, inside each other's tubes, folds, and crevices, insides and outsides, and not quite either".[501] Those tubes, folds and crevices emerge before thought and ideas, a statement, which urges all theoretical constructs to yet again think through mutant body performance of symbiotic becoming.

The becoming of mutant performers with nonhuman others is related to the general notion of embracing the strangeness of life forms and their worlds as unexpected origins of what

[498] See Doug Saunders, *Arrival Cities*, Windmill Books, London, 2011
[499] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, London, 2016, p.5
[500] Ibid., p.122
[501] Ibid., p.98

can possibly be human. Last but not least, sympoietic becoming falls into the category of queerness as a general metaphysical category. Queer, being a word for the oddity of the other, links with the key notion of the cyborgic manifesto. “Cyborgs are critters in a queer litter (…) Queer here means not committed to reproduction of kind and having bumptious relations with futurities”.[502] Non-normative sexuality eludes the reproductive function of human sex and deconstructs the social structures based on the traditional family, breeding kin networks that challenge human identity, more than ever in the context of media and urban technologies. Last but not least, there is also a significant “death drive” diagnosed within the technology-inspired odd sexuality, which, as it breeds intensities of excitement, also performs the nourishing processes of fungoid decomposition. As Lyotard commented on distortion aesthetics in art: “What we are interested in is the dimension of otherness, alteration”.[503] Fascination with disfigurement clearly shows in the techno-perversions of the post-Internet performers of bodily mutations.

3Decay

Pursuing my research into the merging of the communicational understanding of media with the embodiment of media vitalism, I started probing visual parallels between the digital decomposition of an image and organic decay. Attracted by this aesthetic correspondence, I decided to shift my performance practice towards the creation of mutant body forms, enacting fungoid and digital reproduction. After years of probing the viscerality of sewage physiology through invasive acts within the microbial entity of urban guts, I conceived a series of alternative experiments. Those experiments were pursued in order to give an account of the technological conditioning of my perception of life, as well as to test how far the correspondence between digital image making and microbial decomposition can go. The experiments were aimed at the digitalisation of my body moving within the alien entity of the rotting space of The Dungeons. The process of digital mediation was undertaken via the 3D scanning of my body parts with a hacked movement detector (produced for a game platform) and connected to a laptop. Computer software rendered the images and offered a variety of decomposition modes in the process of editing. The digital decompositions were further merged with photographs of piles of rot in the Dungeons, and also with my body parts projected onto them. [Figs 18-29, pp. 138-144]

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[502] Ibid., p.104
[503] Jean-François Lyotard, “Critical Function”, in: *Driftworks*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1979, p.78

All those forms of re-mediation interplay with a complex technological performance of moulding multiple photographs of my body into a 3D model that is later rendered into a 2D image and edited together with my macrophotography of fungoids that inhabit the Dungeons. This is to establish the 'aesthetics of telecommunication'[504] as defined by Eduardo Kac. This aesthetic mode assigns aesthetic value to the processuality of 'media events' rather than to any "results" of the actual image composition of my 3D decay. Kac considers communication as the main aesthetic value of media. He also considers "communication [to be] the essential characteristic of life".[505] Following his thinking, I can consider the 3D scanning of fungoids to be a way of participating in their life processes. With a view to this, I 3D-scanned mouldy patterns, rotten materials and fungoid overgrowth within my performance space, meshed digitally with my own body. The activity became a cyclical process of fungal biotelematics – a form of high-tech communications with nonhumans. High definition 3D resonances of my gestures dispersed into the amorphous pixel formations, blending with patchy transfigurations of the decomposed Dungeons. The space was also reconstructed by computer analysis of data from the 3D scanner and thus reconfigured, in order to convey the aesthetics of decomposition via high-tech digital manipulations. The result is the visual convergence of primordial life processes and advanced technological data manipulation. The digital simulation assisted me in the mediatic mergence with the bodily entity of the Dungeons. The mediations also offered a form of kinship with the fungoids, in a similar vein to Annike Flo's "bioscenography" project 'Cocreat:e:ures', which I got to know only later.[506] Flo had spent several months of 2018 inside her basement near Oslo, where she bred fungi companions. She described her experience as:

> belonging to another creature. Matter appeared to be dissolving, floating away, including my body- and by proxy also my thoughts. In this tactile world with no clear boundaries between bodies, matter and space I was in the process of becoming less and less defined. As if cells were loosening from my body- one by one joining the particles[507]

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[504] See Eduardo Kac, 'The Aesthetics of Telecommunications', in: *Telepresence and Bio Art,* The University of Michigan Press, Detroit, 2005
[505] Eduardo Kac, *Telepresence and Bio Art,* The University of Michigan Press, Detroit, 2005, p. 2018
[506] Annike Flo, interview for CLOT Magazine: https://www.clotmag.com/interviews/annike-flo-scenographic-perspectives-of-the-anthropocene?fbclid=IwAR0vOL7rH0M9_PymvXh56kyrv4HQX-FGvyGnPTCRosRrQVvsasUTV8T_5Bc , 2019
[507] Annike Flo, 'Concreat:e:ures', in: *Carry the Fire zine 001,* Carry the Fire, London, 2019, p.62

Through my technological performances of 3D scanning I attempted to, similarly to Flo, undergo a particular material transformation by "becoming a medium"[508] as well as "move the sense of performance to living matter",[509] beyond my humanity and towards fungi. This performance was intended by me as a communication with the mysterious nonhuman entitity that the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan is. The entity has been guiding me with aesthetical inspirations for the past few years and every event, act, rehearsal and body or filming session was a cut into that nonhuman life that had existed there already, before I even entered the space. *3Decay* was conceived as a technological platform of shared existence with fungoids.

Nano-transmissions have been touching and reacting to the irregular shapes of microbial entities, involving high-definition abstract deformations, which offer a form of coexistence with digital invariants of my own techno-bodily actions. In her hybrid between a tangible and digital environment (as she manipulated the documentation of her fungal environment through computer image editing), Flo not only encountered fungi as potential oddkin but in a way simulated a completely alien life environment of an imaginary planet. Mycelial outer-space expansion performs through darkness, humidity and a multitude of genders of mutable media with the multitude of mushrooming techno-extensions. Those mushrooms are the slimy flesh of cloning architecture of Flo's bioscenography, which consists of spore secreting tubes and mist. The spore clones replicate the confusing multistructures of mycelial threads and create another unknown hyper-complication of the threading. Visions of environments taken over by alien decay also invite practices of storytelling about transplanetary life infections.

By shifting the scale of their attention, the mutant performers open up or break apart what previously seemed continuous.[510] In this way via their media technology, the performers step into fungal life and find discrete microspaces for themselves anew, as virtual techno-fungoids. The continuity of the mutant performers' bodies is challenged as the biological fabric reveals itself to be porous. Medical practice or biological sciences approach the living bodies but they don't explain their urges to move, to transform – to perform. Technology thus can be said to develop in the history of humans as an evolving metaphor for what their bodies can do or become through the mediation of nonhuman environments.

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[508] Robert Mitchell, *Bioart and the Vitality of Media*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010, p.70
[509] Ibid, p.83
[510] Glenn Kurtz, *The Aesthetics of Scale*, http://www.glennkurtz.com/cgi-bin/iowa/essays/aesthetics/index.html, 1997

Simulating alien environments at The Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, in my bioart experiment with 3D scanning I want to engender a different sense of life, one described by Robert Mitchell not as harmony but "rather [as] a strange, embodied sense of alien, nonorganic life. This is a sense of life as fundamentally excessive, beyond my own goals, intensions, and bodily capacities, and as something that threatens -or promises- to transform even my own agency into media for further transformation".[511] My e-fungoid body performs microbial behaviour by means of digital technologies. I replicate my selves into entities of bio-digital mutation. By enacting gestures of auto-cannibalism and of the consumption of the technological decomposition of objects, exemplified by the pixel rot of organs, I attempt to replicate technologically through the mediatic mergence with fungal agencies. Here, 3D scanning embodies fungoid mutation via a partial hybrid fusion of my mediated body with the mediated fungoids, a process which connects technological mediation to fungosexual reproduction. Fleshy mutant "technomorphism"[512] fabricates and sculpts bodies of challenged integrity. According to Denis Baron, the art of the technological mutation of the human body works by contemplating the future of the body. Technological mutations often favour reproduction through the dispersion of fragments that merge into ephemeral hybrids. Apparently "the whole dismantling of the body truly epitomises the symptom of the entrance into a new era".[513] Media can thus be said to replicate humans beyond their sexuality, via technological decompositions. In the process, they end up making the no-longer-human bodies fungosexual.

[511] Robert Mitchell, *Bioart and the Vitality of Media*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010, p.89
[512] Denis Baron, *The Mutant Flesh,* Dis Voir, Paris, 2009, p.13
[513] Ibid., p.85

Conclusion

Exploring the philosophical context of mutant performance art, my research in this thesis has examined – on a theoretical and practical level – some of the ways in which the understanding of the human body is currently being transgressed in bodily mediations unfolding on the Internet. Through my critical readings of dark-vitalist philosophies and selected science texts on microbes and fungi, I have argued that these performances allow us to reassess our relationship with microbial and fungoid life. The concept of 'fungi media' has served as a figuration that has allowed me to mobilise the generativity of life enacted in fungal processes (processes which are omnipresent, even if they do not consciously register for most people) to imagine a new way of thinking about human bodies and about the connections between them. Inspired by the digital manipulations of the body image online and its simultaneous disintegration and proliferation through network computing, I have researched mutant performers who take those mediations *beyond* the Internet by incorporating them into their trans-human acts. I have also developed, and critically reflected on, my own performance practice in which the concept of fungi media has been an important figuration. With this, I have intended to demonstrate that, as performers remediate the technological transformations and distortions of human bodies online, they also find new tangible embodiments that embed Internet processes in the organic generativity of fungoid life. My reason for working with ideas about (and, in my curatorial and performance practice, with the materialities of) microbes and fungi was to develop a new materialist theory of corporality and sexuality, which I have termed 'fungosexuality', as a way of moving beyond the current concepts of queer and trans theory.

I have dedicated the most significant part of my philosophical research to unfolding my reflections on nonhuman life and then developing them further through the aesthetic triggers of mutant performance. In its first part of my thesis, I have built a conceptual skeleton for all those performative experiments with body mutations, with a view to transgressing the nihilism and commodifying dehumanisation of the body in our present-day media cultures. This approach has been intended to serve as an invitation to practise life-affirming engagement with nonhumans that can take place within, between and around humans. With this understanding, post-Internet mutant performances can be interpreted as marrying the decomposition of human bodily forms online with the fertile materialities of fungal decomposition. This interpretation has allowed me to look at the emergence of life-

affirming trans-human ecologies beyond the Internet, in a variety of spaces – including that of my own squat which doubles as a performance space. Drawing on Kathy Acker's proposition that "society is living out its dying in its ruins"[514] through urban slum subcultures, I have purposefully examined the post-Internet performance of bodily mutations by situating it in the squatted architecture of decay throughout the entirety of my research process (2015-2021). The acts that have taken place there were curated by myself as figurations featuring the corporeal undoing of technological infrastructures through the ethico-aesthetic practice of bodily performance. The pursuit of the mediated aesthetics of bodily mutations and the decomposition performance of illness and decay in the context of collapsing global infrastructures has been orchestrated alongside my written thesis in an effort to outline an environmentally-accountable vision of media culture via the fungoid life of human waste.

The concept of human bodily decomposition unfolding through and beyond the Internet, which I interrogated in Chapter 1, has allowed me to situate the post- and trans-human bodies of mutant performers in the fungal ecologies of the biosphere. By way of a wider contextualisation, I have raised the question of the environmental accountability of human civilization and its impact on multispecies coexistence. In order to explore this issue further, I selected contemporary philosophical literature that rethinks human bodies in environmental terms. Orchestrating a discussion on the intersection of transhumanism, new materialism, dark vitalism and post-Internet media practice, and focusing it around the ecosophies of decomposition, I linked those philosophical discussions to the science-based theory of mycelium outlined by Paul Stamets and the theory of evolution through microbial fusions proposed by biologist Lynn Margulis. Both theories draw on, and progress, groundbreaking research within bioscience, foregrounding as they do the fungoid decomposition of bodies and its significance for maintaining living environments. I have drawn on some aspects of those bioscientific theories in my philosophical research in order to embody and test the relevance of artistic experiments with bodily shapes in mutant performances in our global technoscientific culture. In this context, mutant performers are seen as joining the ongoing cultural efforts to renegotiate our current understanding of human bodies. Yet mutant performers also create a cultural phenomenon of their own, which, through my curatorial practice involving performance events located within decaying urban infrastructure, I situate within post-industrial subcultures. Through this cross-contamination of philosophy and biology, complemented

[514] Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*, Grove Press, New York, 2018, p.63

by my own practice research that attempts to enact some of these ideas, my thesis has aspired to demonstrate that the current subterranean practice involving the digital destruction (or decomposition) of the human body online is not just a macabre fad or a random throwback to body-horror looks. This is why in my research I have worked on providing extensive theoretical background to such forms of mutant performance. This has been undertaken with an intention to view such performances as a visual, tangible and body-processual form of philosophical reflection on the planetary ecological crisis known as the Anthropocene.

Moving the context of bodily mediation away from disembodied digital forms and into trans-human fungal acts, my research has encapsulated numerous figures of mutant performers who have embraced the understanding of media as a life-generating environment. The phenomenon of mutant performance art opens post-Internet culture to speculative techno-vitalism because it looks at the Internet through the concept (and matter) of microbial intelligence. Chapter 1 has thus consulted an array of contemporary thinkers who philosophically address the agency of fungoid live entities that are involved in the making of human bodies – and their technological media. Theoretical landscapes of new materialism, dark vitalism and transhumanism have assisted me in exploring the fungoid life and its interweaving with online mediations of human bodies. I have argued that post-Internet mutant performers embody those theories in their acts by transferring their practice of online bodily deformation image into tangible acts unfolding within physical performance spaces of decaying metropolitan environments. Curating those practices, processes and spaces over the years has allowed me to develop some corporeal strategies of my own for philosophising about life.

Through my curatorial and performance practice of the Chronic Illness events, which I have discussed in Chapter 2, I have attempted to enact fungal decomposition as both a biological process and a concept. The Chronic Illness events have allowed me to define the post-Internet bodies of mutant performers not as autonomous individuals but rather as momenta of environmental movements of fungoids. I see the performers as being defined by trans-corporeality, as they disperse into perspiration, spray themselves across the space or collapse into porous hollows that absorb the spores of the Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan. From the perspective of the space itself, the Dungeons figuratively consume the bodies of performers and incorporate them into the material amalgams of the Chronic Illness events. This is the environmental, physical mode through which my research practice has attempted to extend the interrogation of fungoid life beyond

traditionally conceived notions of sex and reproduction. In navigating the events, the concept of the ‘chronic illness’ has allowed me to emphasise the trans-corporeal character of mutant performers as their acts abandon the idea and look of a healthy body. Through what has thus become of form of ‘philosophical performance practice’ my research actualises a mergence of humanoid bodies with the space of polymorphous Dungeons, with its ongoing fungoid mediation.

The above-mentioned curatorial concepts discussed in Chapter 2 have also framed my own performance art that constitutes the practice part of my research. Inspired by butoh theatre as well as Artaud’s theory of bodily transgressions, I developed a series of corporeal mutation acts, which I called *Synthetic Organs*. Their contorted choreographies were orchestrated around the self-made wearable body extensions, which had been purposefully contaminated by mould growing at the Dungeons. This was an attempt to peformatively enact bodily mutation within the context of the fungoid environment.

Another conceptual stage that involved the meshing of my performing body with the fungoid environment of the Dungeons was encapsulated in my bio-media installation *Holobiont*. In the process several videos of digitally edited bodies were projected onto rotting piles of materials hosted at the Dungeons as well as onto my own, partially restrained and partially moving body. My body became corrupted in alignment with fungoid corruption of the anonymous materials at the Dungeons, and then both were meshed with the digital mutations of manipulated image motions. *Holobiont* embodies a concept of fungal decomposition and its embodiment by humand and nonhumans alike.

Last but not least, I have presented *3Decay*, which is the third stage of my performative interrogation of the conceptual enmeshing of my digitally distorted body with the mediated fungoid environment of the Dungeons. The project involved a series of 3D scans of the space together with fragments of my body in motion. I edited images of those scans with my photographs of fungoid overgrowth within the Dungeons, accompanied by textures of the contaminated surfaces. The vital role of *3Decay* editing for my thesis was as an attempt to formulate visual possibilities for staging mutant bodily reproduction through a hybrid involvement between fungoids and digital media.

More specifically, through the practice of bodily performance unfolding at the Dungeons I have sought the possibility of redefining queer sexuality as a technologically-mediated polymorphous entanglement between humans and nonhumans. Post-Internet performance has thus become in my practice-based research an exploration of fantasies

pertaining to a trans-species coexistence and co-evolution. This exploration has been my way of trying to establish a form of queer sexuality that is not focused on traditional heterosexual penetration but that rather foregrounds the penetration of post-human bodies by non-human environments, as encapsulated by the fetishism of rot aesthetics. To develop this point, in Chapter 3 I have looked at selected examples of post-Internet mutant performers as they present themselves through digital manipulations and the documentation of their online live acts. The selection of acts discussed in that chapter was made with a view to probing a growing attraction to monstrous performative mutations, which is increasingly shared by Internet users who transgress the strictures of the online medium, (re)turning to bodily performance in spaces other than the Internet. I have been particularly interested in examining how performers enact trans-human body replication beyond human sexual reproduction. Specifically, I have looked at the modification of performing bodies via fetishism practices related to fungoid decomposition. My theory of fungosexuality emphasises this fetishist embrace of rot and the desire to transform human bodies into monstrous appearances. In my view, decay fetishism in mutant performance establishes itself as a new way to perpetuate the life of the body. It offers an alternative to conventional human parenting, as performers multiply 'bastardised' versions of their bodies or extend and modify them into creaturely fusions. These practices as framed by my research constitute a post-Internet remediation of the online modifications of human bodies. I also consider them an alternative form of sexuality that reproduces bodies through performances with fungoids.

The phenomenon of fungosexuality I have proposed in my thesis embraces a diversifying multitude of non-binary gender identifications. Yet its specificity is captured by an odd choice of pronoun – 'it'. Calling themselves 'it', some mutant performers explicitly reject human individuality related to the status of a person, associating themselves instead with nonhuman life forms. In this way, they allow for the spilling over of their selves into trans-human relations with creatures, substances, material multitudes, environmental processes and chimerical clusters. The 'it' pronoun in the context of my research defines vectors of fungosexual mutations, as the performers focus on connections with nonhuman life forms rather than identity politics.

This alliance with the non-identity of fungoid entities, which I have researched in my thesis through both philosophy and performance, gains an additional significance in the context of my activity in the squatting movement. Being anonymous, semi-nomadic inhabitants of abandoned architectures who apply anti-surveillance solutions in their lifestyles, squatters

are themselves considered a social 'it', as they lack many identity characteristics of regular city dwellers. They join the estimated statistics of 'internally displaced people', who, together with refugees and other asylum seekers, amount to 1% of the world's population.[515] I critically zoom in my work on that uncertain margin of human living. Displacement is understood here as a violent disruption of one's living conditions related to the lack of shelter. My participation in the squatting movement, which has become the crucial part of my practical research into fungi media through its location within the transient occupations of decomposing architecture, also offers an example of an 'internal displacement' within urban areas. Looking at this process in the context of the variety of movements of people across history, Robert Cohen presents migration as a major civilizational process and a hybrid human-nonhuman activity – a position I embrace as foundational to mutant performance. "The flow of people around the world … is comparable to, and often linked with, the flow of goods, resources, money, images, pollutants, drugs, music, data, and many other aspects of contemporary life," says Cohen.[516] Taking into consideration the 'mobility' perspective has allowed me to interrogate the idea of societies as porous and open-ended processes, with the artistic take on the phenomenon of squatting providing a methodological and conceptual framework for approaching this idea. With this, I have been mindful of the fact that the growing numbers of inhabitants of 21st century megalopolises employ a variety of strategies for their internal displacement. Those strategies arguably offer opportunities for a renegotiation of the dominant ways of life. The mutant performance art of Chronic Illness squatters as presented in my thesis embraces the context of urban displacement, post-industrial decay and waste of civilization as vital processes that participate in the making of trans-human bodies.

In conducting my practice research, I have mobilised the way in which the uprooted identities of squatters become a raw material for the transgressions of mutant performance art. Observing their fungosexual bodily mutations, I have begun to understand them as being uncoupled from cultural, political and family values, values which serve as foundations for the concepts of human exceptionality in nature and human superiority over other life forms. My conclusion is that mutant performers intentionally transgress these concepts that have led to the industrial exploitation of nonhuman life forms and that have accelerated the extinction of multiple species. To challenge those concepts on the ground of the philosophies of life, I have looked into the micro-scale of civilisational biowaste while

[515] 82.4 million worldwide according to UNHCR, 18 June 2021, www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html
[516] Robin Cohen, *Migration,* Andre Deutsch, London, 2019, p.9

researching mutant media performance. With this, my research has aimed to shift the perception of the human's exceptional position amongst other life forms by accentuating the intense changeability of human bodies via their embeddings in the multitude of alien life. To sum up, my research argues that mutant performance art focuses on that very perceptual shift, creating a post-Internet subculture that embraces precarious living within urban decay though acts of life-affirming presence that involves living bodies. The phenomenon of fungosexuality, constructed in my research from scattered networks of post-Internet mutant performances, involves a number of ethico-aesthetic strategies of investment in decomposition processes, an investment which represents a wider social call trend to de-accelerate global populations and their industrial societies. My thesis has hopefully demonstrated that mutant performance art can encourage consent to a form of societal decline, thus curbing the so-called development and inspiring the release of technology-trapped energy by observing ecological sustainability, withdrawal from consumerist habits and a decline of sexual reproduction. My conclusion follows a suggestion made by Steve Shaviro that, in the technological environment of overstimulation by media, enforced distraction can be cultivated as a lifestyle choice. The proposed strategy of withdrawal from information overload is manifested by the aesthetics of mutant performers, as they move away from the utilitarian context of computational mediations of the Internet and instead engage in the processes of decomposition by transforming their body shapes.

Even though the formal part of my PhD research has now come to an end, the work has opened up many new questions and further avenues for investigation. This has been partly driven by the unfolding world events. As I was completing this research project, my London squat found itself under repeated lockdowns enforced in the UK by the government due to the global pandemic caused by an infectious coronavirus.[517] Over the last 18 months, global media have been promoting the idea of "self-isolation" in order to tackle the spread of the Covid-19 infection. Many humans have repeatedly locked themselves in their homes in front of their computer screens. This has arguably been the greatest media event involving the Internet so far and it certainly focuses on the relation of mass (media) technologies to microbial life. The virus originated in China and allegedly spread all over the planet within less than three months. To begin with, the spread of the virus couldn't have been possible without the global industrial infrastructures, which are mostly produced in China and shipped all over the world. The virus likely spreads through

[517] UK governmental guidance on 'lockdown': https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others

cargo transports as well as via humans using airplanes, cars, ships and trains. The rapid transportation is a twin of rapid communication. Both technologies are developing together as their operations are intertwined in their efforts to control industrial production. Thus, the virus pandemic is not only "announced" online but is essentially an effect of the Internet and the technological infrastructures that were instrumental in establishing it. The Internet is the virus in more than one way. To notice this is to grasp the basic idea of my fungi media research – in dealing with the Internet, humans are dealing with the global biosphere of microbes. Being an embodiment of microbial life, human technology also changes the biosphere. The mediated pandemic is a crisis of technology that is being managed with state-enforced strategies of the 'social distancing' of humans, which ultimately distort the industrial production and consumption – and thus can be recognised as a form of 'decomposition' performance. After a month of quarantine measures in China, the main global industrial areas reduced their air pollution to almost unnoticeable levels, as a result of reduced production. Fewer container ships as well as tourist cruise ships stopped contributing to the oil pollution of oceans, thus cutting on their significant contribution to the greenhouse effect. Last but not least, China has been encouraged to consider the possibility of introducing more regulation of industrial animal farming and a ban on wild trade, all due to the infectious microbes affecting humans via technological mediations. In the midst of the Internet virus pandemic, global high-tech corporations cannot therefore deny the severe entanglement of their media within fungoid life.

Calculated and logical claims to immateriality, according to critics such as Shaviro, underlay the corporate imagery of IT that illustrates the concepts of the self-referential symbolic order, the singularity of mind and the transcendence of software. Those concepts serve the corporate power structures by helping them excuse their environmentally deadly parasitism as reflected in industry-stimulated "biodiversity loss, declining crop yields, more frequent heatwaves, more extreme weather and heavy rainfall".[518] Myra J. Hyrd argues that after the 19th century of an industrial expansion, humans now have to deal with its consequences, amongst which the most significant is overpopulation and its monstrous impact on the planet. Humans "have mastered nature to such extraordinary degrees as to have produced the mass global movement of species"[519] and this proliferation puts the biosphere in danger. Yet the immateriality of the Internet and its networked technologies is nothing but a fiction.

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[518] Robin Cohen, *Migration,* Andre Deutsch, London, 2019, p.184

[519] Myra J. Hird, "Proliferation, Extinction, and an Anthropocene Aesthetic", in: Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein (eds), *Posthumous Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2016, p.254

This is why I see the major contribution of my thesis as lying in introducing mutant performance as a materialist philosophy of nonhuman life ‘after the Internet’. Mutant performers adopt fungal strategies of decomposition, shape-shifting and non-sexual reproduction, which embody online image manipulations and distortions of human bodies. As my written text has developed various theoretical dimensions of fungosexuality, it has hopefully led to challenging the productivist and consumerist social logic by moving beyond the heterosexual family concepts that structure it. Can fungosexuality offer a form of resistance to the creeping dystopian scenarios of techno-totalitarianism and the 21st century media surveillance? Can it stage better ways of living in the world – and with each other – under the present conditions of the environmental crisis? These questions will guide my research and practice well beyond the confines of this PhD project.

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