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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW

Winchester School of Art

**‘Distance, however near it may be’: Revisiting ‘Aura’ on
the Axis between Painting and Digital Technology
within a Deleuzian Framework of ‘Becoming’**

by

Marius von Brasch

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW

WINCHESTER SCHOOL OF ART

Doctor of Philosophy

‘DISTANCE, HOWEVER NEAR IT MAY BE’: REVISITING ‘AURA’ ON THE AXIS BETWEEN PAINTING AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY WITHIN A DELEUZIAN FRAMEWORK OF ‘BECOMING’

by Marius von Brasch

This practice-based research sets out to explore new ways of visualizing and conceptualizing the notion of *aura* in art. It departs from Walter Benjamin’s widely known critique of *aura*, the thesis of which is that *aura* as ‘uniqueness’ of an artwork decays with the rise of technological reproducibility. Benjamin affirms with the decay of *aura* also the loss of the transposition of religious projections of distance onto fascist politics. His thesis had a major influence on contemporary critical theory where *aura* is still approached with great reservations. These concern a relapse into religious structures, which mirror, so the thesis argues, the fact that *aura* has been, also in Benjamin’s ambivalent conceptualization, left ‘territorialized’ in a regime of transcendence in art.

The main research question has been: What could *aura* mean for painting in the expanded field, especially in relation to digital imaging? The outcomes of this research are paintings, works on paper (both involving the input of digital sources), digital films and writings. The thesis develops a reading and visual ‘mapping’ of *aura* in the framework of Gilles Deleuze’s (and Félix Guattari’s) ontology of immanence where difference and its repetition as differentiation replaces the static metaphysics of ‘origin’ or ‘essence’.

Splendor Solis, a series of book illuminations from the Northern Renaissance proved to become a major visual source for experimentation. *Aura* is introduced in this alchemical work as the ‘splendour’ of *Becoming*, the deframing power of the differential processes that accompany individuation.

As a sensation experienced in intuitive art practice, *aura* affects and is affected by a field of interacting multiplicities and the potentiality of temporal differentiations, which reach beyond any ascertained subjectivity into virtual collective questions and problems. *Aura* suggests as an ‘echo’ of *Becoming* an involvement with affects, and the research follows strands between qualitative intense moments that activate a ‘wound’ and extend to what Deleuze calls a ‘wound

that existed before me', an experience related to the synthesis of future, which confronts an individual with its emerging double.

Constructing, or 'mapping' *aura* as visuals on an axis that involves media of 'uniqueness' *and* digital technology gives those outcomes an ontological status of 'simulacra' or assemblages, far from the traditional associations *aura* would evoke. Touching both experience and experiment, so the thesis argues, *aura* in immanence can provide an access to the virtualities of the 'new' in art practice.

The research introduces a visual scenario or 'conceptual persona' for intuition, which as *method* of this research folds both practice and writing. Friedrich Hölderlin's unfinished play *Empedocles at Etna*, provides a metaphor or metamorphosis encompassing *aura*'s and intuition's involvement with immediacy and duration.

The practice documentation of the thesis reflects the strands of the research as plurality of its differentiations, allowing the dynamics of its method in action to reflect the dynamics of *aura*.

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List of accompanying materials

DVD *Distance*, however near it may be
containing:

Pages

Writing

Drawing

Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling (Speaking)

The Visit

Deer Feathers

and some previous digital animations

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Marius von Brasch

declare that the thesis entitled

**‘Distance, however near it may be’: Revisiting ‘Aura’ on the Axis between
Painting and Digital Technology within a Deleuzian Framework of
‘Becoming’**

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed:

Date:.....29.10.2012.....

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Introduction

The practice-based research presented here proposes, from the angle of an ontology of immanence, new ways of visualizing and conceptualizing a notion that, since Walter Benjamin's interventions, has gained a problematic status in contemporary criticism due to its religious associations: *aura* in art.

Walter Benjamin's conception of *aura* concerns the 'uniqueness' of an artwork, its inherent dynamic of a historical constellation; it appears as a 'strange tissue of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin 2002b, 104). The notion, apart from its reference to a somewhat meaningful encounter with an already existing artwork's 'radiance', extends in this research, being practice-based, to a not at all uncommon sensation in art practice that explores, like the practice element of this research, foremost 'intuitive' elements.

Involving intuitive or 'chaotic' mark making into practice (with the different materialities, in this research of paint, pencil and the digital) opens a process, which seems accompanied or guided by an indeterminate yet dynamic sensation, which only at an unpredictable yet certain point will come to a standstill, when a work 'feels' becoming an 'outcome'. In hindsight, the outcome might reveal an entirely unexpected yet meaningful 'perspective' on a (often not consciously posed) question: it seems to embody, to condense layers of a fluent relationship between an emerging visual and conscious decisions, of an open yet dynamically charged paradoxical simultaneity of closeness and distance, an 'in between'. This sensation of 'otherness' as integral to the process, which dynamically seems to animate the process of making or the encounter with, can be associated with *aura* perhaps exactly because it concerns a 'magical' or 'numinous'¹ aspect of making art, which touches 'intuitive' drawing/painting practice and the 'haptic' aspect of digitally produced visuals² not less than a viewer's experience with art.

Benjamin's critique of the *aura* in art targets mainly its magical elements which, excluded as the 'sacred', build the base for religious regimes and extend from there to the rituals of aestheticized political power, most contemporary for Benjamin to 'humankind['s] own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure'

¹ See footnote 7 in chapter 1.1 (p. 19)

² Laura Marks calls images haptic those 'that invite a look that moves on the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realizes what she or he is beholding. Such images resolve into figuration only gradually, if at all' (Marks 1999, 162).

coming with the unstoppable rise of fascism. In his 1936 seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility*, he states that the decay of *aura* in art historically coincides with the rise of technological possibilities of reproduction and dissemination. When he appreciates this decay of uniqueness in art practice as a historical interruption of contemplative interiority, which attaches itself to a model of teleological ‘progress’ prevalent in his contemporary environment, he does so in order to revolutionize the social function of art from a Marxist point of view: ‘*Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics*’ (Benjamin 2002b, 106). Simultaneously, he reviews and develops the critical potential of radically opposed Jewish strands of cabalistic tradition and its redemptive Messianic potential of irruptions in time ‘on the stage of history and within the community’ (Scholem 1971, 1). From the perspective of Messianic critique, ‘progress’, apart from initializing and supporting the aggressive expansion of power and supremacy, negates the force of first Language (Truth) that fragmented with history into shards, became contorted in its involvement with translations and installations of politics and exploitative injustice. Benjamin’s critique of *aura* is thus also a test of the critical potential of Jewish Tradition in its dialogue with Marx’s critique of progress.

However, it is obvious that Benjamin’s project of ‘profane illumination’, ‘the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination [...], a materialistic, anthropological inspiration’ (Benjamin 1999, 209), remains ambivalent. It half-heartedly reduces *aura*’s gaze of transcendence to the projection of social experience onto nature yet does not commit to the line of critical contexts that connects the notion of *aura* merely to Marx’s description of ‘mist-enveloped regions of the religious world’ extending to the fetish character of commodities (Marx 2000, 473); it leaves *aura* oscillating at the blurred borders between enchantment and disenchantment. In a recent essay on *Aura of the Digital* for example, a Marxist line is consistently kept when the illusion of unceasing capitalist accumulation and abundance is named as *aura*, enabled by digital technologies producing a supposedly infinite virtual space of representation, thus, so artist researcher Michael Betancourt claims (2006), enveloping and transfiguring production as magic. The notion of *aura* in such contexts is dismissed typically as an illustration or cunning deviation from reality as ‘illusion’; it becomes an addendum to human efforts to compensate cultural lacks and damages by constructing religious instances as also laid out in Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* (Freud et al. 1961). But such assessments tend to foreclose the potential of further ‘profaning’ those dynamics (like inherent in *aura*) that have been, historically and ideologically, appropriated by religious interpretation.

In contrast, the present research attempts to find out more about the potential of a profaned *aura* and argues for deterritorializing *aura*’s solidification or

containment, for dissolving its mask of being a somewhat abject mediator of hierarchies between 'original' and 'copy'. The strategy taken here follows Benjamin's idea of 'purging' *aura*, though not focusing on the strands of his Marxist-Messianic critique; it works with the question how *aura* could be described within a framework of immanence. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze developed an intricate network of innovative concepts starting from the question of how to avoid the separation between Being and beings, thus dealing with ontological questions. His move liberates difference from its position of a 'hinge' between Being and beings whereby difference traverses as repetition of itself temporally i.e., as differentiation Being and beings simultaneously, dissolving the separated Being/beings into *univocity*. *Becoming* is this differentiation of differentials, of virtual dynamics, of desire-couplings actualizing in the real world, being 'identical' only as objects for a mind. *Becoming* in the univocity of immanence thus 'produces nothing other than itself [...and] lacks a subject distinct from itself' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 262), it produces a subjectivation (rather than a subject) dealing with the impulses and questions of virtual dynamics. Immanence is thus the domain of the *reality* that both the virtual and the real are and of time, both as continuous flux *and* formalised syntheses that constitute the actualizations of *Becoming*. Time interlinks permanently actualizations between continuity (flux) and discontinuity (stasis) and thus commits both movement and stasis to transformation. At this point opens a place for questions about the encounter with *aura* in a creative process, in its relationship to *Becoming* in the middle of the foldings of virtual/real and the 'events', which emerge like dice-throws from virtual intensities. *Aura* concerns then less as 'illusion' than as qualitative and powerful incisions of internal time (duration) in a line of time that seems straight but effectively becomes labyrinthine with the challenge that any moment with its futurity holds for the process of subjectivation and emergence - also in art practice.

The research develops from the question: What could *aura* mean for painting in the expanded field³ of contemporary art practice focusing on an 'intuitive element, especially in relation to digital imaging? It proposes that a *profaned aura*, taken out of its framework of 'sacredness' and installed within an ontology of processual unfolding of difference in immanence could provide a key for the understanding of the sensation of intuition that for some artists is the departure point and focus of

³ Rosalind Krauss developed the term in her essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (in: Foster 2002), published in *October* 8 (Spring 1979), showing how in postmodernism the practice of individual artists and their use of a medium experience a particular rupture, setting both apart from the modernist purity ideals. '... what appears as eclectic from one point of view can be seen as rigorously logical from another.' (46) Krauss assumes already in 1979 that painters will expand their practice into media supported by technology: 'The postmodernist space of painting would obviously involve ... a set of terms ... that would probably turn on the opposition *uniqueness/reproducibility*' (47).

their practice. It proposes that *aura* in such a philosophical framework leaves the separation between the 'sacred' and the 'non-sacred' behind and points dynamically at the creative potential of *Becoming*. Echoing the material differentiations of *Becoming*, it traverses a field of immanent production of desire in a fold of 'subjectivation' and pre-individual, collective and problematic dynamics. *Aura* as an animated sensation in 'intuitive' art practice concerns then a differentiating multiplicity of practice rather than a division between an artist and an object. Touching on pre-individual and collective questions and 'wounds', so argues the thesis, the sensation of *aura* can mediate and contribute to meaningful experience within the ambivalent economy of the digital.

In order to see if Benjamin's assessment of the 'cult-object' as static placeholder for aestheticized political power (as 'uniqueness, authenticity') is consistently tenable, it seemed promising to involve older picture sources that visualize *aura* directly into the practice part of this research and to interlink them with the heterogeneous strands of traditional and digital media. A decision was made to use Mathis Grünewald's iconic *Resurrection*, a part of the Isenheim Altar pieces, and *Splendor Solis*, a series of book illuminations for treatises on alchemy dating back to Northern German Renaissance. Both sources deal visually very directly with *how aura* 'works', one of them painted for a church, the other an esoteric, 'private' document for initiates of alchemy. A main part of the practice became to digitalize and fragment the sources' apparent uniqueness (all of the source pictures are reproductions, which nevertheless could trigger enough affect to begin researching with them) and use these processed new image files as the base for the emergence of new paintings, drawings and videos.

Working closer with *Splendor Solis* that provides a depiction of *aura* from heretical alchemy from an undoubtedly eclectic background (Christian, Jewish, Cabbalistic, philosophical), allowed steps to remove *aura* out of its context of static representations of an origin as (ontologically contorted, as in Benjamin) copy. Here, *aura*'s processual character, which works 'through' the frames of single images of the series, links to the deframing power of *Becoming*. It showed itself to be in closest connection to *Becoming*, being inherent in the single images, which function as fragments of the flux (process) that leads to an image of *aura* depicted, as much as in the whole series that culminates eventually in becoming the 'radiance of the sun', *Splendor Solis*.

But rather than a *result*, as such teleological order might suggest, *aura* traverses the series at any point. It subverts the chronological order of the 'Great Work' by layering and fragmenting what appears as disjunctions from the start. Instead of an uncontaminated light, the 'Great Work' suggests a continuous transformation within a continuously folding 'chiaroscuro'. The actual final depiction

of *aura* appears thus almost to be deflecting from its processual quality, as it is the result of an attempt to capture what is always and already traversing as strands of *Becoming*. However, *Becoming* needs to be framed exactly in order to disrupt what it has framed. *Splendor Solis* as a sequential order of images ‘following’ the disjunctive becoming-*aura* documents this paradox.

‘Mapping’ less visible or defining strands of *aura* in an image, either in the distribution of forces as visual elements or references from one image to another, led to the methods of practice documented in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. It suggested making inherent flows in the source images more visible and enhancing the aspect of their being framed fragments; to ‘break’ the given frames in favour of ‘mapping’ virtual intensities coming along with the sensation of *aura* during the process of making. Questioning *aura*’s place between original and copy suggested exposing the fragments to the polarity between a supposed original (the handmade oil painting) and digital technology as medium of dissemination. *Becoming* within the framework of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference proposes asymmetrical processes between virtual intensities and multiplicities and thus does not support separating technological advances like the digital from humanity (as ‘nature’ versus technology); as part of contemporary life, digital technology provides an ambivalent tool or medium, which points at the responsibility for its use within micro-political practice. The digital is involved throughout the entire research: in drawing and paintings indirectly via projections of digitized, manipulated source fragments onto paper or canvas, which traverse the multiplicity of the practice, a field including materials, artist, forces etc; in films directly as ‘tool’ that enables ‘smooth’, not yet fixed and manageable states of transformation, which are stored digitally as striated, fixed versions of a film.

As a painting or drawing, the layers and strands that map *Becoming* in time build ‘crystal images’ that can hold ‘the present [as] the actual, and *its* contemporaneous past [as] the virtual image’ (Deleuze 2008a: 76). In films, this crystal quality is distributed onto a timeline, result of an editing process that breaks down a straight narrative in favour of enabling a visual experience for the viewer that leaves more space for own experience.

The practice showed an increasingly conscious engagement with achieving greater closeness to the mediation of the ‘instant’ that encompasses and holds not only the impact of materiality of the media applied, but also features an ‘agent’ of differentiation. Deleuze’s notion of *Becoming* relates to such an agent in the figure of alchemical Hermes/Mercury in *Splendor Solis*, a messenger mediating and linking heterogeneous worlds who, with the delivery of a message (the composition and manifestation of the image), vanishes or dies. The heterogeneous zones are contained by the symbolic image of the alchemical Hermaphrodite where they build

a conjunction of opposites, an unstable, continuously returning and refracting equilibrium that affirms the potential and resilience of the tendencies of *Becoming* against permanent solidification. Not just affirming that the individual emerges within a process of individuation as psychological hybrid of male/female, the Hermaphrodite, holding the world egg with its pre-individual tendencies (as *anima mundi* or *Body without Organs*), points at the challenge given with the interconnecting desiring-machines and their production of ‘not one or even two sexes, but *n* sexes’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 296). *Aura* as unfolding ‘radiance’ of the Hermaphrodite, as an intuitive experience with art (practice) suggests with its transgendered quality also the dynamics of *Becoming* as escaping any binarity, thus moving away from a central position (which traditionally *aura* would refer to as ‘rays’ of the sun, the Idea, divine face/eyes/mouth).

Aura as an echo or intuitive perception of the deframing power, of continuous yet disjunctive foldings of *Becoming* in an outcome as fragment of a potentially ceaseless flux is, so argues the thesis, part and sensation of differentiation, of difference in movement, which is reflected in artistic practice by refolding, by making it conscious or creating modes of interpretation around it.

Expanded art practice, which experiments with this movement and the dynamics between uniqueness and dissemination, and between flux and fragment, touches on the question of how to capture the line between flux and fragment, how to capture what intuitively appears as ‘immediacy’ on a static support or in time-based media and how to understand it. Such open-endedness in art practice meant reconsidering an understanding of ‘finishing’ an outcome, which suggests itself, while focusing on ‘immediacy’, with an increasing awareness of *aura*’s function of ‘guiding’ through differentiation.

The status of works emerging from such practice as ‘originals’ is destabilised by various factors: with regard to pictures ‘based on’ the Renaissance work *Splendor Solis*, they appropriate and fragment source images, which themselves contain fragmented (then) contemporary appropriations; the new appropriations submit to digital manipulations, which then are traced, not literally but integrating the impact of materials and affects. Although a new outcome can differ so strongly from the source images that references may appear to be unrecognizable for most viewers, its status is one of being a fragment of a process of differentiation, which creates outside of systems based on origin. As such, the new image is likely to embody a ‘simulacrum’, not as ‘degraded copy’, but with a ‘positive power which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*’ (Deleuze 2004c, 299; Deleuze’s italics) and involves carefully considered decisions and selections with regards to materiality and contexts involved. ‘Arbitrariness’, traditionally associated with the simulacrum, resonates with a rebellious indifference toward serving visual

mediations between divine and mundane systems of order. In Deleuzian ontology, the simulacrum or assemblage is less arbitrary than a composite of materials, actualized virtual intensities engaging with questions and problems and selections of an artist engaging with these ‘desiring machines’ (being one oneself). The simulacrum is thus the outcome of an act that attempts to leave the contraction of an instant as open as possible for the complexity of the multiplicities involved in it. For an artist this means to act, as Arnaud Villani puts it, as ‘letting oneself act, to let the virtual infuse, without forcing it’, to practice ‘an *appropriating deappropriation*’ (Villani 2010, 77). The outcomes of such a process of *Becoming*, which in the practice element here seems ‘guided’ or assisted by the sensation of its echo or vibration (*aura*) could be seen as punctuations, ‘occasional points of dynamic equilibrium’ (Sellars 1999, 16).

However, as the course of the research proposes, the decisions and selective awareness, which are elements of ‘following’ *aura* in the sense described above, are intricately bound up with specific moments in time or responses to qualitative ‘events’. This aspect became prominent through an affective, in the case described here, quite painful impact of reaching to a ‘wound’ at first not determinable. It suggested that the sensation of *aura* might not emerge from an attitude of indifference or detachment but coincides with instants of quality, of a Stoic ‘propitious’ moment in time that allows tapping a potential of the ‘new’.

The ‘new’, taken seriously, can deliver its promise only *outside* of a teleological model of future with its inherently restricted possibilities (in contrast to *potentialities* that jeopardize the teleological objective); thus, if *aura* mediates the potentially ‘new’, it can not rest on either ‘origin’ or ‘fulfilments’ of eschatological models but must emerge with open-ended and immanent differentiations. It encompasses both, the completely unexpected ‘new’ *and* the fragment with its historical signature, the moment when the fragment appears as melancholic ruinous shard.

These two faces reflect the polarities, updated by Deleuze, between *Chronos* as the ordered, castrated time of succession and the ‘event’ or *Aion* as the ‘royal child’, which is introduced in one of Heraclitos’ fragments (Diels/Kranz B 52) as: ‘Eternity [aion] is a child at play, playing draughts: the kingdom is a child’s’ (Barnes 1987, 50). As non-intentionality of ‘being-with’ emergence, the openness for the aleatoric becoming-present (*Chronos*) of a past that has never been presence, it eternally returns as repetition of differentiation.

In this research, such a significant moment actualized a personal ‘wound’. However, in the set-up of the expanded practice introduced here, a personal wound becomes simultaneously a mediator or thread to, as Deleuze puts it, a ‘wound that existed before me’ and that refers to a specific condition of modern consciousness (thus not ‘eternal’ but historical), when it faces the alienating double of the self that

the next moment, the return of a need of synthesizing the self, holds. To realize the differentiations along this connection, so the result of this aspect of the research, mirrors the differentiation from emotion to affect.

The wound ‘that existed before me’ in art can be visualized as a *caesura* or fissure, which presents ceaselessly the impossibility of instantaneity as an *identity* of emergence and representation.

The step of introducing Hölderlin’s unfinished ‘mourning-play’ *Empedocles at Etna* provides a visually inspiring ‘conceptual persona’ for the *caesura* on the one hand and allows a closer look at the relationship between *aura* and intuition on the other. *Aura* is an sensation connecting to intuition that makes it difficult to describe it. However, intuition itself can become method when the differentiations in time as duration, which such experiences provide, are mapped and described, a method concerned with the visualization and description of ‘a plurality of acts, a plurality of efforts and directions’ (Deleuze 1999a, 43) and followed throughout this research. Philosophically, intuition as method and as proposed and applied by Henri Bergson and Deleuze, strives for letting each ‘thing’, each state to be traced or mapped and described, become its own concept. As practice-based research, the process of painting/drawing/editing in its tension with conceptualization has such a strong weight on the sense and affects involved that it felt right to develop a conceptual persona rather than a concept, keeping thus the particular strand of embodiment. Empathizing with or inviting closer the ‘distance’ that comes with the intuitive awareness of *aura* as an objective of art practice, and this includes the input of digital media and manipulation, reflects the intuitive element and produces a particular kind of outcome: an embodiment (painting/drawing/film) of tracing *Becoming* as differentiation that is simultaneously the application of intuition as method. The outcomes and the writing fold into each other with a differentiator in between, an echo holding both together in one ‘conceptual persona’.

‘Profaning’ *aura* as proposed in this research is certainly a speculative, contentious step; however, it proposes also an angle on intuition that provides with an indeterminate yet meaningful (‘numinous’) sensation a doorway for *experience*, a subject at the heart of both Benjamin’s and Deleuze’s thought. Where Benjamin observes the irretrievable loss of experience (which coincides with the decay of the *aura*) as taking hold of what happens to us i.e., as an act of refolding that grants an experience of ‘self’ in capitalist information society, Deleuze’s philosophy targets, with its inherent demand to continuously construct experience via experiment as the ‘new’, the crippling redundancy of communication and information language and imagery, which is always based on fixed, thus already *possible* dispositifs. When the research thus engages a ‘vitalist’ position for the notion and sensation of *aura*, it does so it with a very clear scope of ‘human and non-human limitations’ (see Lash

2006, 328) and the strands that lead from artistic subjectivation to collective problematic questions. In terms of dealing with the digital, this latter point of meaningful differentiations interrupts what Bill Nichols called already 1988 a fetishization of processuality which, in contrast to the appropriation of objects in reproduction, comes with the potential of simulation (Nichols 2003). The folds of practice and writing and of writing and practice interweave *practice* with material and social contents from the angle of immanent univocal differentiation.

The axes explored by the practice, allow experiments and experiences resulting in outcomes that build fusions and tangible hybrids between heterogeneous media (the digital and the analogous) and practices (Renaissance/alchemical and contemporary art practice). Experimenting experientially with these strands suggests a relativity and at the same time singularity of the 'new' that, in its tension with the 'old', can actualize virtual yet immanent forgotten, heterogeneous potential with the support of the sensation of a profane(d) *aura*.

The written thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 provides and prepares the conceptual background of this project by introducing its key elements: Walter Benjamin critique of what he calls aura; methods and particular perspective of the practice element of this research; the alchemical picture sources from the Renaissance, which provides a link to aura in a framework of immanent Becoming; an overview of Gilles Deleuze philosophical conceptualization of Becoming and its relevance for this project; some implication of the axis between painting and digital technology envisaged.

Chapter 2 documents the practice-based element of the research. It is based on notes taken during the practice and follows chronologically the project's gradual development.

Chapter 3 continues by proposing a conceptual persona or 'masked' concept in the middle of the fold between practice and theory in art research. It is 'intuition', which in this practice-based research involves with *aura* as practice as much as it holds the key for a method of conceptualizing its differentiations.

Methodology

This project is informed by reflexive practice and Sullivan's notion of visual arts as knowledge: transformative as a continuously widening process, constructivist as a consequence of the integration of theory, contextual as information entering into knowledge of users/viewers and conceptual as being grounded in the practice of making that uses knowledge available (Sullivan 2010, 100). The research engages a cross-firing of, or rhizomatic strands between, an open-ended post-discipline practice and critical discourse. Creative practice is understood here as simultaneously guided by protocols and intuition; discourse as hermeneutic investigation of texts and images, based on the development of a specific ontological position, following the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze.

By engaging with *aura* in art, a notion hovering on the borders between art, philosophy and history of religion, this project aims to contribute with new ways of visualization and contextualization *towards* a non-religious, 'purged' concept of *aura*. As this research is practice-based, it commits to contextualization as much as to the impact of senses, imagination and affects. It builds thus a hybrid in-between the task in art to extract affects and percepts and the task in philosophy to extract concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 24).

An advantage of applying a practice-based research to the subject of *aura* is given by the 'ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning' that 'intuition' (according to Oxford Dictionaries) as an integral element of art practice provides. Intuition, a common factor of art practice that is often left conceptually vague, relates effortlessly to *aura* in art as already Walter Benjamin's description demonstrates: a 'strange tissue of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin 2002b, 104)

As *research*, art practice becomes part of a rigorous framework that affects directly its intuitive elements. An intuitive notion and subject of knowledge-to-be-gained like *aura* can gain more clarity exactly at the point where the tensions between analytical positions (in this case contemporary philosophical key concepts) and practical approaches (experimentally engaging intuition) meet or 'clash'.

At the heart of this project are thus creative tensions generated by paradoxes that evolve with instinctive understanding and 'doing' on the one hand and discursive contextualization and creative planning on the other hand. These tensions

concern the subject, *aura* itself, as much as the overall structure of the thesis as a coherent project.

In a framework of *Becoming* with its inherent problematic of flux and fragmentation, the tensions suggest axes of inherently *unstable* polarities, which require methodologically to be reflected in the choice of media (involved in this case is the axis between handmade painting and digital in an expanded field) and contexts (connecting ancient art with the digital, alchemy with contemporary Deleuzian metaphysics, digital film with Pre-Socratic philosophy etc.).

Such axes allow transdisciplinary constructions of metamorphoses, both in practice (in form of sequential outcomes in painting/drawing or time-based outcomes in film) and writing (the strands of questions evolving from one proposed research question). Working on such axes responds to the observation that they generate from what *aura* provides as an experience 'in-between' with its associations to connectivity and an allusion of something to be discovered between connected points.

It would have been possible to explore the *aura* as 'experience' within a psychoanalytic or phenomenological framework. However, already looking at Benjamin's description reveals an engagement of a non-subjective element, a vividness of nature or art that suggested leaving the restriction of 'subjectivity' behind and to see how far I could go operating with art practice as an assemblage of 'multiplicities', a Deleuzian concept that dilutes a psychoanalytically framed subjectivity and allows exactly the conceptual approach to connectivity I was looking for. The research results showed that subjective factors concerned mainly questions of responsibility, which rise with the emergence of the 'new' (in the sense of outcomes and media involved).

The question, how a core aspect of the practice element of this research that transcends the experience of the return of the repressed and rather suggests an affirmative creative flow that *is* the dialogue with the evolving piece of work, could be contextualized and supported by contemporary theory, concerned a specific methodological approach. It led to a known problem of research that plays a much bigger role for this project than initially anticipated: the more or less conscious subscriptions to specific ontological frameworks that deeply influence the choice of subjects and subsequently methodologies referred to (Love 2002)⁴.

⁴ A few years ago Terence Love argued that the traditional five chapter model of postgraduate dissertations was flawed. He proposed that the traditional grounding of the model in 'research methodology' should be replaced by a model where candidates have to account for their ontological and epistemological perspectives before they offer a methodological perspective on which their research methodology (and then the particular research methods) is based.' (Garner 2008: 22)

The decision to creatively adapt Deleuzian key concepts for this project is, of course, such an ontological ‘subscription’ to a philosophical model that supports a ‘case’ of testing whether *aura* can be explored outside its traditional religious framework so as to rescue some aspects of significance for contemporary practice and conceptualization.

The main research question has been: What could *aura* mean for painting in the expanded field, especially in relation to digital imaging? It remained the germ cell throughout the whole project, from which the other questions with their axes and polarities spread out.

To reflect the emphasis on an unfolding process required considering how to structure the thesis, its written part, the exhibition of the visual outcomes and their mutual relationship. As a continuously widening process, a ‘discovery of a ground behind every other ground’ (Deleuze 2004b, 80), the research deals with attempts to grasp the immediacy of *Becoming*, which differs as visuals or text. Thus, I decided to present it in two different aspects: as a time-line of documenting the results of contextualization (the written part from chapter 2 onwards) and as an assemblage, an exhibition (of the visual outcomes) embodying the rhizomatic connections between the works.

Clearly outlined philosophical (ontological) positions and protocols, as well as intuitive disruptive and unpredictable elements, are applied to both, practice and writing. Thus, those polarities are equally important and function *mutually* as *parerga*, being beside (*par-*) a larger work (*ergon*), as ‘hybrid[s] of outside and inside’, as Jacques Derrida outlines in *The Truth in Painting*; they build each ‘an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside’ (Derrida 1987, 63).

The first chapter introduces (conceptual) key elements of this research, including an introduction to Deleuze’s notion of *Becoming*. It seemed important to place a conceptual argument for reading/visualizing *aura* in Deleuze’s framework in front of the following second chapter, which builds less systematically than the first on notes taken during the artistic practice. This step allowed on the one hand a more concentrated introduction into Deleuze’s inventive and multi-layered vocabulary (or concepts), which lead consistently away from assumptions of objectivity in favour of perspectives encompassing temporal differentiations within fields of forces; on the other hand, it allowed more freedom, on the basis of a preparation, for the following practice documentation and some of the surprising turns that a project engaging *Becoming* promised. The text is thus designed to make knowledge more accessible for the reader and the documentation mirrors, keeping the chronology of the research, Deleuze’s notion of linear time (*Chronos*) with its inherent constant

changes, which come from its involvement with non-linear time, the intervention of qualitative, irruptive ‘events’.

The exhibition, which presents the visuals, is freed from such linearity, although some viewers might wish to reconstruct it. The visuals will not be chronologically presented but build what Deleuze calls ‘lines of flights’, those dynamics, which are parts of the works themselves and their temporarily fixed arrangements yet work inherently against them through their interaction and interference. As *parerga*, the structure of the two parts of the thesis integrates two aspects or ‘folds’ of *Becoming* and *aura*, their involvement in linear and non-linear time as outlined in the text (Chapter 3.1).

Towards the end of the course of this research it became clear that from the start, by attempting as consistently as possible to clarify the intuitive element involved in *aura*, a method had been applied that to accept as method seems literally counter-intuitive at first: intuition. The method refers to practice with its focus on flux and ‘immediacy’ as well as its contextualization in writing, builds the hinge for both, folds them.

Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze argue that intuition allows for more accurate descriptions of experience⁵. Focusing in research on the immediacy of reflective awareness will show the temporal dimension of observation that presents its subject as a continuously changing, differentiating one. The presence of a thing presents itself as a returning appearance, changed in itself in a changed consciousness. This means, we observe and describe objects as multiplicities of change within time and can avoid by inclusion of intuition as method a point of observation that segments the world of objects and habitually will need to refer to ‘essences’. Intuition neither supports an idealist nor realist position, which both are derived from the status of a ‘consciousness of’, but introduces for Deleuze the movement (or repetition) of ‘difference’ as ‘being’. The problematic of the attempt to describe duration with language lies in the complexity that continuous and unpredictable differentiations provide. Intuition is thus a problematic method but, so the position taken here reveals, productive for the subject dealt with. The research shows that it is the potentiality of time-related differentiations in consciousness as ‘duration’ that *aura* addresses.

⁵ Henri Bergson writes in *The Creative Mind*: ‘Instead of a discontinuity of moments replacing one another in an infinitely divided time, [intuition] will perceive the continuous fluidity of real time which flows along, indivisible. Instead of surface states covering successively some neutral stuff and maintaining with it a mysterious relationship of phenomenon to substance, it will seize upon one identical change which keeps ever lengthening as in a melody where everything is becoming but where the becoming, being itself substantial, has no need of support. No more inert states, no more dead things; nothing but the mobility of which the stability of life is made. A vision of this kind, where reality appears as continuous and indivisible, is on the road which leads to philosophical intuition’ (Bergson 1946, 127)

As method, intuition states *problems* by inventing questions that allow for the exploration of singular states or differentiations. A research question as developed at the very beginning of this project is thus not designed to ask for essences ('what is...') but to allow for further strands of questions about how complexes and singularities linked to the question differentiate. Intuition thus 'proposes to us a plurality of acts, a plurality of efforts and directions' (Deleuze 1999a, 43) that allow to observe and to respond to observations in parameters of 'tendencies'.

The introduction of the 'conceptual persona' *Empedocles at Etna* in the third chapter is designed to provide a metaphor in the form of a scenario, both in practice and writing; a stepping-stone on the way to a philosophical concept such a conceptual persona 'carries out the movements that describe the author's plane of immanence, and [...] play[s] a part in the very creation of the author's concept' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 63). It attempts to involve or 'embody' the methodology applied in this project in a model of *aura* developed in the text and visuals, showing that *aura* invents its methodology inherently. This means that writing and visual outcomes become differentiations of the method, merging in its becoming 'metaphor', the *Empedocles* scenario. The decision to re-present the course of research as its *Becoming*, reflecting its two temporal aspects (linear/non-linear), allows the dynamics of the method in action to merge with the dynamics of *aura*.

Chapter 1 provides and prepares the conceptual background of this project by introducing its key elements: Walter Benjamin's critique of what he calls aura; methods and particular perspective of the practice element of this research; the alchemical picture sources from the Renaissance, which provides a link to aura in a framework of immanent Becoming; an overview of Gilles Deleuze philosophical conceptualization of Becoming and its relevance for this project; some implication of the axis between painting and digital technology envisaged.

1. Departure Points

1.1 Aspects of Walter Benjamin's Critique of *Aura*

In a contemporary critical context *aura* in art is referred to with a characteristic ambivalence: while a sensation with 'otherness' in art as possible experience both for viewer and producer is admitted, problems start with what such an experience could refer to. Historically anchored in art's role to visualize, mediate fix religious spheres or ideology, the acknowledgment of *aura* with its strands that seem consistently to lead back to a (transcendent) 'origin' would equal a regress into pre-modern religious beliefs and their subsequent social and political structures.

The following quote from the online journal *Transformations* seems very typical for such ambivalence:

'... aura and auratic experience is accelerating in intensity and scope, as the phantasmagoria of capitalist consumer culture becomes ever more deeply embedded in new technological forms. Aura has taken on an aspect of the real that now requires renewed efforts on the part of critical theorists and creative artists alike, to unpack its illusory structures and to expose its power to deflect sensory experience into pseudo-presence, or false origin.' (Mules 2007)

But is it enough to dismiss *aura* as illusion? The notion of 'illusion' assumes criteria of 'reality' and 'truth', which themselves depend on varying frameworks (empiricist, mechanical-materialist, critical, psychoanalytic etc.) around the disposition of reason and an assessment of the human ability to achieve 'non-illusory happiness' on grounds of knowledge (Ritter et al. 1971, vol.4, 214).

What would remain if the desire that 'illusion' holds and that *aura* provides was taken seriously *outside* its framework of transcendence, outside the realm that constitutes the institutions of 'judgment', derived from, as Gilles Deleuze writes, 'the

judgment of God [that] is nothing other than the power to *organize* to infinity' (Deleuze 1998, 130, my emphasis)?

Less than focusing on an analysis of a lack and its illusory makeshift compensation that an already reified image of *aura* might promise to fill, this research endeavours to find elements for an understanding of *aura* within an ontology of immanence, i.e. from an angle of un-grounding it from references to transcendent organizing 'judgments'. This is a fragile, yet consciously undertaken risk of such a research: any findings, especially as they are based on experience and might lead to some affirmative results, which cannot be yet assumed, lead to an organization and reification within the framework of this thesis.

The conceptual departure point here must be a closer look to Walter Benjamin's notion of the *aura*, which probably underlies any dealings with *aura* in contemporary critical context. A difficulty is faced with Benjamin's enormous and eclectic output as a writer, essayist and literary critic who dealt with subjects as (to name a few) German/French literature, theory of language and history from the (simultaneous) angles of Marxism and Messianic-Judaism in various forms: from newspaper articles, treatises, poetic writings to a few published works on literature and a substantial archive of excerpts and fragments for the hidden history of collective broken dreams of the 19th century. The notion *aura* appears within this work, which is difficult to specify, at different places, within the development of his thinking changing and not consistently conceptualised. The following paragraphs can only attempt to chisel out some strands showing how far Benjamin's *aura* can be used for a non-transcendent approach.

Aura became a 'notion' in critical theory with the publication of Walter Benjamin's seminal *The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility*, in German in 1955, in English (in the collection of Benjamin texts *Illuminations*) in 1968 (Benjamin et al. 1973). This first posthumous publication is the third version from 1939 (in: 2003) of an essay already written in 1935 (in: 2002b). It had great influence on the reflections on art in the years around 1968, supporting the perception of a shift from art's supposed autonomy ('uniqueness') to its subsidiary function within the construction of the social world of productivity and technological reproducibility.

In 1970, praising Benjamin for the groundwork he provided with his essay and his thesis of the loss of *aura* in the age of reproducibility, Hans Magnus Enzensberger wrote: 'Artistic productivity reveals itself to be the extreme marginal case of a much more widespread productivity, and it is socially important only insofar as it surrenders all pretensions to autonomy and recognizes itself to be a marginal case' ('Constituents of a Theory of the Media', in: Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort 2003, 272). But Benjamin's *aura*, in context to other references in his writings, holds a place in a much subtler network.

Facing the reality of fascism and its elaborated manipulations around charisma, Benjamin states and celebrates the potential dissolution of the *auratic* elusive distinctions of sacred objects that prepared and psychologically induced political power structures. Referring to a 'better' world and its contemplative appeasements, the *aura* becomes a tool of a 'degenerated' bourgeoisie (Benjamin 2002b: 119) oriented towards aggressive accumulation. As 'charisma', it has an aesthetic potential that camouflages calculated violence as aesthetic experience, thus laying the ground for an aesthetization of politics that inevitably heads toward war.

Benjamin examines the political potential of the work of art liberated from its traditional roots as ritual and 'cult object'. As such it had been a symbolic reminder in possession of numinous power, representing the underlying religious matrix of political hierarchies. This aspect of the sacred or cult object echoes in Benjamin's description of *aura*: 'A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin 2002b: 104) ['Ein sonderbares Gespinst aus Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag.']. Benjamin comments in a footnote to the third version of the essay: 'The *essentially* distant is the unapproachable. Unapproachability is, indeed, a primary quality of the cult image [...] The nearness one may gain from its substance [*Materie*] does not impair the distance it retains in its apparition.' (Benjamin 2003, 272) The word 'Ferne' alludes here to 'distance' in both a spatial and a temporal sense, as 'faraway', 'far-off'. The German 'sonderbar' means 'strange' but also 'divisible', which gives more depth to 'Gespinst' as 'weaving'. Benjamin would then allude to a possible interweaving of paradoxical strands in a simultaneity of opposites.

For Benjamin, the technologically advanced methods of reproducibility and its use for the arts manifest a potential 'decay' of *aura*, opening up a space for shock and new ways of playful and self-directed production of art. This new collective art will be a positive mirroring of the proletariat's needs and identity. Mimesis and its key elements, semblance and play, are thus released from their previous ties to 'mastery over nature'. Art works as 'cult objects' had constituted metaphysical semblance and thus put art in an a-historical context. The potential of reproducibility appears as a wake-up call, a shock, and looking at other texts by Benjamin, this shock would tear apart the alleged security of an attitude towards the spiritual that denies the rupture.

The conflicts of mastering nature as dealing with desire and aggression seem with advanced technologies, with camera and film, the 'transportable' image of appearance more appropriately resolved (Benjamin 2002b: 113): as a lens for the optical unconscious, able to interweave and zoom heterogeneous perspectives, technology provides for a preventive and therapeutic dealing with mass psychoses,

integrating the individual unconscious with the masses by staging it as a collective and experience and montage. It is the 'forced development of sadistic fantasies or masochistic delusions' that holds laughter as collective catharsis and education, mirrored by slapstick 'figures of collective dream' like Mickey Mouse and characters played by Chaplin (Benjamin 2002b: 118). The influence of Brecht and his concept of 'epic theatre' seem obvious here. Theatre, instead of providing charisma and staged catharsis, should be the place of emancipation, avoiding the entanglement of semblance and subjectivity limited to the viewer's contemplative identification with a plot.

In contrast to foremost technological connections, Benjamin's notion of the *aura* is anchored in images of nature: 'To follow with the eye – while resting on a summer afternoon – a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of these mountains, of that branch' (ibid.: 105). This poetic description stays within a materialist framework, moving the cultural element into the object matter. But it is because the object is still animated by 'breath' and thus aligned to metaphysical, non-materialist associations that Adorno suggested linking the *aura* instead to the commodity fetish as memory of human labour, as 'forgotten humanness'; Benjamin did not follow this route and answered him 7.5.1940: 'But even if, in fact, the issue is a "forgotten human something" in the aura, the issue is not necessarily what is actually present in the work. The tree and the shrub vouchsafed to people are not made by them. Thus there must be something human about objects that is *not* bestowed by the work done' (Benjamin 1994, p. 692). In earlier protocols from 1930, which Benjamin wrote down after experiments with hashish, we find 'genuine aura' put into an even wider context as it 'appears in all things, ... changes completely with each movement made by the object [... with a] distinguishing feature [...]: the ornament, an ornamental periphery in which the thing or being lies fixed, as if confined in a sheath' (Benjamin 1977). As embedded in a visual and animated surplus, the things or beings seem attached to *aura* indissolubly without taking on the more common image of 'rays': the term 'ornament', emphasized by a reference to the orbs in Van Gogh's late paintings, reduces spiritualist visualizations of splendour, exclusively attainable to initiates of this then (and still) fashionable movement, to an aesthetic accessory⁶; yet,

⁶ Benjamin explicitly targets theosophy and the promises of 'great universal harmony in which all individuals are subsumed' (Benjamin 1999, 655). In the book review of an occultist book from 1932, *Light from the Obscurantists*, Benjamin observes a parallel between the advertisement techniques veiling commodities and the discourse of occult groups (here especially Rudolf Steiner's *Anthroposophy*). Common to both is the dissociated 'scattering of pieces of factual information' let commodities appear as if they 'drape themselves in the world of knowledge and the human spirit, in order to stand out more alluringly'. The review peaks the remark: 'If one [advertisement] has mastered the art of transforming the commodity into an arcanum,, the other is able to sell the Arcanum as a commodity' (Benjamin 1999, 653-

despite the attempt to dissociate from spiritualist appropriations of what Benjamin felt worth fighting for, it remains a mystical experience. The quote above could even allude to 'thing and being' as emanations of an encircling *aura* that keeps them enclosed, material, flexible and protected at the same time.

Benjamin's description shows a strange vagueness about where the closeness/distance or subjective experience of it is to be located: viewer and emanation are mutually involved via the 'look/gaze': 'To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us' (Benjamin 2003, 338). This move, to link visual closeness and distance with the animated gaze, prepares how technology, here a camera as the focus of actor, camera-man and viewer can suspend and transform the *aura*'s previous work of guarding the numinous⁷ distance from 'cult-object' to viewer into the new relationship of the 'close-up', which is tactile, an appropriation of the aesthetic object by the viewer through the senses. Benjamin's use of 'distant' and 'near' for the historic stages of ritual- or cult-object and liberated, accessible exhibition object is a further development of Alois Riegl's influential distinction in *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901) between 'optical' (distant, disembodied) and 'haptic' (or 'tactile', close), which Riegl put in context to historical changes of visual perception, thus arguing for an appreciation of 'minor' periods of art history, that in Riegl's time were underappreciated. Giles Peaker shows how Riegl's notion of *Kunstwollen* ['artistic volition], which underlies collectively the changes in art history, suits Benjamin's interest in the demise of subjectivity with its unbridgeable distance (as will become

657). Miriam Bratu Hansen shows that Benjamin's introduction of the *aura* (with its theosophical flavours into a Marxist framework 'was not least a tactical move designed to isolate and distance the concept from the at once more popular and more esoteric notions of aura that flourished in contemporary occultist discourse (and do to this day)' (Hansen 2008, 337). Nevertheless, 'deployment [...] of the term *aura* is informed by the very field of discourse from which he sought to dissociate the term' (Hansen 2008, 338).

⁷ The term 'numinous' is understood here as introduced by Walter Otto in *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1917), Engl. *The Idea of the Holy An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (Otto 1936). Within the limits of a Protestant interest not to abandon the rational limits of theology, Otto attempted to deal with the human encounter with what he calls 'the holy', that goes beyond the morally 'good'. Thus, he focuses on the emotional urgency that an encounter with the numinous holds. He uses the term *mysterium tremendum* referring to 'tremor', the emotion of fear, the 'fascination' of the 'wholly other', 'overpoweringness' and 'energy' typical for what is contained in numinous experience (Otto 1936, 12-41). The term originates in 'numen' (Lat.), 'a nodding with the head, a nod. As an expression of will, command, consent. Of a deity, the divine will, divine command. Hence the might of a deity, majesty, divinity. Cassell's New Latin Dictionary' (Stein 2006, 50). Also Plate (2005) makes the connection between Benjamin's *aura* and Otto's term: 'Regardless of whether Benjamin had Otto's work in mind, the relation between the *aura* and the holy is central to Benjamin's designs for his essay, and he continues to see the relation of the *aura* to its ritualized, sacred setting' (Plate 2005, 89). I am indebted here also to Stein (2006).

clearer in the next paragraphs) from an original language of 'Truth'; the shift from optical perception to the appropriative 'close-up' of traditional ritualistic 'distance' is then also collective artistic volition: it meant for Benjamin 'that artworks could be a means of access to collective experience without attention to the individual producer' (Peaker 2000, 306). Applied to the potential of technology of reproducibility, which allows to absorb and transform the cult-object-related *aura*, closeness (the haptic approach) thus suits '*the desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things spatially and humanly, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as reproduction*', as Benjamin writes (Benjamin 2003, 255, emphasis orig.). This quote extends to the editing process in the medium of film producing montaged multiple perspectives that allow a translation of collective dream work (for example, collage-like editing for displacement).

But a problematic constellation for a project, setting out to propose new materialist aesthetics, arises when Benjamin insists that not only art (which can be exposed to technological reproducibility) but also 'nature' or natural objects contain auratic 'distance'; the 'unapproachable' extends here into and infuses matter: '[t]he essentially distant is the unapproachable' (Benjamin 2003, 338)⁸. Yet, this problem does not contradict Benjamin's previous or later work. On the contrary, it seems to mark a transition between such early theological papers such as *On Language as Such and the Language of Man* from 1916 (in: Benjamin 1996) and the theses *On the Concept of History* from 1940 (in: Benjamin 2003), written shortly before his death and proposing a merging of historical materialism and theology.

Bram Mertens shows the inherent influence of Jewish 'tradition' on Benjamin⁹, 'tradition' naming here the multi-layered, archive-like Torah studies (Talmud, Midrashim), which are collated over centuries as weavings documenting a permanent 'process of interpretation' (Mertens 2007: 45) on the assumption that language is divine (though concealed) communication that has to be reinterpreted and aligned for contemporary needs.

Such processual reinterpretation and 'contemporaneity of the past' equals the actuality of past commentaries and puts value on the minutest detail, however odd it might seem. Benjamin's 'figure of the collector, who examines the so-called refuse

⁸ The latter quote comes from *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, written in the same time as but contrasting with the third version of *Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility*, which according to Miriam Bratu Hansen might have supported a reductive reading of *aura* as Benjamin's supposed 'call for its demolition' (Hansen 2008, 237)

⁹ Benjamin's friend Gershom Scholem, the most important researcher on Jewish mysticism, had recommended a 4 volume work by Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition (Philosophy of History or On Tradition)*, and this 'had been one of the first works about Judaism he [Benjamin] acquired, it gained a place of honour in his library' (Scholem, quoted in Mertens 2007: 17, my trans.).

of history (*“Abfall der Geschichte”*), the immense diversity of bits and bobs discarded in the process or progress, to which fragments of the utopian hopes and expectations held by the past still adhere’ (Mertens 2007: 44) is an embodiment of this Talmudic position.

Benjamin’s *aura* critique targets a generation of Jews assimilating to protestant values after the foundation of the German state in 1871. It was the protestant affirmation of interiority via conscience and calling that underlay, according to Max Weber, the stability and success of capitalism at this time.¹⁰ It could be argued that Benjamin’s *aura* appears in connection to its own death mask, as an ambiguous ruin of itself. It carries thus the melancholy of a mistaken or lost identity, devoid of its promise. But it does so, much more fundamentally for Benjamin, because of the (collective) loss of the human being’s ability to reconnect to the blueprint of God’s original language. *On Language as Such and the Language of Man*, a text he refers to as a foundation of his main thoughts, states this loss and puts history into the context of origin as mediated by the Torah (the first five parts of the bible) and the layers of its interpretation/mediation as tradition.

God breathing language creates the world¹¹; the human is created then of what has been created already (earth) and thus is not participating directly in the first language. Language is given to the human as a tool to name things, to communicate, and this reification of the creative force leads to the inherent openness or confusion that, according to Benjamin, caused the Fall and further widening of the distance. The main point here is that the first language does not signify but creates, whereas the tool language has already left its original force and unambiguity behind. It opens up the search for traces of the first language and redemption within the structure of the world, including language, objects and historical events. Stéphane Mosès writes in the fascinating study *The Angel of History*: ‘The meaning of history is not revealed, for Benjamin, in the process of its evolution but in the breaks in its apparent continuity, in its flaws and accidents, where the sudden emergence of the unpredictable interrupts its course and thus reveals in a flash, a fragment of original truth’ (Mosès 2009: 80).

Every moment in the flow of time can hold the ‘flash’ as revolutionary potential, but without any guarantee of a justice premeditated by historic materialism. Rather, the messianic rupture means the shutdown of a contorted history, to be expected against the abundance of images or better: simulacra, every

¹⁰ ‘It is obvious how powerfully the exclusive search for the Kingdom of God only through the fulfilment of duty in the calling, and the strict asceticism which Church discipline naturally imposed, especially on the propertyless classes, was bound to affect the productivity of labour in the capitalistic sense of the word’ (Weber 2003: 178).

¹¹ This is a direct reference to one of the most common translations of ‘aura’ = ‘breath’.

moment. In Benjamin's own words: '... for the Jews the future [did not become] homogenous, empty time. For every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter. (On the Concept of History, B, in: Benjamin 2003: 397).

Thus, 'the aura', as Stéphane Mosès clarifies, 'is given to us as a beam of the original, just as the light of a star reveals to us the glow of a star that has long ago disappeared'; deeply entwined in a theological matrix, the aura speaks as a metaphor of a simultaneous closeness and distance of 'the incommensurability of the original' (Mosès 2009: 78).

Now it becomes quite obvious that the technologically achieved reproduction embodies a *further* distance from the original, a decay that is desirable exactly because of its potential to undermine the 'false', contemplative approaches 'back' (historicism) or 'forward' (teleological ideology of progress); these cover up the 'events' that could prepare, initialize or *be* a restoration towards the first language, identified in the distance of the past by remembrance and projected into the closest future as messianic intervention.

Along this axis Benjamin's archive evolves, displaying Benjamin's insistence on making the theological heart of his model inseparable from the analysis of historical (political) *reality* and taking its traces and fragments back to the encapsulated and betrayed dreams of humanity¹²; his approach, so Michael Löwy says in his *Fire Alarm*, 'consists precisely in standing this view of history [the Hegelian justification of human suffering for the sake of historical progress] on its head, in demystifying progress and riveting a gaze imbued with a deep, inconsolable sadness – but also with a profound moral revulsion – on the ruins it produces' (Löwy 2005: 65)¹³. This

¹² The closeness of Historical Materialism and Jewish Messianism lies in the latter's focus on *external* reflections of inwardness in contrast to Christian mysticism that supports a hermetic retreat into inwardness: 'According to the dialectics of Jewish mysticism, the drive to the essence was at the same time the drive outward. The re-establishment of all things in their proper place, which constitutes the redemption, produces a totality that knows nothing of [...] a division between inwardness and outwardness. The utopian element in Messianism refers to this totality and to it alone' (Scholem 1971: 17).

¹³ This is most poignantly formulated in Benjamin's interpretation (Thesis IX of *On the Concept of History*, 1940) of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920): 'There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned towards the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm' (Benjamin 2003: 392). The picture hangs in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and can be seen here <http://www.imj.org.il/Imagine/collections/item.asp?itemNum=199799>.

inconsolable sadness concerns also the failure of reason that in Hegel's work operates for the perfection of dialectically demonstrating the teleological unfolding of God as absolute reason into history¹⁴. This endeavour proves, face to face with the undercurrent 'other' of reason toward the 1930s for Benjamin to collapse; progress reveals itself as a ruin of its conception, as the 'storm' that drives Benjamin's angel of history 'irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky' (Benjamin 2003, 392). Contrary to Hegel's model of dialectical progress, Benjamin's proves to be, so writes Scholem, 'really cyclical': 'Paradise is at once the origin and the primal past of as well as the utopian image of the future of his redemption' (Scholem 1976, 232). *Aura*'s gaze – between human eyes, from a branch but also stars ('Are the stars [Benjamin's archaic choice of the German '*Gestirn*' alludes to 'forehead' or 'brow'] with their gaze from the distance the Ur[First]phenomenon of the aura?' (Benjamin 1991, vol.II, 958) – one could say, is perceived with an ambiguity of hope and sadness: on the one hand its all-pervading shine promises being 'index' of original life/truth/language, on the other hand its presence in a culture built upon ideas of the reliability of reason and its grasp of God's unfolding appears philosophically administered, receding reciprocally with the growth of the 'pile of debris'. But there is more: the sadness attached is also one about creative language that more and more digresses from any possibility of translation. Looking back at Adorno's objection that *aura* would, in a Marxist framework, stand better as a metaphor for the 'forgotten human factor in the object', Benjamin's answer, so writes Willem van Reijn, 'is clearly alluding to language, or more precisely, to that creative language for which the Adamite language of naming, itself a sign for lost salvation, is responsible, even after the Fall' (Reijn 2001, 47). 'Profane illumination' sums up this interweaving of Marxist and Messianic tracing of fragments on a non-linear line of betrayed history, as 'the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination [...], a materialistic, anthropological

In this scenario, the fragment becomes a powerful index of historic failure, distance from the source and remembrance of hope; Benjamin's method of reading the fragment is thus based on the way he 'reversed the direction of [lending history legitimacy through religion and its powerful semantic force] from a vindication of the forward course of history to a radical critique of history when viewed with a backward gaze' (Buck-Morss 1989: 93).

¹⁴ In Hegel, the 'absolute Idea', so explains Terry Pinkard, can be developed methodically only from what is already established, from 'that which is already implicit in the commitments that modern rational agents necessarily undertake in order to shore up and sustain the other *types* of judgments that they *must* make'. He quotes Hegel from *Science of Logic*: "out of all that, the method has emerged as the *self-knowing* concept that, to itself, is absolute ... that is subjective as well as objective, consequently as the pure correspondence of the concept and its reality, as an existence (*Existenz*) that is the concept itself" (Pinkard 2002, 263). Pinkard points out that there is no logic 'compulsion' for an equation of absolute Idea and God; however, Hegel historicises the use of reason in its form of the absolute Idea as teleological stages of unfolding. It would go beyond the scope of this thesis around *aura* to expand on this subject.

inspiration' (Benjamin 1999, 209). *Aura* is then, for Benjamin, finally to be derived as a psychoanalytic-materialist 'projection of a human social experience onto nature: the gaze is returned' (Benjamin 2003, 173), leaving 'a world without aura, or magic', as Rodolphe Gasché writes, a 'stupendous transformation of the world [...], in which all forms of transcendence bastardized by myth have been evacuated from the realm of the present. It is a world so free that it has become empty', emptied of the narratives and images that for Benjamin have culminate in the aestheticizing of catastrophes, leaving, besides new aesthetics of utter proximity promising a revolutionary shift between the collective body and technology, a 'silence', a 'blankness' pointing to 'what it cannot name, yet from which the very meaning of "profane" remains suspended' (Benjamin and Osborne 2002, 201). What remains is a silence only interrupted by the ticking of 'an alarm clock that in each minute rings for sixty seconds' (Benjamin 1999, 218), announcing that 'every second was the small gateway through which the Messiah might enter' (Benjamin 2003, 397).

From the angle of 'Tradition', the price of eradicating *aura* and its associations to 'divine light' from the world is high as it concerns also a 'sacrifice' of the *Shekinah*, in Talmudic literature 'presence' or 'indwelling' of God (Scholem and Werblowsky 1987, 163), more often though, from the angle of Kabbalah, the feminine aspect of God as divine presence/light in the material world, *Malkhut* ('Kingdom', the tenth Kabbalistic 'sefirah' or emanation of divine power). When the Talmud states 'In every exile into which the children of Israel went, the *Shekinah* was with them', it shows the exile of the *Shekinah* as a result of the 'Fall' that created a cleavage between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, or as Scholem writes, 'between the upper and lower, the masculine and feminine' (Scholem 1996, 108)¹⁵. This promised presence in exile must have seemed – at the latest with the reality of fascism and concentration camps - betrayed for Benjamin; from this angle, his

¹⁵ Scholem explains: 'God was revealed in His potencies and His various attribute (justice, mercy, etc., etc. [the ten sefirot or emanations]). By these powers through which He willed to effect Creation He formed "vessels" destined to serve the manifestation of His own being. [...] The divine light entered these vessels in order to take forms appropriate to their function in creation, but the vessels could not contain the light and thus were broken. [...] The light was dispersed. Much of it returned to the source; some portions, or "sparks", fell downward and were scattered, some rose upward. [...] There was nothing that was not damaged by the breaking. Nothing is in the place appointed for it; everything is either below or above, but not where it should be. In other words, all being is in Galut [Diaspora]. [...] Hence there is a Galut of the divine itself, of the "sparks of the Shekinah": "These sparks of holiness are bound in fetters of steels in the depths of the shells, and yearningly aspire to rise to their source but cannot avail to do so until they have support" – so says Rabbi Hayyim Vital, a disciple of Luria [Isaac Luria, lived from 1534-1572]' (Scholem 1971, 45). The sparks are, what constitutes also a connection between *Shekinah* and 'soul'. As divine light contained 'broken' with the 'vessels' (creations) in the world, the *Shekinah* suggests a link to what Benjamin's *aura* contains. He corresponded with Scholem about the *Shekinah* already around 1916.

strategy is a desperate move to intensify the heterogeneous Jewish concept of time by emptying the 'small gateway' from all the debris that could delay or obstruct the force of its violent impact he hoped for. The eradication of *aura* serves thus the restoration of the first language. Scholem explains:

The process of decay has turned into the one great catastrophe which brings the past before the angel's eyes only as a pile of debris. At the same time, however, Benjamin's meaning includes the kabbalistic concept of *tikkun*, the messianic restoration and repair which mends and restores the original being of things, and of history as well, after they have been smashed and corrupted by the "breaking of the vessels [see footnote 15]" (Scholem 1976, 233).

For art practice, dealing with intuitive elements and imagination, the hopeless constellation around the abolished *aura* holds creatively stifling obstacles, and only one of them concerns an inherent tendency to religious righteousness or vengeance as a result of knowing and exhorting 'Law', which in some of Benjamin's texts despite their complex and overwhelming prescience can lead to irritating didacticism. Only the work of 'mourning', as Benjamin knows (Krell 2000: 136), provides, in a changed historical situation, a way out of this danger, a potential (and integral part of creativity) that might, in connection to an alternative view on *aura*, also balance out an explicitly (at times perhaps overtly) affirmative framework like Gilles Deleuze's, which will be introduced in chapter 1.3.

Back to the initial questions: what are the reasons for the reservation about *aura* in a contemporary context? What ontology is Benjamin's *aura* based on? Can Benjamin's notion be used as a springboard for this research?

The reasons for the simultaneity of attraction and reservation toward *aura* in criticism might be found in Benjamin's strategy of introducing this esoteric term that seems ambivalent yet consistent when one takes into account his goal to argue simultaneously from a materialist *and* Messianic point of view. His argument is based on theological 'origin' or 'ground' with a core of true transcendent justice while *aura*'s (alleged) decline, consistent with Benjamin's understanding of the irretrievable loss of a capitalized truth in modernity, rescues exactly this theological ground into the framework of Marxism. Brecht (with whom Benjamin stayed at the time of engaging with the essay) assessed the strategy in his diary as follows: 'mysticism in spite of an antimystical attitude' (quoted in: Scholem 2001, 223)¹⁶.

Benjamin's move, as Miriam Bratu Hansen shows in *Benjamin's Aura*, is motivated also by countering those contemporary esoteric strands that shared some

¹⁶ What Scholem told Benjamin about his impressions on the 'essay in the work of art' in a meeting in 1937, he recounts as follows: 'In my view, his new definition of this phenomenon [aura] constituted, logically speaking, a subreption that permitted him to sneak metaphysical insights into a framework unsuited to them' (Scholem 2001, 260).

of his views but served, even unwittingly, fascism with a spiritual superstructure. Projecting the hope for a decaying *aura* onto technology follows thus a strategy of denial of the 'false' *aura* in order to rescue some of its buried potential, both as remembrance and index for a utopian messianic rupture.

But even from this perspective, the rescue remains essentially based on a quite orthodox model of ontological separation between man and the Law (redemption).

Time, although non-linear and non-teleological, is eminently charged with possible cuts of a vertical intensity that will annihilate its stream into a restored unity with the ground (Law/Truth).

What remains as a 'springboard' for this research, when the theological implications and ontology of a definite 'ground' (God), which contradict the objectives of this research, are stripped away?

It is the interweaving of time and space belonging according to Benjamin to *aura*, an inherent potential of the moment¹⁷ as the rupture of an inherent appearance to unfold, of *Becoming*. This observation has inspired me to look further into *aura* as 'event'. However, applying the 'catastrophic and the utopian', unmistakably integral to Benjamin's vision and apocalyptic Messianism (Scholem 1971: 17), to the conceptual exploration of the 'event' as an open, creative and immanent unfolding, would certainly mean disrespecting his vision. This concerns also the model of history: a broken time line with its abundance of (historical) fragments and their logic of deviations and disjunctions in Benjamin's archive that stores them as proofs of a lost language. This aspect points already at what is known as media archaeology, tracing the indices of betrayed collective dreams, of torn apart historical masks; however, the layer of Messianic redemption gives this endeavour its particular theological and melancholic dimension.

Part of Benjamin's estate contains several notes for his study *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, facsimiled in the German *Gesammelte Schriften*, but unfortunately not in the *Selected Writings*. One of these notes (Fig. 1) relates directly to *aura*. The text in the bottom left box on Fig. 1 reads: 'Perhaps it is necessary to try it with a concept of an aura that is purged from cultic enzymes? Perhaps the decay of the aura is only a transitional stage of elimination of these cultic enzymes in order to approach others, not yet recognizable ones. (Last sentence literally: 'Perhaps the decay of the aura is only a transitional stage where it eliminates its cultic ferments

¹⁷ Krell points out: 'To be sure, in Benjamin's view each instant of future time is given not as a stolid, homogenous, and empty now point but as what Heidegger calls the *kairotic moment*, Benjamin "the little portal through which the Messiah could step"' (Krell 2000: 136).

(enzymes) in order for it to approach with others, not yet recognized ones.']

(Benjamin 1991, Vol. 7: 752, my trans.)¹⁸

At the end of this note Benjamin refers to 'play' as maybe the 'enzyme' that will kick-start a new process of fermentation for the purged *aura*, a point made

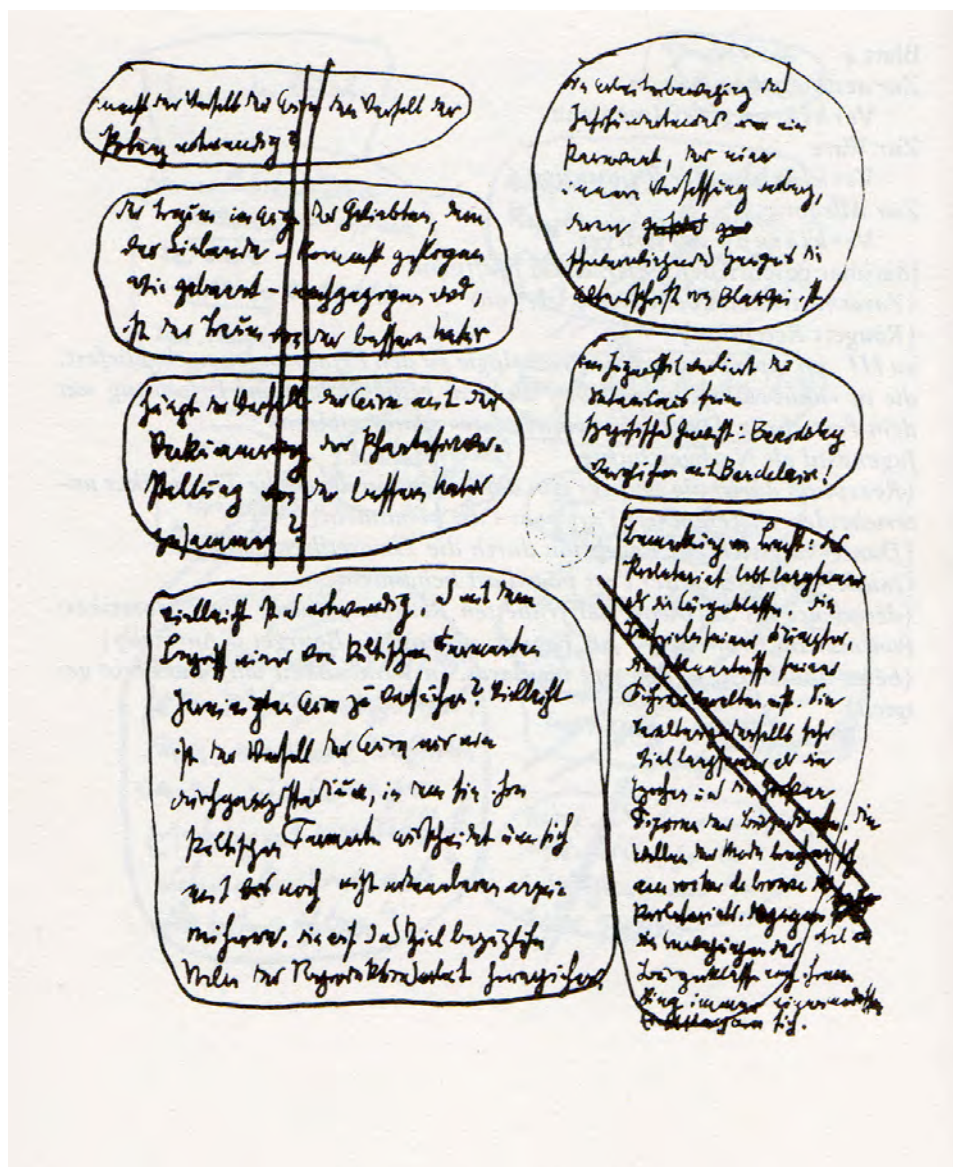


Fig. 1 - Sheet from Benjamin's notes for Charles Baudelaire. *Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (about 1939). Courtesy of Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin

¹⁸ The German text reads: 'vielleicht ist es notwendig, es mit dem Begriff einer von kultischen Fermenten gereinigten Aura zu versuchen? Vielleicht ist der Verfall der Aura nur ein Durchgangsstadium, in dem sie ihre kultischen Fermente ausscheidet um sich mit noch nicht erkennbaren anzunähern. Die auf das Spiel bezüglichen Stell[un]ge der Reproduktionsarbeit heranziehen' (Benjamin 1991: 753). I have translated the German verb 'reinigen' as 'to purge' (instead of 'to cleanse' for instance) and follow here the quite physical associations the text builds and the also the putrefaction image that 'decay' holds.

already in the *Artwork* essay. But has the envisaged liberation via ‘exhibition-value’ (as collective play enabled by technology), built upon the replaceable faciality and presence of the human, happened in Western contemporary entertainment culture? Already Benjamin sees that technology’s potential depends entirely on *how* it is realized; it is neutral with regard to its ideological charge: ‘The direction of this change [to exhibition-value ...] tends toward the exhibition of controllable, transferable skills under certain social conditions. This results in a new form of selection [...] from which the star *and* the dictator emerge as victors’ (Benjamin 2003, 277, my emphasis).

Benjamin’s note projects a conceptual purging of *aura* and affirms its relevance, even if ambivalent and fragmented, imbued with life (it *acts*: ‘eliminates’, ‘approaches’) which leads back to its esoteric and theological dimensions, which resist purely phenomenological or psychological approaches i.e. approaches rooted in frameworks of subjectivity. Hansen thinks that Benjamin appropriates *aura* by exposing it to a ‘conceptual *apokatastasis*’, a “resurrection, as it were, through [mortification and] dismemberment” (Irving Wohlfarth, quoted in: Hansen 2008, 375). The vocabulary of ‘purging’ would confirm that.

It could be further asked whether *apokatastasis* can be understood as inherent not only to *aura*’s conceptualisation but also to how it works. This would presuppose a temporal aspect, an unfolding or cycle of ‘dismemberment and resurrection’. The *visual* associations opening up with such dynamics would lead away from the realm of ‘purity’ and ‘light’ that *aura* might carry along; it would be contaminated by death as much as birth, light as much as darkness, involved into a movement of vital change.

Aura’s possible double aspect of temporal becoming and interweaving of dark and light, thought outside a determinate spiritual source (of ‘judgment’), will be of specific interest to this research. Technology though, which Benjamin links to *aura*, has made a radical transition from technological reproducibility to digital processing. The questions evolving from here will concern thus less the appropriation of an original than how involving the digital into the production/creation of visuals suggests an always already disseminated ‘original’, associated with the ontological status of the ‘simulacrum’ and its history of (theological, philosophical) rejection and (rarer) affirmation.

The following sub-chapter, introducing the practice element and source images contextualized, shows how a series of alchemical Renaissance book illuminations with their remarkable model of *aura* as unfolding process of the involvement of light and dark could become relevant for the exploration of *aura* in an immanent framework, without denying its call for ‘otherness’.

1.2 The Practice Element of this Research

Choosing the notion of *aura* as a subject for the practice-aspect of this research originates from a long-standing interest in understanding a particular sensation that seems the driving force, as it initializes and accompanies the emergence of visuals, of the practice presented here. The sensation appears as highly subjective and instinctual, as ‘feeling drawn to’ or even compelled to start a process of painting, mark making or editing footage. Simultaneously however, during the process of making this sensation seems to indicate how to ‘co-create’ with something anonymous, an ‘other’, seems a force that puts the clarity of ‘inwardness’ as the place of ideas, of ‘I am doing this’ in doubt. It opens a dynamic area of tension by remaining continuously present during the process of making, alternating between distance and closeness, concealed yet present, invisible yet co-producing potentially unexpected and meaningful visuals. The emerging visual seems thus to have an own life: ‘Experience of the aura’, writes Benjamin (2003, 338), ‘[...] arises from the fact that a response characteristic of human relationships is transposed to the relationship between humans and inanimate or natural objects. [...] To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us’, adding in a footnote, that relates this observation to the aura of words and poetry: ‘The gaze of nature, when thus awakened, dreams and pulls the poet after its dream’ (Benjamin 2003, 354).

This sensation could be described as another mode encountering a piece of art that has the power to affect, touch at a certain time, often unexpectedly. Without a doubt it seems possible to associate this frequently two-folded sensation (in this art practice) with layers of the numinous¹⁹.

The specific art practice presented here focuses, as a longstanding project, on the impact of the sudden and emotionally powerful encounter that mark-making, starting a drawing or painting (and, via software, film footage) with aleatoric marks, can mean. There seems to be a dynamic yet intangible presence attached to the process, developing an outcome as a relationship between an unfolding ‘new’ perspective with its intuitive, intensive qualities and the decisions concerning questions about how to realize this unfolding, appropriating it but not ‘owning’ it. Exploring this peculiar fascination with the ‘intense’ mark led to working in sequential fashion, which allows for each project to extend from image to image (instead of ‘crowding’ it into one), into what becomes a series at some point; a project thus ‘reveals’ itself more often than not *after* it has been started. The evolving constellations of the paintings would suggest a subject that was either on

¹⁹ This refers to Rudolf Otto’s term ‘the numinous’, see footnote 6.

my mind or on a deeper level present but not conscious. The moment of recognizing such a subject would coincide with an affective response and mark the point of departure into further exploration of the given subject. The evolving series of paintings proposed visual aspects like stills of a flow that built alternative perspectives of an 'issue', comparable with the sometimes absurd but lucid logic of dreams²⁰. The underlying and unplanned development within the series, that would reveal itself only in hindsight, would build a 'proposal' of complementary, overlooked, minor aspects, which as a completed work would trace and actually *be* the segmented line of a transformation. Following this intuitive process, so the hypothesis, would lead to a *meaningfully* embodied perspective.

Some ground rules concern consistency of materials i.e. for each series one medium, one type and size of image support, a particular range of colours, brushes etc.; one series can consist of several subseries. These ground rules grant an equality of each image within one series and provide the base for working closer on different perspectives that the dynamic process might hold.

This process provides 'experience', despite the difficulties of putting the latter into language due to its associations to multiple and well-known clichés, in an emphatic sense as discerned by Hansen in her essay on *Benjamin's Aura*: as a translation of the German *Erfahrung* with 'its etymological connotations of *Fahrt* ("journey") and *Gefahr* ("peril," related to the Latin *periri*, also the root of *experience*)' it differs from the related *Erlebnis* as "momentary, immediate experience" (Hansen 2008, 338), and the challenge consists in identifying clichés of 'experience'. The 'perils' of an approach like the one introduced here wait mostly in the intensities (emotionally, but also intellectually) that come with an opening toward what will be developed here hypothetically as a relationship between *aura* and 'Becoming' in a

²⁰ Similarities of the practice involved here to surrealist techniques e.g. automatic drawing etc. seem obvious but as a model of understanding or contextualizing they pose problems. The close liaison of Surrealism and psychoanalysis ties an act of automatic drawing conceptually into the psychoanalytic model of the unconscious and its restrictions to a reservoir of personal and repressed issues. Operating with this model – although accepting the connections between 'libido' and the drive experienced – means to accept mark making, which is what my drawings and paintings begin with, as manifestations of energetically charged projections, of a contorted essence onto a canvas. Due to the closeness of such works to dream-work, the outcome of such 'release' then offers itself to a scrutinizing psychoanalytic gaze that identifies on the bottom of layers of displaced and condensed personal material the results it expects within its given framework. Having a background in psychotherapy, this contextualisation has been of great interest to me, and the last series taking a psychoanalytic approach (consisting of 46 almost monochromatic, red more figurative paintings) engaged critically with the somewhat limiting cultural theory of the 'Oedipus Complex'. It has been published as a book 2007 as *Oedipus Diving* (von Brasch 2007). A question leading to the current research has been, how a core aspect of this art practice (that transcends the experience of the return of the repressed and rather suggests an affirmative creative flow that *is* the dialogue with the evolving piece of work) could be contextualized and supported by contemporary theory without having to refer to the psychoanalytic framework

framework of immanence²¹. ‘Experience’ in this sense doesn’t deny the fact that ‘any experience is caught up in relations of power’ (Deleuze 1999b), in strategies of power that serve socially arranged, stratified modes of interpretation i.e. defaults of ‘how to’ experience. However, and this is a specific aspect of a Deleuzian approach to ‘experience’ as a process, its creative transmutations, both in artistic and conceptual forms, can potentially ‘resist’ and counteract the rigidities of such stratifications by proposing ‘new’ perspectives.

As will become clearer in section 1.4, where Deleuzian concepts relating to *aura* and *Becoming* are introduced, the ‘new’ responds to collective undercurrent conflicts with spontaneous and unpredictable manoeuvres, destabilizing structures (of interpretation) by escaping as/with force through the cracks of such structures, which organise (and potentially trap) conflicting forces as ‘consensus’. The emergence of the ‘new’, the creative act is, in a Deleuzian view, initiated by intensities not restricted to a personal unconscious but of a pre-individual quality: though conceptually circumventing the alleged ‘origin’ of the art work in a confined subjectivity, intensities will be necessarily *experienced*, for example in art practice, as sensation of an artist’s body, granting as a temporary side effect to the production of art stages of subjectivation (in contrast to affirming a pre-determined idea of subjectivity). Focusing on a processual emergence of art that might serve new aspects of interpretation, the practice element of this research deals (and perhaps must deal) with such intensities, and also with degrees of what appears as emotion or rather less personal, as ‘affect’. From an artist’s perspective, the attitude of ‘journeying’ (Lat. ‘periri’) requires an openness for what Cy Twombly associates in *L’Esperienza moderna* (1957) with ‘a certain crisis, or at least a crucial moment of sensation or release; and by crisis it should by no means be limited to a morbid state, but could just as well be one ecstatic impulse, or in the process of painting, run a gamut of states. One must desire the ultimate essence even if it is “contaminated”’ (in: Del Roscio 2002, 206). Although *aura* will not, in this research, provide a thread to an ‘ultimate essence’, Twombly makes a link to a ‘contamination’ attached to the work of intensities that will, following the hypothesis of this research, reflect onto *aura* as experience in art practice.

²¹ Hansen’s etymology supports mainly the *building* of experience. In contrast, Henry James describes (euphemistically) the other pole, *gained* experience that inevitably underlies (also spontaneous) practice as: ‘The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it - this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe’ (James 1919, 389). The interest in the ‘unseen’ with its links to ‘tracing/mapping’ and ‘life’ reflects an angle of this research.

As a practitioner who engages in academic research and yet commits to work in the way described above, a challenge lies thus in avoiding to sugar-coat the tensions, which are part and stimulus of the practice. For the written part of this thesis this means to allow an occasional blurring of the lines between academic discourse and experiential narrative against the convention in academic texts to let affect and its less abstract vanguard, affections, dilute into a concealed 'other' below the writing²². Disclosing these poles of artistic research might also cast a light onto Deleuze's focus on the 'pre-individual': is it possible (or desirable) as an artist to remain 'pre-individual' in the process of making, and if not, does the point where it capsizes into 'emotion' possibly indicate anything relevant?

The processual nature of the art practice here brings an involvement with time as *duration* to a 'journey' that, as a sequential project of painting for example, leaves an outcome of segments or windows behind, an unstable synthesis interrupted by the gaps that have occurred between the individual visuals. The French philosopher Henri Bergson describes this process as follows:

'[...] to the artist who creates a picture by drawing it from the depth of his soul, time is no longer an accessory; it is not an interval that may be lengthened or shortened without the content being altered. The duration of this work is part and parcel of his work. To contract or to dilate it would be to modify both the psychological evolution that fills it and the invention which is its goal. The time taken up by the invention is one with the invention itself.[...] the concrete solution [of painting] brings with it that unforeseeable nothing which is everything in a work of art. And it is this nothing that takes time. Nought as matter, it creates itself as form.' (Bergson 1954: 360/361)

Problems like how this 'nothing' (taken here as no-thing-yet) can actualize, how a 'depth of the soul' can possibly be described, lead directly to the heart of this research: the difficulty of a topic that (not only for Benjamin) seems to evade any grasp of a purely analytic approach suggesting some clarification of Bergson's description: the intuitive aspect of making art and its methodological reflection in writing i.e., how to re/present it as will become clearer in the course of this project.

The basic research question, what *aura* could mean for painting in the expanded field extended to the questions firstly, in connection to Benjamin's

²² Less from the angle of producing art but looking at art, art historian James Elkin made the specific rift that opens between the encounter with intensities and academic writing about it the thread of his book *Pictures & Tears* (Elkins 2001). It consists of a commented collection of various people's encounters with art that made them cry, in contrast to their more composed academic contemporaries who come up tearlessly with erudite and detached analyses of the same works. He writes: 'Crying, passions, confusions, echoes of religion: they belong in people's experiences, not in books. There are writers, more prudent than I am, who don't even broach theology when it comes to art. Religion seeps through everything that's written about modern art, but it's the thought [of crying] that dare not speak its name. I've risked being a bit ham-fisted by bringing it onstage' (Elkins 2001, 214)

critique, how it might be possible to take *aura* out of its transcendent framework that signifies contemporary ambivalences around it and try to visualize it within a framework of immanence, secondly, in connection to the practice element, how as being part of an experience of emergence in 'intuitive' art practice it links to intensity.

For the practice element of this research it seemed appropriate to look for visual sources that relate directly to and challenge Benjamin's devalorised term of the 'cult-object'. Are their qualities necessarily uniqueness, authenticity and are they necessarily references to static and hierarchical (political) religiosity? Such sources became two works, Mathis Grünewald's famous and iconic *Resurrection*, a part of the Isenheim Altar pieces, and *Splendor Solis*, a series of book illuminations for treatises on alchemy dating back to Northern German Renaissance. Both the *Resurrection* and *Splendor Solis* deal very directly with the subject of *aura*, and engaging closely and creatively with *how* it 'works' in and through these pictures became the subject of the practice: by digitalizing and fragmenting their uniqueness and using these processed new image files, in connection to 'intuitive' responses, as the base for the emergence of new paintings, drawings and videos.

Especially *Splendor Solis* offers an alternative model for *aura* that is processual without necessarily referring to a transcendent origin. The next section introduces the work and the reasons for choosing it as one main source for this research. Grünewald's *Resurrection* will be introduced in chapter 2.2.

1.3 The Captive/Fugitive Aura in *Splendor Solis*

1.3.1 *Splendor Solis*' Frames

Splendor Solis exists in six versions of illuminated manuscripts from the sixteenth century (the earliest one from 1531/32, the latest one from about 1600)²³. All consist of written treatises and at a time 22 illuminations dealing with 'royal art': gaining gold by purifying lesser metals, though clearly indicating that the desired outcome is a symbolic transformation of the alchemist through catharsis that will provide him/her with the 'philosophical stone', which, so the first treatise discloses, 'is produced by means of the Greening and Growing Nature. Hail the Philosopher says thereof: "This stone rises in growing, greening things"' (Trismosin and K. 1920, 17)²⁴. The envisaged result is thus not an object but a metaphor of a processual,

²³ Jörg Völlnagel, the specialist of the history of this work, lists the following: 'The earliest witness is the manuscript in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett (Cod. 78 D 3), dated 1531 and 1532. This is also the original manuscript which formed the basis for later copies. Closely linked are manuscripts in Nuremberg (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 4° Hs. 146 766, dated 1545), Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. allemand 113, dated 1577), London (British Library, Harl. MS. 3469, dated 1582), Kassel (Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, 2° Ms. chem. 21, dated 1588) and another in Berlin at the Staatsbibliothek (Cod. germ. f. 42, undated, around 1600). It was possible to show that the versions in Nuremberg and Kassel are direct copies of the early Berlin manuscript, while the manuscripts in Paris, London and the Berlin Staatsbibliothek can be identified as direct or indirect copies of the Nuremberg manuscript' (Völlnagel 2011, 3). The texts of these versions differ but show a consistent usage of quotes from the much earlier *Aurora Consurgens* (around 1410). Völlnagel attributes the pictures of *Splendor Solis* to Jörg Breu the Elder from Augsburg and shows also the influences of Hans Holbein the Younger. Because the pictures and texts quote and refer to (in their time) the best known other alchemical manuscripts, the collection (then copied itself) tries as a 'florilegium' to surpass *Aurora Consurgens*, 'not only in the title:', as Völlnagel points out, 'the rising dawn, in Latin 'aurora consurgens', is followed by the shining son, 'splendor solis'' (Völlnagel 2011, 13).

The version used for this research is the manuscript Cod. germ. f. 42 in Berlin at the Staatsbibliothek as a facsimile (Höhle 1972); reproduced in this text are for copyright reasons digitalised Ektachrome reproductions from the Staatsbibliothek Berlin. The text quotes are from an English translation of the copy in the British library. As Völlnagel does not see essential textual differences between the different versions, I present here the miniatures and text quotes from slightly varying sources.

²⁴ The following bits of information around the circumstances around *Splendor Solis* and its reception in England at the beginning of the 20th century might serve as small spot lights on the theosophical circles in which alchemy was studied and which Walter Benjamin (though in Germany) wished to attack with his introduction of *aura* into a critical context; they cast also some light on alchemy's ambivalent reputation, which is perhaps based on its theosophical appropriation. The translation of *Splendor Solis* from the Early Modern High German of the treatises into English had been carried out by a 'J.K.' - Julius Kohn. Keywords about Kohn's life were published in a book in 1934 by 'Messrs. Hodgson & Co.': 'A catalogue of valuable books from various sources including a library from a country manor house ... ; the library of the late Julius Kohn, Esq. formerly of the Austro-Hungarian Consulate comprising an

infinitive and mutual relationship: the stone ‘rises’ with its effect on things and things grow, become more of ‘nature’ as much as they need to *contain* the stone that rises with their greening. The image reminds strongly of the relationship between rising sun and photosynthesis, but the peculiar mutuality, the interwoven growth of matter and an expanding (not only rising) sun takes both out of its context to physics into associations of life, of rejuvenation, infinite movement, becoming, when ‘greening’ is taken for its temporal, differentiating quality. However, the name for this relationship has the solidity, groundedness and density of a ‘stone’ and is, according to the various stages in alchemy gained through putrefaction of undifferentiated primary matter (*prima materia*) as the base for what will become the desired and elusive stone, through distillation of the four natural elements (fire, water, air, earth) serving the production of a ‘QUINTA ESSENTIA of the elementary FAECES’ (Trismosin and K. 1920, 70) used for the purification and preparation of the stone’s body and sublimation.

The philosopher’s stone ‘is a stone and not a stone’, a symbol typically incorporating the presence of an equilibrium of matter and spirit, thus bridging a gap that traditionally exists between them. The equilibrium is based on the workings of the elements²⁵, which, according to the alchemists, always simultaneously

extensive collection of books on comparative religions, Oriental literature and philology, occult mss., books on alchemy, spiritualism, mystical theology, etc.’

Around the 1880s, we find Kohn involved in a specialist fight about esoteric positions, staged on the pages of magazines like *The Theosophist* and *The Spiritualist*. At some point, the mysterious translator must have dared to contest the authority of founder theosophist Helena Blavatsky whose writing, in my view, is distinguished by an unfortunate concurrence of confusion in terms of style and renunciation of sound arguments. Her (written) revenge testifies to the fact that esoteric or religious authority has to justify itself by keeping the self-imposed elevation toward ‘higher wisdom’ literal and talk ‘down’ to the enemy: ‘Since he did not hesitate to name Mme. Blavatsky [she writes here about herself] and tried to show her so inferior to himself, we do not see why we should feel the slightest scruple to lift up the “brazen mask” which shrouds the face of the Kabalistic beau domino. We declare then in our turn, proofs in hand, that Mr. Julius Kohn is a very conceited, vain, young gentleman, who, hardly weaned from the A.B.C. of Occultism, puts on the airs of a mysterious grand adept--dextro tempore, writes pretentious articles under the safe cover of two initials, and so obtains a public hearing under false pretences. There is no Kabalistic organ, and even the third-class London Weeklies, but would throw his articles in the waste basket, had he offered them. What better opportunity, then, taking advantage of the ill-feeling of the Spiritualists toward the Theosophists to get room in a journal wherein to ventilate his vagaries? Hence his articles in *The Spiritualist*, and the declarations that there are no spirits in nature other than human spirits; and the magisterial, ridiculous verdict “if the Theosophists study the elementals, they study only undeveloped human spirits” (Blavatsky 1881). Despite the venom sprayed, J.K.’s translation of *Splendor Solis* remains the only one available in English, recommended by the British Library where the manuscript version from 1582 is held.

²⁵ This particular point is based, as also quoted in the treatise, on Aristotle’s theorization ‘that the four elements were formed by combinations of basic properties or qualities of matter (hot-cold, wet-dry),

penetrate each other. The 'stone' is 'like a man, ... composed of body, soul and spirit. The body has the power to fix or coagulate the spirit. The spirit has the power to dissolve and penetrate the body.' It is thus the paradoxical 'supreme crystallization in form of the precious life-essence' (Abraham 1998: 145), essentially the claim of a spiritualization of the earth and the body, of light being veiled in dark matter and nature and matter. This point is significant as it questions a division fundamental to Judeo-Christian beliefs. It also explains why 'alchemists' were persecuted and executed as heretics.

The 'Great Work' can be summarize briefly in three stages²⁶:

1. *nigredo*, the 'blackening' (Fig. 3) that prepares matter for a development by disintegration of its present form, comparable to the disposition of 'melancholy', referring here also to black traditionally attributed to the planet Saturn²⁷. The particularity of alchemical darkness (*prima materia*) according to Fig. 4 is that it is inherently light, a sun illuminating *as* darkness, or the state of being virtual of what becomes more and more distinct visibility, through the gradual differentiation from black (as the inner of the earth) to red (or gold).

Nigredo leads matter back to a state of chaos and is associated with putrefaction, thus suggesting that also transformation or differentiation is inherent to darkness and always already an experience grounded in physical reality and the alchemist's body, thus an experience, simultaneously symbolic and empiric.

2. *albedo*, the 'whitening' signifies 'purification'; after the blackened body or putrefied matter has been washed and shown the colours of the rainbow (as *cuda pavonis*, the peacock's tail), it turns to a 'dazzling white', signifying its being imbued by spirit. Associations are: 'they call it their Swan, their Dove, their white stone of Paradise [etc]' (Abraham 1998, 5-6).

3. *rubedo* as 'redness' (Fig. 5 and 6) symbolizes the tincture (the 'philosopher's stone'), the agent that, spread onto metals, will transmute lead (blackness, Saturn, the state of reinforced stagnation) to gold (the burning Sun, enlightened as made conscious).

The agent supporting all alchemical operations is Mercury in a dual function: on the one hand as the metal mercury that overrules the properties of all other

and therefore ... could be converted into one another.' (Henderson and Sherwood 2003: 7) 'Spirit' is understood as 'agent'.

²⁶ The often confusing details of the (sub-)operations wouldn't elucidate the connection to *aura*, which this section leads to.

²⁷ The *nigredo* as alchemical stage suggests a realization of the denial of melancholy as depression. Julia Kristeva speaks about disavowal and 'denial of negation' as an 'exercise of an impossible mourning, the setting up of a fundamental sadness' that is based on displacement or 'transposition' of the '*inscription of the want*' in order 'to produce meaning in the subject for another subject' (Kristeva 1989, pp. 43).

metals because it is fugitive, and on the other hand as the messenger between the worlds; it is Hermes/Mercury's mythological function to trespass in heteronomous worlds (underworld, human realm, realm of the gods) in order to interconnect them, to inform, interweave the zones with each other.

He is the agent of mutability and adaptability enabling an interweaving of diversity; he could be thus the bridge within heterogeneity. As the one who merges what is *constructed* as polarity but essentially in flux, Hermes is also an imaginary incarnated third term, destabilizing binary oppositions and exposing fixed positions and results to their dissolution into something else.



Fig. 2 – Tommaso Laureti, *Trionfo della religione cristiana*, 1585. Musei Vaticani, Stanze di Raffaello. Photo © Jean-Pol Grandmont

In a legend to Tommaso Laureti's *Triumph of Christianity, or the Exaltation of the Faith*²⁸ (Fig.2), Michel Serres (1995) elucidates that the messenger dies with the deliverance of the message: 'Hermes, the messenger god of classical antiquity, lies shattered on the floor (in fact this floor is painted on a ceiling): we recognize him by his staff and his winged helmet. The Christian mediator takes his place on the

²⁸ Fresco, 1582. Palazzi Vaticani

pedestal. [...] Messengers disappear in relation to their message: this is our key to understanding their death agonies, their death and their disaggregation' (ibid.: 80). Does not the central path of flight running through Laureti's painting imply also that Christianity's triumph will be shattered? The theatrical edifice, the 'house'²⁹ or frame for this mediation, seems neutral to the erection of the cross and constructed like a magnified architectural detail of an infinite series of dying messengers to come.

The book illumination from *Splendor Solis* on Fig. 4 shows a symbolic encounter of opposites: a man rises from a pool of mud, his head accentuated as if reddened while rising. He approaches a peacock-feather-winged woman who seems to wait for him and offers him a folded red cloth. The star above her head, much darker than her costume, might be gazing to the invisible depth of the earth that covers his feet and lower legs. The pool, only part of a stream, continues sluggishly into the distance and touches the ornate frame with all its references to nature from the inside. Both figures build composites of mutual references and of differences: they refer to earth (matter) and air (spirit), curiously coded and collaged out of joint references (white, red, black). The text reads: 'Here then the body becomes spiritual by force of the Spirit' (Trismosin and K. 1920, 31), but the picture hints also at a variant claiming that spirit becomes bodily by the force of matter and, as pointed out in a *Tractatus aureus* of the *Ars Chemica* from 1566, its contact with 'what is found in filth', "In stercore invenitur" (quoted in: Jung 1983, 25). It is their being indissoluble that becomes visible as two singularities within one movement of polarities, connected by an invisible bridge yet divided by a significant instant of differentiation and unity, as a 'symbol' in the sense of Jacques Derrida's following description:

'The analogy of the abyss and of the bridge over the abyss is an analogy which says that there must be surely an analogy between two absolutely heterogeneous worlds, a third term to cross the abyss, to heal over the gaping wound and think the gap, in a word, a *symbol*. The bridge is a symbol, it passes from one bank to the other, and the symbol is a bridge' (Derrida 1987: 36).

As the figures on Fig. 4 are personages *and* composites, this bridge extends or is diverted into the figures themselves; interweaving into each other by taking on the other's colours, the ever present 'gaping wound' is here perhaps the fact that they, in the sequence of the 'Great Work', will die, dissolve into other constellations. *Splendor Solis* illustrates this disintegration in calm yet violent illustrations of dismemberment and mutilation. Fig. 5 shows a knight cutting himself up and discarding parts of his body. All figures, mutilated or adorned, 'resurrect' in transmutations along this invisible yet present bridge over the abyss of an instant

²⁹ 'Art begins not with flesh but with the house' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 186).

dividing the work of differentiation. What is the goal of alchemical work, or better how does the goal work?

Fig. 6, the final picture of the first series of *Splendor Solis*, depicts the black sun transmuted after various operations into a vital red one, figuring as a distinct (hidden, yet concealed) level of an otherwise ordinarily illuminated landscape, emphasising that it is not literally the sun the alchemical adept is dealing with. Fig. 7, the final image of the second series in *Splendor Solis*, expands on what remains concealed in Fig. 6 by presenting a king surrounded by a corona of light. He is positioned in the centre of the image, marking the culmination of the expanded process of the 'Great Work'. Enclosed in a framed ambelic (the alchemical vessel of transformation), his body is enclosed by a corona of solar light; he stands on a waxing moon. 'Gold', the goal of alchemical operations, is here liquefied and revealed as an emanation of light, as *aura*, radiating life around the king. The precious framing (gold leaf) locates the king in a space of interiority, protected from the world outside as if the image pretends to ask the viewer to approach it from sideways, and carefully pass through the frames. The rectangular frame around the king motif is framed by a landscape showing people involved in everyday activities, but mythological references put the mundane work scene (fishing) in context to planetary symbolism of the moon and Luna: the central but concealed/revealed figure of the king, *being-king* is thus explicitly shown as an equilibrium of 'opposites' (sun/moon) or, as the work as a whole suggests, male and female that can and will collapse at any time.

Carl Jung interprets the patterns of rectangular shapes as originating from the square, which refers in alchemical imagery to the equal distribution of the four directions, elements or quarters of the earth (Jung 1980: 193). The discussed image shows an imbalance, a 'predominance' of the vertical over the horizontal; it could be looked at as a typical representation of a transcendent 'position' with its axis of 'as above as below' at the expense of the horizontal (immanent) constellation.

The imagery or its 'plan' is grounded by frames that repeat its key motives and stretch their shape from the darkest centre of the earth to the (shadowless) corona of the soul into the form of an upright rectangular. But against the grounding element stands that which happens within the frames, the king in the glass alembic, the realms of sun and moon, of interior space and social environment are in reality interwoven; they border over the frames and always already merge kaleidoscopically, conjunct in a destabilization of what holds them together.

Frames function, as Jacques Derrida writes in *The Truth in Painting* as *parerga*, being beside (*par-*) a larger work (*ergon*), as 'hybrid[s] of outside and inside', building 'an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute as an inside.' (Derrida 1987: 63) The constituted 'inside' is here a singularised,

transformation in stop motion that loops, folds itself around the edges that make it possible for it to merge (into) heterogeneous worlds. When Derrida writes that ‘there can be a *parergon* of the beautiful ... But there cannot, it seems, be a *parergon* for the sublime’ (ibid.: 127)³⁰, it becomes obvious that the *energeia* of the *Splendor Solis* series must differ from the sublime as much as from the purely aesthetic (and its connotations of disinterested pleasure): although ‘without-limit’, it can and desires to be traced, and it builds folds on various levels: from frame to frame in image to image in series to series; in the overlaying of this present interpretation from image to language; it folds itself further into the repetitions of some of its motives reaching out beyond the frames into my own framework as differentiation.

Deleuze effectively comes to a similar result as Derrida when he writes, ‘the picture is also traversed by a deframing power that opens it onto a plane of composition or an infinite field of forces [...] The painter’s action never stays within the frame; it leaves the frame and does not begin with it’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 188). However, what ‘deframes’ here, is understood as an ontological presence or field of forces that due to its energetic friction will not be contained in a form that it can establish only temporarily. That seems to contradict the understanding of a painting as a somewhat static form, but only as long as the creative act coming together on/in the painting is assessed as ‘final’; the force field, which in Deleuze encompasses not only the painter but the field of influences, the materials, the collective undercurrents, the multiplicity that a set-up of painting constitutes, is what lives on in the painting, always already deframes it. In *Splendor Solis*, this deframing power pervades the frames of the stages of the Great Work, which, from this point of view, are thresholds of a process, accentuated singularities of a certain accumulation of forces within a process of transmutation; transmutation highlights, from an alchemical perspective, the potential of ‘transformation’ to leap into ‘instantaneous change[s]’ (Abraham 1998, 204) induced by the projection of the Mercurial mediator over metals. Deframing, thus, opens the particular process of *Becoming* depicted in the miniatures towards constellations that are unpredictable and new, not logically deduced but instantaneous composites. The instantaneity disintegrates an organization that might be expected in favour of dream-like constructions: personages flow into each other and keep, fixed in a frame, signs of others, segments of landscapes come together over different frames.

³⁰ Derrida refers to Kant’s distinctions in *Critique of Judgment*.



Fig. 3 - from the first series in *Splendor Solis*. Manuscript Cod. Germ. Fol. 42, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz



Fig. 4 - from the first series in *Splendor Solis*. Manuscript Cod. Germ. Fol. 42, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz



Fig. 5 - from the first series in *Splendor Solis*. Manuscript Cod. Germ. Fol. 42, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz

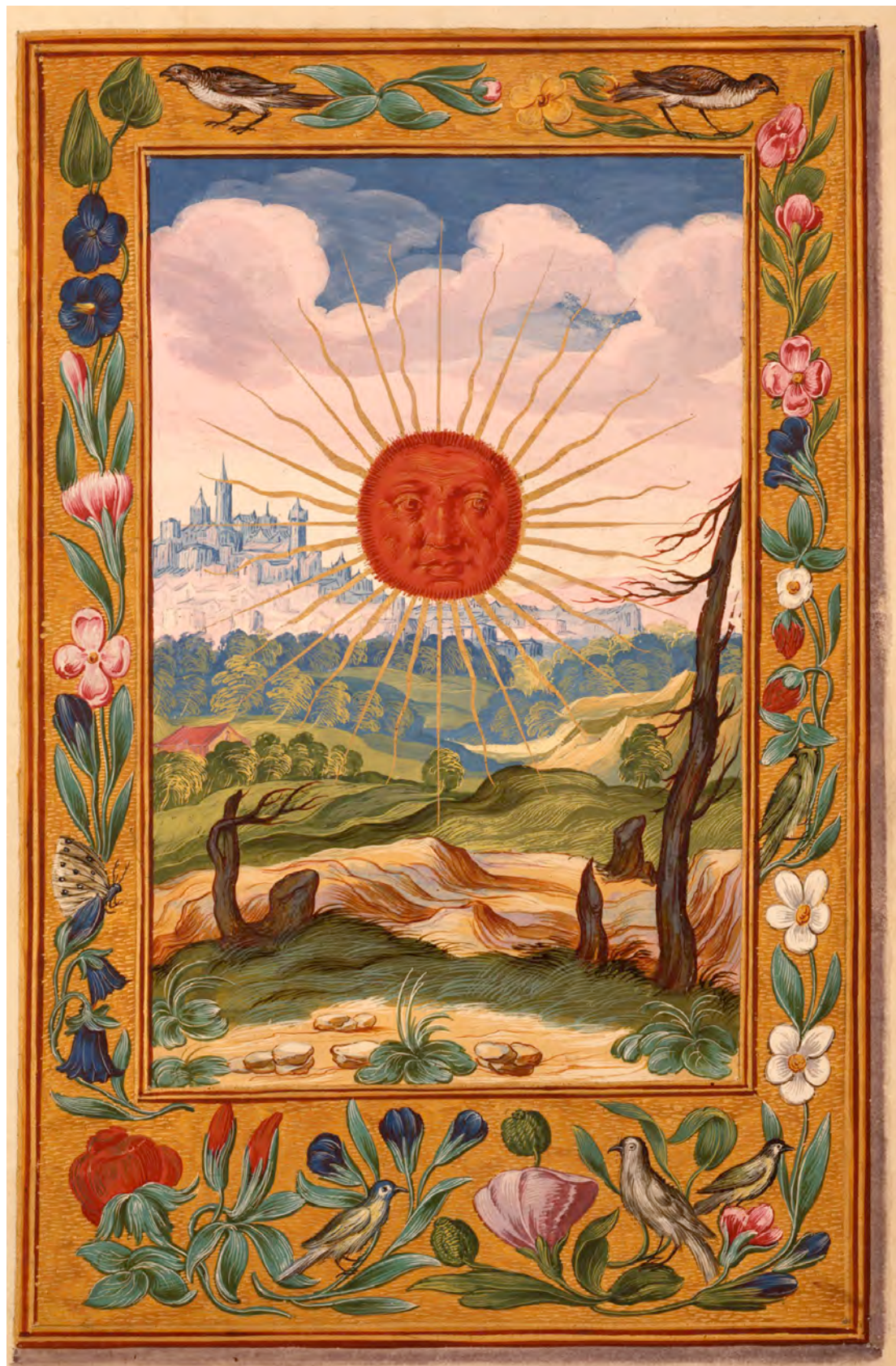


Fig. 6 - from the first series of *Splendor Solis*. Manuscript Cod. Germ. Fol. 42, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz



Fig. 7 - from the second series of *Splendor Solis*. Manuscript Cod. Germ. Fol. 42, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz

What needs to be ‘framed’, be shown evidence of its singularities in order to become visible, is thus the ‘Great Work’ as a temporal unfolding of a differentiation that also in terms of time is in reality multi-layered. A text in *Splendor Solis*, quoting ‘the [nondescript] Philosopher’, betrays a remarkable characteristic concerning the ‘Great Work’s’ professed order of successions: “‘dissolve the thing, and sublimate it, and then distil it, coagulate it, make it ascend, make it descend, soak it, dry it, and ever up to *an indefinite number of operations, all of which take place at the same time and in the same vessel.*” ALPHIDIUS [another alchemist] confirms this and says: “You must know that when we dissolve we sublimate as well and calcinate without interruption” (Trismosin and K. 1920, 23; my italics).

The successions, determining the ‘Work’ as multi-layered simultaneous and interacting zones of differentiation, enter in Fig. 7 a potential phase of *aura* as *image*. But as everything works towards this end, and the end intermingles with all differentiations at the same time, it seems as if this once visible *aura* is the inherent agent of differentiation: the ‘light’ at an unstable ‘end’ already contaminated by subcutaneous putrefaction at an unstable beginning, by layers of first dark matter and Mercury’s fugitive fusions of fire and water that, instead of preparing *aura* for an end, pull it back towards the *prima materia*, its becoming darkness’ inherent light. *Splendor Solis*’ visualization of transmutations, resulting in and simultaneously suspending *aura*, is thus perhaps also a visualization of a proximity or mutuality of *aura* and *Becoming*. *Aura*, here, has no reference to an original; thus, it does not constitute a distance between original and copy as in Walter Benjamin’s notion but always already is inherent to the Becomings of what is depicted as a ‘Great Work’ that culminates ultimately (though only temporarily) in a coincidence of opposites, a vanishing point where ‘opposites’ (dark/light, male/female, original/copy etc.) overlap and disprove their ‘binarity’.

With this constellation, *Splendor Solis* reflects as *imagery* also a specific shift of the concept of ‘image’ in Renaissance. Paul Kugler shows how Giordano Bruno located imaging, which had been linked in Platonic and theological traditions to the representation of some pre-existing original, ‘as a creative, transformative, and originary power [...] *within the human condition*’ (Kugler 1997, 75). Thus, for Bruno, painting is not limited to creating copies but the place to *invent*: ‘any painter is naturally an establisher of infinite images who, by means of his image forming power, constructs from sights and sounds by combining in a multiplicity of ways’ (Bruno and Higgins 1991, xv). With this shift, the ‘sun’ loses its symbolic significance of being the original (as in Plato’s *Republic*) whose light exposes the inferior copy. Paracelsus, another Renaissance alchemist, asks: ‘What else is imagination, if not the inner sun?’ (quoted in: Kugler 1997, 75) and declares thus an independence from the

original, an ability to partake in the creative dynamics of nature and its forces³¹. Coming back to *Splendor Solis* with its explicit links to the sun as transmutation and *aura* in flux (according to the reading attempted here), it could be said that *aura* is developed here *outside* of models of an original truth that perverts with its filtering down into copies.

The *aura* in Fig.7, a pictorial mask, a somewhat static and jagged cut-out *mandorla* around a crowned man works as an index of an infinite, yet immanent process that will ceaselessly repeat its work of differentiation or 'being-born' as the almond or vaginal shape of the *mandorla* affirms. The process repeats within the framing/protective *mater(ia)* of immanence, showing at this stage a dissolution (as *coniunctio*) of the binary structure 'man/woman'. The king, simultaneously concealed and revealed, inhabits a stillness between two breaths, between further differentiations into past and future of the 'Work'. It is the frames of *Splendor Solis* that dissolve and extend him into otherness and hold the imagery of an arrested, 'captive' *aura*, isolated from a flux, a potentially chaotic field of immanence with its fugitive/forming forces.

Thus, according to the 'ethics' of alchemical transformations, *becoming-king* or authenticating a process of *Becoming* can be achieved only as equilibrium of multiple polarities or syntheses, which stay open as multiplicities in movement with their either/or options of spontaneous, yet selective further differentiations. Then, Fig. 7 in its context could be seen as affirming a temporary state within a '*processual direction*', as Félix Guattari puts it, 'in the existential sense of auto-affirmation' (Guattari and Ettinger 2002, 244), a temporary yet definite window into subjectivation.

The reading of *aura* as proposed here, starting from a Renaissance work on alchemy as an alternative to models that bind *aura* into the transcendent dynamics of original and copy, led to an intricate connection to *Becoming*. But what can be said about *Becoming*?

This research aims to put *aura* in context to the philosophical concept of *Becoming*, a key to the ontology of immanence of Gilles Deleuze, which will be introduced in the chapter 1.4. Deleuze did neither engage with *aura* nor with a strand of alchemy that links it, as proposed here, to an ontology of immanence. However, a connection, which will be explored briefly in the next paragraphs and before introducing Deleuze's *Becoming*, can be established with Deleuze's tacit adaption and updating of important strands of the work of Carl Jung (see Kerslake

³¹ Paracelsus writes for example: 'He who is born in imagination discovers the latent forces of Nature. . . . Besides the stars that are established, there is yet another - Imagination - that begets a new star and a new heaven' (Hayes 2001, 13).

2007), one of the major proponents examining a relevance of alchemy for modernity.

1.3.2 Jungian Alchemical ‘Individuation’

Jung questioned, while still associated with the Freudian psychoanalytic movement, the framework of ‘libido’ underlying Freudian psychoanalysis (Jung 1956), departing from a revision or revaluation of the concept of schizophrenia³². He observed that schizophrenic patients can be considerably helped by taking their encounter with paranoiac ‘voices’ seriously as split contents of a collective unconscious which, holding the history and symbolic representations of humanity, can overwhelm the individual’s conscious mind. Jung proposed that the dynamics of such ‘mnemic sediment[s]’ (Jung 1971: § 693) might - in contrast to the Freudian concept of the unconscious in its ‘topographical’ sense comprising ‘the repressed contents which have been denied access to the preconscious-conscious system by the operation of repression’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988, 474) - also hold autonomous factors challenging a person to grow beyond social construction. His thesis indicates thus an autonomous volition inherent in the unconscious, a theory he would develop further and that caused the break with Freud³³. However, exactly this point must have been attractive for Deleuze whose work sets out to de-subjectivate the conceptualization of perception: ‘Was not one of the most important points of Jung’s theory already to be found here: the force of “questioning” in the unconscious, the conception of the unconscious as a unconscious of “problems” and “tasks”? Drawing out the consequences to this led Jung to the discovery of a process of differentiation [this specific Deleuzian take on differentiation distinguishes differential or virtual ‘differentiation’ from ‘differentiation’ into actualized, real’ thing] more profound than the resulting oppositions’ (Deleuze 2004b, 161).

³² Especially this point was of interest for Deleuze; he and his (at times) co-writer, psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, developed ‘schizoanalysis’ (see next section), if though with a different conceptual goal, from the same point.

³³ The Freudian school’s core argument against this, undertaken when Jung’s ideas were very fashionable (Glover 1950) was already formulated by Freud himself in the paper *The Unconscious* (1915), one year before the break with Jung: ‘The psycho-analytic assumption of unconscious mental activity appears to us, on the one hand, a further development of that primitive animism which caused our own consciousness to be reflected in all around us, and, on the other hand, it seems to be an extension of the corrections begun by Kant in regard to our views on external perceptions. Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perception is subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with the phenomena perceived but never really discerned, so psycho-analysis bids us not to set conscious perception in the place of the unconscious mental process which is its object’ (Freud 1926, 104).

According to the imagery of *Splendor Solis*, *Becoming* encompasses at first sight an *inner* development and its symbolic representation. According to Jung in various studies on alchemy, such alchemical medieval imagery and symbolism typically witnesses how ‘the alchemist projected [...] the process of individuation into the phenomena of chemical change’ (Jung 1980, 482), revealing with its projective character its inaccessible numinosity. His thesis is that alchemical imagery constructs an intermediary link between unconscious processes of *individuation* and the conscious mind engaging with understanding them, assessing alchemy thus as a possibly ‘obscure’ and underrated source of ‘knowledge’, which provides forgotten dynamics, a heterogeneous moment of what in modernity emerges as a ‘new’ technique (science): psychoanalysis.

Individuation, a term that has its roots in alchemy - it dates back to Gerard Dorn, a Belgian alchemist (see Samuels et al. 1986, 76) - is understood in Jungian terminology as a ‘*process of differentiation*’ (Jung 1971, §743), ‘the centralizing processes in the unconscious that go to form the personality’ (Jung 1980, 482). It enables a social person to develop as distinct from others and collective expectations while focusing on the dynamics of ‘self’ as a constellation, which encompasses conscious and unconscious potential and conflicts of creative changes and does, more integrated, not lead into isolation but to stronger, because less adapted, connections to others (Jung 1971, §744). The ‘self’, which is augmented here to the unconscious, assumes a *creative* unconscious, which challenges a subject’s prevalent rational position with ‘psychoid’ and teleological dynamics, with scattered contents and splits of the collective evolution of humanity that swarm on a vast libidinal stream. The dynamics of this stream, freed of its restriction to a purely personal and principally contorting mirror, will be disguised as spontaneous imagination with the potential and direction to become conscious. Jung’s concept of desire encompasses thus libido (as sexuality) as *one* expression among other passionate interests, and psyche and psychic reality are directed towards a development (integration and individuation): he ‘opts to “enlarge the narrower concept of psychic energy to a broader one of life-energy, which includes “psychic energy” as a specific part’ (Kerslake 2007, 74).

The aim of individuation ‘is nothing less than to divest the self of the false wrappings of the persona [the social mask] on the one hand, and the suggestive power of primordial images on the other’ (Jung 1953, 172), thus an alchemical, ‘paradoxical practice’ (Semetsky 2006, 333) along the polarities conscious/unconscious and collective/individual with their pictorial symbolism that carry cathexis ‘numinous character’ (Jung 1980, 476)³⁴. *Aura* as the numinous

³⁴ *Aura* as the numinous character of such pictured symbols would here be ascribed to the complex projections coming with the process of (Jungian) individuation.

character of such pictured symbols would here be ascribed to the complex projections coming with the process of (Jungian) individuation. This is, because the 'numinosum' with its *aura*, which in sacred art and its staging close to an altar 'legitimizes' the distance to presence of otherness, would be turned into the *work* on a *mutual* projection emerging between a demand (in the sense of challenging dynamics) of an open, but directed unconscious for integration and a conscious persona within its social network dealing with this demand, 'a dynamic agency or effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will. On the contrary, it seizes and controls the human subject, who is always rather its victim than its creator. The *numinosum* – whatever its cause may be – is an experience of the subject independent of his will. [...] The *numinosum* is either a quality belonging to a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness' (Samuels et al. 1986, 100).

From this angle, *Splendor Solis* presents 'imagery' in the sense of bridging and *mediating* the various strands of a continuously destabilized differentiation, aiming 'at a living co-operation of all [collective, individual, unconscious] factors' (Jung 1953, 172). The process directs both itself and the alchemist symbolically towards the declared goal of the 'Great Work', a conjunction of its inherent opposites [*coniunctio oppositorum*]; however, being a movement of (further) differentiation, this conjunction forms simultaneously its dissolution, leaving the 'Great Work' always suspended³⁵.

James Hillman sums up Jung's interest in alchemy when he writes: 'in Jung's language, psychotherapy achieves its ultimate goal in the wholeness of the conjunction' (quoted in: Semetsky 2006). But despite Jung's consistent work on destabilizing binary opposites and augmenting the concept of desire that opens it for an ontology beyond a framework of subjectivity and reflects clearly into Deleuze's concept of *Becoming*, his model is still based (and that is its weakness from the perspective of this research) on 'universals' i.e. 'archetypes' (the 'self' being perhaps the central one). These, for Jung, *empty* and instinctual structures cannot be but explored/lived individually in the process of individuation. Though always aware of the fact that the (alchemical) processes he is dealing with 'are steeped in mystery' (Jung 1980, 482), Jung disappoints the reader with 'fixations' (denoting here the alchemical reductions of volatile spirit to permanent forms i.e. representations) like: 'We are then confronted with the underlying human psyche which, unlike consciousness, hardly changes at all in the course of many centuries

³⁵ *Splendor Solis* shows how the painter visualizes alchemical (virtual/differential) transformation, shows his *image* of 'differentiations'; the pictures, in contrast, are the 'differentiation' of what he brings into form. When, in the further course of this thesis, 'differentiation' is used on its own, the relationship has been kept in mind.

[...] Here, too we find those fundamental psychic facts that remain unchanged for thousands of years and will still be unchanged thousands of years hence' (Jung 1980, 476)³⁶. *Aura* would here be ascribed to the complex projections signifying the process of individuation but anchored in 'eternal' forms and limited to intersubjective development.

However, Kerslake shows how Deleuze worked also Jungian 'archetypes' into the concept of problematic 'Ideas' in *Difference and Repetition* (Kerslake 2007, 92), which will be introduced in the next section. The reasons for Deleuze's interest in a thinker, who like Heidegger represented especially for the generation of leftists in the 1930s³⁷ and the one active in the 1960s and 70s an ambivalent engagement with Nazi ideology, are according to Kerslake the following:

'He [Deleuze] is opposed to the view of many contemporary theorists (from the Frankfurt School to Hardt and Negri) that all subjective experience is always already

³⁶ However, Kerslake shows how Deleuze worked also Jungian 'archetypes' into the concept of problematic 'Ideas' in *Difference and Repetition* (Kerslake 2007, 92). Although explicitly arguing against universals, Deleuze refers also to pre-individual (dynamically charged) intensities that support a subjectivation or individuation, 'to bring into being that which does not yet exist' (Deleuze 2004b, 185) i.e. individuate by differentiating beyond that which has already established as a 'norm' that 'judges'. The reasons for Deleuze's interest in a thinker, who like Heidegger stood for the generation active in the 1960s and 70s for an ambivalent engagement with Nazi ideology, are according to Kerslake the following: 'He [Deleuze] is opposed to the view of many contemporary theorists (from the Frankfurt School to Hardt and Negri) that all subjective experience is always already penetrated by either representation or the biological imprint of late capitalism (or, at worst, by both of these). Much of Deleuze's most creative thought is focused on articulating a positive account of the autonomous processes of the unconscious. Instincts and intuitions, experience of love, intoxication, esoteric experiences, breakdowns, dreams and nightmares all involve "dramatizations" which are relatively independent of our everyday representational activity, and involve what Deleuze and Jung both call "individuation". The lurking political claim here is that to act as if processes of individuation do not exist (as the aforementioned thinkers often do) is self-defeating, and robs the agent of the strength to throw the dice in other domains. To recapture for theory and practice the positivity common to processes of individuation might therefore require making some strange alliances with more 'esoteric' traditions of thought (which were not always associated with the right, especially in France). Deleuze certainly does not appear to have been afraid to make this move.' (Kerslake 2007: 189)

³⁷ Walter Benjamin writes 1937 in a letter to Scholem that he had 'begun to delve into Jung's psychology – the devil's work through and through, which should be attacked with white magic' (Benjamin 1994, 544). This Manichaeian assignment of 'white wizard' vs. 'ur-devil' comes with Benjamin's need to delimit clearly his arcades project and the search for *ur*-images (what became 'dialectical' images) from Jung's 'archetypes'. Jung, in contrast to Benjamin, does *not* refer to a transcendent origin or 'fall' but stresses that he examines the dynamics of human consciousness that lead, by trying to grasp an all-pervading and 'numinous' desire ('psyche'), to the collective evolution of varying 'god'-images; his *Answer to Job* (1952) develops this perhaps most convincingly. Thus both 'share' an interest in possibilities of thinking the influence of the 'pre-historic' within contemporary historical time; one significant difference is Jung's focus on a description of interiority (influenced by Kant) and Benjamin's strategies against subjectivity (as it leads even further away from a redemption that will be a collective one).

penetrated by either representation or the biological imprint of late capitalism (or, at worst, by both of these). Much of Deleuze's most creative thought is focused on articulating a positive account of the autonomous processes of the unconscious. Instincts and intuitions, experience of love, intoxication, esoteric experiences, breakdowns, dreams and nightmares all involve "dramatizations" which are relatively independent of our everyday representational activity, and involve what Deleuze and Jung both call "individuation". The lurking political claim here is that to act as if processes of individuation do not exist (as the aforementioned thinkers often do) is self-defeating, and robs the agent of the strength to throw the dice in other domains.' (Kerslake 2007: 189)

The observation in this section, based on *Splendor Solis*, that *aura* with its connection to *Becoming* deframes the allegedly determinate stages (or 'dramatizations' of the individuation) of the 'Work' suggests that to ask 'what *Becoming* is' will miss exactly its processual quality, would ask for an essence. By presenting incessant changes and differentiations, i.e. by being temporal, *Splendor Solis*, so here the hypothesis, even avoids a quest for essence.

The next section introduces *Becoming* as one of the multiple conceptual keys for the ontology of immanence, which Deleuze developed between the 1950s up to his death in 1995 works and its relevance for *aura* in immanence.

1.4 *Becoming and Aura*

1.4.1 Deleuzian *Becoming*³⁸

At the heart of Deleuze's philosophy stands the concept of (Being/Life/Desire as) 'difference in itself' in its temporal involvement with 'repetition for itself', released from any subordinations to identity and conceptualized explicitly in immanence, thus led by the question of how to avoid grounding Being in an 'origin' that causes the world with its beings and regresses toward transcendent hierarchies and their 'judgments'.

There are many ways of 'entering' Deleuze's network of concepts, which is pervaded by 'difference' and its intricate relationship with *Becoming*, supported by an array of creative sourcing of various philosophical strands, writers, artists, musician. Martin Heidegger is only one of many thresholds (names) in this network,

³⁸ For this section, which cannot be more than a briefest introduction, the following secondary literature has been most helpful with assisting the reading of Deleuze: (Agamben 1999c; Artaud 1976; Balke 1996, 1998; Bogue 2003; Bryden 2001; Gente and Weibel 2007; Grosz 1999, 2008; Hardt 1993; Kaiser 2009; Keller 2007; Kerslake 2007; Lambert 2002; Marenbon 2003; O'Sullivan 2006; Parr 2005; Pinkard 2002; Rancière 2009; Rölli 2004; Semetsky 2006; Williams 2003; Young 2002).

but especially his critique of metaphysics and questions around the 'ontological difference', which implied the shift from the question *what* something is to the affirmation *that* something *is*, seem to be highly relevant for the understanding of Deleuze's steps.

The question *what* something is automatically leads into models of representations based on a matrix of origins *behind* the world ('appearances'), a grounding separation between the original ('god') and the world as a lacking or deceitful 'simulacrum' as it has been carried out in classic metaphysics. In *Identity and Difference* from 1957, Heidegger shows how metaphysical thinking revolves in a circle around the attempt to give 'account of the ground', of 'what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account' (Heidegger 1969, 58) and introduces thus a split between things in their temporal 'being' and Being as such.

This attempt is based on the subject as reliable basis of perception and knowledge: originally translated into the Latin word *subjectum*, the Greek *hypokeimenon* means 'that which is underneath', referring, so explains Heidegger in the paper *The Age of the World Picture*, to 'something which lies before us from out of itself and which, as such, lies at the foundation of both its own permanent characteristics and its changing circumstances'; it signifies as an 'unshakeable ground of truth, which rests in itself' (Heidegger 2002, 81) the basis of knowledge. With Descartes and the rise of modern philosophy, so argues Heidegger, the weight of this certainty of truth was shifted with the liberation from theological orthodoxies towards the human mind constituting truth. The subject reflects itself like the object world as representation: 'The subiectum, the fundamental certainty, is that always secured entity which representing man always co-presents along with human or non-human being, along, that is, with the objectified' (Heidegger 2002, 82). This shift in modern philosophy concerns the new and opened ways of positing what is 'obligatory' according to the subject as source of knowledge: reason, an ordered and classified nature and social space or what has not yet been objectified: chaos. The shift thus reflects a potentially (and practically) destructive mastery over nature and, simultaneously, the oblivion of the primary relationship of world as beings and Being, establishing their mutual 'disclosure' and 'concealment' as truth.

What has been forgotten, is 'that when we deal with the Being of beings with the beings of Being, we deal in each case with a difference' (Heidegger 1969, 62); here, difference becomes a hinge previously not thought independently, which, outside of any ground, relates beings and Being in their mutual and simultaneous folding of concealment/disclosure. To abstract a 'ground' from the realm of beings is the consequence of forgetting the limiting perspective or horizon applied to it, which inevitably 'degrades' beings, 'as they are the fullness of Being: they are what

is most of all' (Heidegger 1969, 69). Metaphysic's simultaneous attempts to determine the universal essence of beings ('indifferently valid everywhere') and unity in the 'All-Highest' (Heidegger 1969, 58) sublate difference in the identity of Being (as God).

Re-presentation, which is at the heart of such limiting pictures of the differential twofold of beings/Being, Heidegger describes as 'to set something before one' and secure it as 'what has been set in place [*das Gestellte*]', to frame it in order to make it usable. Heidegger calls this characteristic human trait (that comes with language) - 'to set something in place', to frame it in order to master, change, administer it - *enframing* (*Gestell*) (Heidegger 2002, 82). In its practice, as ceaselessly developing technologies in a world of the forgotten fold of being-here as 'fullness of Being', the process of enframing (*Gestell*) becomes highly ambivalent and dangerous. Heidegger proposes to 'step back' and to think difference *as* difference: 'Being thought in terms of difference' opens the 'twofold' of Being and beings as a 'circling [...] around each other' (Heidegger 1969, 65).

Creating his own radicalised concept of difference, Deleuze refers to Heidegger's "'turning" beyond metaphysics"', which supports his move of freeing difference from its subordination to opposition, resemblance, identity and analogy. When Heidegger writes: 'Being itself can open out in its truth the difference of Being and beings preserved in itself only when the difference explicitly takes place' (quoted in: Deleuze 2004b, 78), he moves in this direction, but keeps, by leaving it in the middle of the 'twofold' with its apparent given/giving coherence, difference hinged. Deleuze expounds where his concept differs from Heidegger:

'Because we think without origin, and without destination, difference becomes the highest thought, but we cannot think it *between* two things, between a point of departure and a point of arrival, not even between Being [*l'Être*] and being [*l'étant*]. Difference cannot be affirmed as such without devouring the two terms that cease to contain it, though it does not itself cease from passing through assignable terms. Difference is the true logos, but logos is the errancy that does away with fixed points; indifference is its pathos. Difference emerges from and re-enters a fissure that swallows up all things and beings' (Deleuze 2004a, 159)

Here, difference has been released from any subordination that could guarantee identities derived from relationships between things (opposition, resemblance, identity, analogy). Unhinged, difference also questions (and devours) a coherent axis between Being and beings. It destroys its temporal suffering (as fixed conception of 'Being'=indifference) by ceaselessly passing through the cracks and fissures of 'strata', the nameable historical formations, positivities and empiricities' (Deleuze 1999b, 41) of knowledge, but not remaining as their assignation. Following the fissure 'in order to reach an interior of the world' (Deleuze 1999b, 99) equals following difference in its involvement with repetition as processual differentiation.

Taken out of their analogical relationship or their categorised differences, Being and beings fall together as 'univocity', a concept that had already been developed by the medieval theologian John Duns Scotus: 'All masters and theologians seem to use a concept common to God and creature, although they deny this verbally when they apply it' (quoted in: Marenbon 2003, 312). Aware of the dangers to uphold a community of beings with God as reality against a first being as source, Duns Scotus restricted this concept to logic, thus 'neutralised being itself in an abstract concept' (Deleuze 2004b, 49). For Deleuze, Baruch Spinoza is the first who affirms in his *Ethics* univocity as one single universal and infinite substance, as '*Deus sive Natura*' that possesses all attributes as expressive modes (thoughts, beings) and avoids the separation between Being and beings:

'If substance possesses equally all attributes, there is no hierarchy among the attributes, one is not worth more than another. In other words, if thought is an attribute of God and if extension is an attribute of God or of substance, between thought and extension there won't be any hierarchy. All the attributes will have the same value from the moment that they are attributes of substance. We are still in the abstract. This is the speculative figure of immanence' (Deleuze 2004b).

Deleuze, as can be seen at this point, prepares from multiple sources a network of predecessors for a philosophy of difference kept consequently within univocity of being and immanence. Immanence is 'not immanence to substance; rather, substance and modes are in immanence' (Deleuze 2001, 26). None of the concepts, which rise from this network of non-hierarchical involvement, will be ones 'beyond'. The problematic division between the one and the multiple, which affects also the one between subject and object, makes way for multiplicities populating planes of immanence, traversed by difference. What had in (Kantian) critical philosophy been an analysis and determination of the limits of human recognition and knowledge as 'transcendental subject', opens up in Deleuze to the positivity of 'life', is turned, beyond the borders of interiority, to the outside, reaching into the pre-individual and indefinite as 'A LIFE', *the* plane of immanence that defines subsequently the 'transcendental field'. '[A] singular essence' (Deleuze 2001, 29), it builds, consisting of all planes ('interleaved', 'holed' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 50/1)), a crossover of cosmos and chaos, of order and disorder, spatialized time and temporalized space: 'chaosmos' as first visualized in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: '[...] every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected [...] was moving and changing every part of the time [...] the continually more and less intermisunderstanding minds [...] as time went on as it will variously inflected, differently pronounced, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns' (118.21-28). In

contrast (but not opposed³⁹) to Kant's conception, the plane of immanence holds forces of 'chaotic variability', which provide the potential for the differentiation and actualization of the real as world and its experience ('transcendental field'). It is art's task to transform this 'chaotic variability' into '*chaoid* variety' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 205) and to provide audio/visual/readable links to 'singularities', to those remarkable, inimitable points or transformative thresholds of *Becoming* on the plane of immanence, which delimit the concept of the subject and its organization of the world. A singularity is 'any element that can be extended to the proximity of another such that it may obtain a connection' (Deleuze 2006c, 354), indicating that knowledge becomes an 'assemblage' of such extending proximities, and this includes as well the place of such knowledge, the concept of the subject. Individuation encompasses thus the transcendental field, not only the subject (as in Jung), which becomes a cluster of 'pre-individual singularities and non-personal individuation' (Deleuze 2006c, 355). For an artist (as for the philosopher), that means: 'I am no longer myself, but an aptitude of thought for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 64); however, a philosopher, according to Deleuze/Guattari, needs to *create* concepts that are able to describe the constellations of events, whereas an artist includes 'the novelties, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived', is a 'seer, a becomer' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 171).

Brian Massumi's aphorism: 'It is every being's exemplary fate to be born a singularity, for more to come' (Massumi 2002b, xxxiv) alludes to the overall-conception of the plane of immanence as univocity of all being that, with its affirmed infinite chain of 'birth' and metamorphosis, absorbs 'origin' and 'otherness' (both pointers to the traditional notion of *aura* and transcendence) '*within the immanent*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 47). In order to prevent transcendence from re-entering into the imagined (the thought of) still-stand (via contemplation, reflection, communication), the immanent needs to be conceptualized as continuously differentiating movement of the infinite⁴⁰: Deleuze uses for this resistance the verb 'to immanate', a 'device', as Catherine Keller writes, 'that will let immanence resist its own petrification' (2007, 155).

When Deleuze writes: 'What differentiates itself is *first* that which differs from itself, in other word, the virtual' (2004a, 43), it becomes clear that what actualizes through/on the planes in time must be intricately involved with and triggered by an

³⁹ The main aspects of Deleuze's critique of Kant is explained in chapter 3.1.

⁴⁰ In how far this is possible in art practice, is one of the main underlying questions of this research. It links directly to the problematic of flux and framing flux in visuals (chapter 2.3) and the question of how the ethical aspects of *aura* (response/ability to/wards the 'other') might transform in an immanent view.

intensity that exceeds what otherwise would stagnate as a fixed form. Ronald Bogue explains:

‘The virtual is actualized in bodies, states of things, perceptions, and affections, and these actual entities are the subject of scientific investigation. But immanent within the actual is the virtual, something extra that exceeds the actualizations of every occurrence, both something left over, perpetually in reserve, and something still about to occur, an “infinite awaiting that is already infinitely past, awaiting and reserve”’ (Bogue 2003, 176).

Deleuze reworks here Henri Bergson’s objection to the application of scientific methods onto lived experience. As scientific methods apply to the observation of objects in space, separated from each other and in a ‘stop’-state, they cannot do justice to the characteristics of the immediate, the sensation of internal non-linear flow of time, ‘duration’ and will lose ‘the difference of the thing, that which makes its being, that which makes it this rather than that, this rather than something else’ (Deleuze 2004a, 24)⁴¹. Metaphysical systems built on such analytical methods will, according to Bergson, fail as they disregard that duration is not only the internal experience as flux but also its quantitative condensation; when he writes ‘*fixed concepts can be extracted by our thought from the mobile reality; but there is no means whatever of reconstituting with the fixity of concepts the mobility of the real*’ (Bergson 1946, 189), he foreshadows what Deleuze conceives in his philosophy as an overdue critique of ‘images of thought’, judgments derived from spatial analysis of duration, which is temporal, yet non-linear. Duration appears as *two tendencies* of one movement, as spirit (duration as internal experience, ‘mobility’) and simultaneously as matter and with it as two modes of time: past and present as coexisting movements, ‘the one *beneath* the other, and not the one *after* the other [, ...] different times, the present and the past, as contemporary with one another, and forming the same world’ (Deleuze 2004a, 24). The *virtual* then, as accumulation of ‘*an infinitely dilated*’ past, an excess with its problematic complexes that (even if never having been present), triggers actualization by differentiation, a contraction ‘*as an extremely narrow, tensed present*’ (Deleuze 2004a, 31).

From this angle, *Becoming* is exactly the process of actualization of the coexisting and real ‘beneath’, the virtual, before it has become the actual itself. Instead of functioning as a hinge between the virtual and the actual, *Becoming* names difference in movement, differentiation within duration; it traverses, passes across and through duration’s ‘ability to englobe itself, even while it splits itself up

⁴¹ Bergson writes: ‘[...] it appeared to us that the utilitarian work of the mind, in what concerns the perception of our inner life, consisted in a sort of refracting of pure duration into space a refracting which permits us to separate our psychical states, to reduce them to a more and more impersonal form and to impose names upon them, - in short, to make them enter the current of social life’ (Bergson 1919, 242).

into fluxes and concentrates itself in a single current, according to the nature of attention we pay to it' (Deleuze 2004a, 39). With *Becoming*, duration '*differs from itself*' (Deleuze 2004a, 37), differentiates multiplicities, both continuous (quantitative) and discontinuous (qualitative) ones as production of real difference⁴². As englobing heterogeneity, Bergson's discredited *élan* gains with Deleuze's take on 'Bergsonism' new relevance: for it is not a clearly framed subject that Bergson's conception of 'difference' (according to Deleuze) invites to dissolve in a stream of dreamy consciousness, but a multiplicity or destabilized composite or 'subjectile'⁴³ of heterogeneous and differentiating tendencies that must live with an awareness for how to respond creatively (*actively*) to 'a force that duration carries in itself: dichotomy is the law of life' (Deleuze 2004a, 28). The dichotomy, could be argued, consists perhaps merely between Deleuze's claim and actual regress into new hierarchies between 'pure' forces and historical/social reality he aims to overcome; then, the traditional genesis of *Becoming* from Being would have been just reversed. But Deleuze clearly states the reality and simultaneity (univocity) of the interaction of both perspectives: 'The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The*

⁴² Multiplicities as temporalized 'compositions' appear in two types: on the one hand as actual numerical objects of observation, represented by space, differentiating quantitatively in measured time; on the other hand as virtual, heterogeneous and internal aspects of duration. Multiplicities are 'composed of particular elements, empty places for those who temporarily function as subjects, and cumable, repeatable and self-preserving regularities [, ...] topological' (Deleuze 1999b, 13). As spatial relations of lived experiences and their fissured strata, of concepts as much as expressive intensities and their dramatization, multiplicities encompass a network that interweaves and dissolves structures of exteriority (as countable things) and interiority (as psychic states). Deleuze writes: 'The important thing ... is that the decomposition of the composite reveals to us two types of multiplicity. One is represented by space (or rather, if all the nuances are taken into account, by the impure combination of homogenous time): It is a multiplicity of exteriority, of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of order, of quantitative differentiation, of difference in degree; it is a numerical multiplicity, discontinuous and actual. The other type of multiplicity appears in pure duration: It is an internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of difference in kind; it is a virtual and continuous multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers.' (Deleuze 1988a: 38)

⁴³ Deleuze, in *The Fold*, refers to architect/philosopher Bernard Cache's term of the 'objectile' as: 'a very modern conception of the technological object: it refers neither to the beginnings of the industrial era nor to the idea of the standard that still upheld a semblance of essence and imposed a law of constancy ... but to our current state of things, where fluctuation of the norm replaces the permanence of a law; where the object assumes a place in a continuum by variation ... The new status of the object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mold – in other words, to a relation of form-matter – but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form' (Deleuze 2006b, 20). From this perspective, which implies a temporalization/vectorialization of the relationship between subject and object and the latter's becoming an 'event', Cache speaks of the subject – put as 'event' or 'surface' (subjectile in French means literally 'the layer as basis for applying paint' (Interview in: Balkema and Slager 1999, 27)) – as 'subjectile'. Cache writes: 'The subjectile [...] subdivides into "subject" zones of which it will be said that they have this body or that soul' (Cache 1995, 124).

virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual. [...] Indeed, the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension’ (Deleuze 2004b, 260). Differentiation refers thus to differentials as ‘portions of the difference’, a ‘reciprocal determination’ or relations between differences in contrast to quasi-Neoplatonical theories of emanation. ‘A life’ or the plane of immanence, containing ‘only virtuals’, coexists with its actualization in ‘an object and a subject to which it attributes itself’ (Deleuze 2001, 31) as one constellation within a much broader transcendental field.

Becoming as the gradual, intense differentiation (*not* the virtual, *not* the actual but in between) is here the productive and infinite *return* of differences, the vitality of pure differences and repetitions leading to temporarily stable forms. The forming of these stable forms projects no finality but functions as masks or costumes: ‘Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself. It is not underneath the masks, but is formed from one mask to another, as though from one distinctive point to another’ (Deleuze 2004b: 19). The subject, as multiplicity opened in and for the forces of *Becoming*, the personal and the personal experience (*per sonare* (lat.): to sound through a mask) becomes thus a *locus solus*, a unique place of transmutation within ‘A LIFE’ (Deleuze 2001: 31). Deleuze binds Nietzsche’s ‘eternal return’⁴⁴, the affirmation of a ‘thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness; “the eternal recurrence”’ (Nietzsche 1968, 35), into his philosophy by linking it to difference. Repetition is the counter-part to difference, linking it not to repetition of the same but to transmutation. As Nietzsche argues ‘to welcome every moment of universal existence with a sense of triumph [...] in oneself as good, valuable – with pleasure’ (Nietzsche 1968, 36), he positions the affirmation of recurrence against the consequence of the transcendent structures of religion, slavery of ‘resentment’ that coerces the individual into subordination of life, passion, vitality and positivity as ‘misery’ to transcendent ideals⁴⁵. What Nietzsche achieves, according to Deleuze, is to affirm the ‘death of God’ in a new way, not as affirming man’s usurpation of

⁴⁴ Developed particularly in Nietzsche’s fragments from the years 1883-1888, which were ordered into thematic section by Nietzsche’s sister and first published posthumously as *The Will to Power* in 1901. This edition (and especially Alfred Bäumler’s editorial involvement) gained notorious fame in the 1930s as the sum of Nietzsche’s thinking and its closeness to the aims of the ‘Third Reich’.

⁴⁵ In terms of *Becoming*, this freedom of transcendence makes the plane of perspectives – that had to be subordinated to the judgment of transcendent authority – explode: ‘If becoming is a great ring, then everything is equally valuable, eternal, necessary. – In all correlations of Yes and No, of preference and rejection, love and hate, all that is expressed is a perspective, an interest of certain types of life: in itself, everything that is says Yes’ (Aphorism 293, 1888, in: Nietzsche 1968: 165).

God's place but by 'trying to give voice to [...] impersonal individuations and [...] pre-individual singularities ... that's what he calls Dionysos, or also the super-man' (Deleuze 2004a, 139). Deleuze reads Nietzsche's 'eternal return' not as the return of the same, but as that which 'one also will the eternal return', a condition, which, enlarged onto the concept of 'being' excludes the inverted resentment of superiority: 'only that which *becomes* in the fullest sense of the word can return, is fit to return. Only action and affirmation return: becoming has being and only becoming has being' (Deleuze 2010, x): linked to (the re-turn of) further differentiation, *Becoming* implies decisions, 'disjunctions' or selections. This reading installs the notorious terms 'selection' and 'being fit' - perhaps the most alarming aspects of certain forms of vitalism - in univocity, where they indicate the ability and responsibility of transmuting with the potential of 'zoë' as 'life' against its administration as 'bios' in strategies of politics.

'Life' as the plane of immanence (the virtual and thus being *real*) carries complex questions, which trigger actualizations and their reflection in thought (as counter-actualizations). Deleuze calls these problematic questions or problems 'Ideas', thereby inverting Platonic Ideas, which are positioned as pure abstractions outside of real forms, into differentiated complexes within univocity=immanence. Thus, '[p]roblematic Ideas are not simple essences, but multiplicities or complexes of relations and corresponding singularities' (Deleuze 2004b, 203), they 'pre-embodiment' tests and selections asking for solutions, which 'ground in the conditions of the problems' (Deleuze 2004b, 201)⁴⁶. Emerging from and encompassing the tendencies of problematic Ideas, *Becoming* suggests, from the point of view of this research, artistically and politically an unfolding of a community of *dissensus*, not an empty homogeneous search for the supra-sensible or for power⁴⁷. Subjectivation (also in the sense of making art) encompasses not the development of a homogeneous or indifferent 'style' (Deleuze 1995, 141) but asks for decisions of *how* to subjectivate, to *be* a differentiating multiplicity and respond to the world as '*matrix of problems*' (Kerslake 2007) after the loss of 'belief' in transcendent ideals and with it, loss of coherence between thought and world:

⁴⁶ Deleuze's composite or conjunction of 'different/ciation' refers, according to Constantin V. Boundas, 'to the complex relations between problems and solutions, questions and answers, virtual Ideas-structures and their actualizations. Deleuze calls 'differentiation' the totality of the diacritic relations which occur 'inside' an Idea-structure, and 'differentiation,' the process of actualization of such a structure. 'Differentiation', therefore, designates the actualization of a virtuality, and it is only one half of the notion of difference. It is the half which cannot account for itself without prior appeal to the process of differentiation' (in: Patton 1996, 91).

⁴⁷ Deleuze puts differentiation and thus the problematic of a complex act in the centre, not foremost the 'Other'. He avoids thus what Jacques Rancière points out in *Dissensus*: 'Obedience to the rights of the Other sweep aside the heterogeneity of political dissensus in the name of a more radical heterogeneity' (Rancière 2009, 74).

‘What we most lack is a belief in the world, we’ve quite lost the world, it’s been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume. It’s what you call *pietas*. Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity and a people’ (Deleuze 1995, 176).

Here it is lived, continuous and active openness for ‘selective’ differentiation in discontinuity (‘creativity’, ‘people’) that is anchored in immanence (the world) from where ‘*a breach* [as transcendent ‘event’ or rupture within the immanent] *is expected*’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 47), the trigger from virtual problematic that stimulates the ‘new’.

Selections as responses to the intensities of virtual problems result from the particular way in which, in terms of time, actualizations (and consciousness) build, according to Deleuze, upon three syntheses of time: the first being a passive synthesis of habit, defining an organism as ‘contraction’, as ‘living present in time’; the second a synthesis of memory as *a priori* or ‘pure’ (thus not yet actualized) past, a virtual co-existence of past and present, which constitutes memory as an ‘*embedding* of presents themselves’ (Deleuze 2004b, 102) from ‘the point of view of a ground which causes the passing of one present and the arrival of another’ (Deleuze 2004b, 117). Against the purely cyclical models of predictable repetitions of the present into futurity, Deleuze introduces with the third synthesis of future an effacement of the present as agent: the ‘eternal return’ of repetition confronts the subject-agent with ‘empty time’, a ‘time out of joint [...] outside the curve which gave it a god [or, teleology], liberated from its overly simple circular figure’. This involves a continuous questioning of what “I” is, a fracture demanding decisions about how to act futurity in a scenario where: ‘[t]ime itself unfolds (that is, apparently ceases to be a circle) instead of things unfolding within it (following the overly simple circular figure’ (Deleuze 2004b, 111)⁴⁸.

Deleuze’s conceptualization of the ‘eternal return’ with its reference to the complexity and *Becoming* of individuation (individuation always precedes the individual, *Becoming* the actual) inherently subverts a state of established power as it tends to that which is still ‘to come’, the ‘new’ and the ‘minor’ which is not yet established as majority or narrative/mythology to be followed; in this context – strictly speaking, *Becoming* excludes ‘what is’ – his concept has its political/ethical strength and installs Nietzsche’s affirmation of life in an unambiguous way⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ This subject is central to chapter 2.5 of this thesis.

⁴⁹ John Caputo shows in *Against Ethics* that Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche suppresses Nietzsche’s rejection of differentiating univocity or, how Caputo puts it, difference as ‘gay play of egalitarian forces’. In fact, Nietzsche’s at time repelling statements about ranks, superiority and ‘pathos of distance’ appear

This extension of individuation affects the limitations of the ‘unconscious’ to a realm of human condition as held up by psychoanalysis. When the virtual, the past (memory) with its problematic Ideas ‘*coexists with itself as present*’ (Deleuze 2004a, 29), then it is also the virtual as ‘unconscious’ that actualizes its other movement, ‘consciousness’, with its quantitative reflective mode. The polarity of conscious/unconscious seems reflected in the relationship between the reality of virtual/actual but destabilized by the minute instants of differentiations. Already Bergson’s perspective of the unconscious is that

‘[...] memory does not consist in a regression from the present to the past, but, on the contrary, in a progress from the past to the present. It is in the past that we place ourselves at a stroke. We start from a “virtual state” which we lead onwards, step by step, through a series of different *planes of consciousness*, up to the goal where it is materialized in an actual perception; that is to say, up to the point where it becomes a present, active state; in fine, up to that extreme plane of our consciousness against which our body stands out. In this virtual state pure memory consists’ (Bergson 1919).

Like an inverted cone, the ‘unconscious’ dilates here downward towards the pre-individual singularities and complexes of the plane of immanence, which escape transcendent concepts.

The ‘unconscious’ in its relationship to *Becoming* and the plane of immanence with its singularities, as conceptualized by Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, his at times co-writer - the ‘two of us [...] each of us several, [...] already a crowd’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 3) -, differs radically from traditional psychoanalytic frameworks and their focus on an individual’s equilibrium in between societal demands and unconscious drives.

Desire, far from being the drive behind a theatrical self-illumination via mythology, does not exist as such in Deleuze/Guattari’s materialist ‘Schizoanalysis’ but as a network of productive ‘desiring-machines’, making the unconscious a factory of production (thus not first a question of representation that needs decoding). Their first cooperation for their project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Anti-Oedipus*, presents ‘the univocity of the real, a sort of Spinozism of the unconscious’ (Deleuze 1995, 144), dealing here with the concept of the Real as proposed by Jacques Lacan when he updated Freud’s topology.

In Lacan’s *The Mirror Stage as Formative of The I Function* (2006, 75-81), the first identification and image of the self (at the age of 18 months, before entering

to vanish in Deleuze’s reworking for a new post-war reception of his work. Caputo stresses that Deleuze stays silent about Nietzsche’s extremes, denies Nietzsche’s affirmation of opposition and quotes Deleuze: “One cannot overemphasize *the extent to which the notions of struggle, war rivalry or even comparison are foreign to Nietzsche and to his conception of the will of power*” (Caputo 1993, 50). When Caputo claims that ‘[Deleuze’s] will of the free spirit guards against all “responsibility”’ (Caputo 1993, 44), he obviously denies Deleuze’s implicit ethics which will hopefully become clearer in the course of this thesis.

speech) is composed like a mirror image as it is the result of reflections: either of a direct visual glimpse of the inverted parts of the own body on a speculum, or of others who themselves imitate the infant's movements. Others and the self-as-other function thus as foundation for a subject forming in-between the desire of others, the discourse of signifiers (Symbolic Order) enabling the communication of desire on the one hand, and the realm of partial drives on the other hand, located in the Real that will remain according to Lacan, after the subject's entry into the symbolic order (as it is unsymbolizable), inaccessible. The gap or, perhaps better, the *wound of lack* resulting from this structure will shape all subsequent forming of relations exactly because of the separation and somewhat final seclusion that builds the nucleus of inter-subjectivity as a fundamentally barred one in this model. In connection to the external, inassimilable and radical otherness that inhabits inevitably an unconscious understood as linguistically structured, '[m]an's desire is the desire of the Other' (Lacan 1998b, 235)⁵⁰.

By conceptualizing the Real as univocity, Deleuze/Guattari make it accessible and dissolve this dialectical, yet also constitutional gap (the wound of lack) that marks the barrier to the inaccessible. Then, the Real appears in all its productivity, as immanent chaos of partial drives and objects and transforms the conception of the unconscious (and thus desire) that emerged with the enlightenment and the simultaneous liberation of the 'night', the slumber of reason. Freud's model, built upon hydraulic imagery of sexual cathexis in its conflict with the cultural demands of sublimation on the one hand and ordained capitalist strategies in the upcoming industrial age on the other transforms to an affirmative, challenging and creative stream of desire-connectivity and transcends the individual as a blindly locked unit by equipping it conceptually (and practically) with a potential to link into this connectivity.

Deleuze/Guattari re-evaluate the symptoms of schizophrenia by listening to schizophrenics like Jung, but from another angle. Once the 'lack of being' as hiatus between Symbolic Order and the Real has been de-installed, the typical disruption of a functioning integration into the symbolic order opens to the chaosmos of a (problematic) potential of pre-individual fluidity and its inherent formations of desire

⁵⁰ Lacan's thus *dialectic* conception of desire – which Deleuze from his perspective of univocal differentiation will try to dismantle – is strongly influenced by Kojève's reading of Hegel's chapter on the relationship of master and slave in (*Phenomenology of Spirit*) forming the subject's self-consciousness: 'Man's humanity "comes to light" only in risking his life to satisfy his human Desire – that is, his Desire directed toward another Desire. Now, to desire a Desire is to want to substitute oneself for the value desired by this Desire. For without this substitution, one would desire the value, the desired object, and not the Desire itself. Therefore, to desire the Desire of another is in the final analysis to desire that the value that I am or that I "represent" be the value desired by the other: I want him to "recognize" my value as his value. I want him to "recognize" me as an autonomous value' (Kojève 1980, 7).

to break through or liquefy capitalist structures that are liaised with a particular controlling mythical structure, the familial triad of the psychoanalytic oedipal model. The delirium of and split-offs from the schizophrenic body, the non-organic fragments or singularities connected in a 'machinic assemblage' they name *Body of Organs* (further on *BwO*) after texts by Antonin Artaud who developed a theatre of intensity ('theatre of cruelty') that incorporates, not represents, the transgression of the body thwarted by order language. In fact, words (or their order as 'language') tormented Artaud's body, and in one of his last works, the radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (1947), it reads:

'Man is sick because he is badly constructed. / We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape / off that animalcule that itches him mortally, / / god, / and with god / his organs. / For you can tie me up if you wish, / but there is nothing more useless than an organ. / When you will have made him a body without organs, / then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions / and restored him to his true freedom. / Then you will teach him again to dance wrong side out / as in the frenzy of dance halls / and this wrong side out be his real place.' (Artaud 1976: 570)

Here, the body's fragmentation into partial objects and non-organic forces liberates the body from its organs as judgments of God, from 'the doctrine of infinite debt [that] determines the relationships of the immortal soul with judgments (Deleuze 1998, 128): the 'organ-ized' body is barred from 'true freedom' i.e. from thought beyond its order as language maintaining a consciousness that never recognizes and affirms its entrapment by God's judgements. The *BwO* stands thus, as Joshua Ramey puts it, for 'a subtle body accessible at the extremes of experience – in suffering, delirium, synesthesia, and ecstatic states', for Deleuze marking the intense conditions for stepping out of images of thought and conceiving the real in thought 'paradoxically beyond its representational capacities' (Ramey 2012, 2). God's judgement thus marks 'lack' as it 'implies a veritable organization of the bodies [and is] nothing other than the power to organize to infinity' (Deleuze 1998, 130), the ground for a will *for* power, not the will *to* power that would affirm transformational *Becoming*. The *BwO* connects desiring-machines from one to the other, but also (against traditional logic) by simultaneously charging all chains as 'disjunctive syntheses', 'an immanent use that would no longer be exclusive or restrictive, but fully affirmative, nonrestrictive, inclusive'. Such rebuff to reason and structure supports Deleuze/Guattari's project applying schizophrenic *Becoming* to a critique of capitalist structures and societies: the disjunction shows both aspect of a delirium that capitalism produces, the catatonic, dead *and* the vital, anarchic; the disjunction proposes an avoidance of that identity, which obeys the structure of judgment, opening both at once 'without restricting one by the other or excluding

the other from the one, is perhaps the greatest paradox [...,belonging] precisely to both sides' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 76).

Clearly, Deleuze/Guattari free Artaud's *Body without Organs* from the clinically schizophrenic aspect of a deep, almost gnostic disgust of the body⁵¹ to its potential as 'affective, intensive, anarchist body that consists solely of poles, zones, thresholds and gradients. It is traversed by a powerful, nonorganic vitality' (Deleuze 1998, 131)⁵². In this description, elements encountered earlier in this section, play together: the intensity of affects in problematic virtual multiplicities urging into actualization, the poles and thresholds built by singularities during differentiation in the virtual, the free flowing chaotic stream of forces that are not yet organically bound.

Deleuze/Guattari achieve, by introducing the *BwO*, to radicalize a line of Freudo-Marxism of the end 60s, which in their view, paralyses due to its narrow framework. Guattari writes:

'To sever desire from work: such is the primary imperative of capitalism. To separate political economy from libidinal economy: such is the mission of those theoreticians who serve capitalism. Work and desire are in contradiction only in the framework of relations of production, of well-defined social and familial relations: those of capitalism and bureaucratic socialism.' (Guattari 1977, 74).

Capitalism (and bureaucratic socialism) as delirium suggests a *becoming-Capitalism* of desire as an all-pervading and intangible plane, not in the sense of a teleology of desire but its being 'world-historical' (Deleuze 2006c, 314), a consequence of the *representation* of its forces as 'surplus-value'; as such a delirium

⁵¹ Susan Sontag points out that the BwO carries with it a Gnostic refusal of the body itself and a very specific refusal of language to create a meaningful discourse. 'Artaud's commitment', she writes in her excellent introduction to Artaud's *Selected Writings*, 'to the magical value of words explains his refusal of metaphor as the principal mode of conveying meaning in his late poems. He demands that language directly express the physical human being, The person of the poet appears in a state beyond nakedness: played' (Susan Sontag, Artaud. An Essay, in: Artaud 1976: lii). This point is turned affirmatively by Deleuze.

⁵² From an orthodox Lacanian point of view, Deleuze's and Guattari's affirmation of the *Body without Organs* (and especially their recommendation to make one for oneself) implies a trespassing of one of the fundamental Lacanian concepts, the patriarchal subjection to the symbolic order (of coordinated/-ing language and laws); Ellie Ragland-Sullivan gives Deleuze/Guattari a slap on the wrist: 'These authors, indeed, advocate what Lacan has shown to be an impossibility: to live in sanity in an archaic, preverbal state of psychic symbiosis. The schizophrenic hero of Desire, whom they extol, is a kind of Marcusean or Laing-like caricature of the Lacanian desiring subject' (Ragland-Sullivan 1986: 272). However, Smith (2012, 313-324) can prove that Deleuze/Guattari in fact continue as 'Lacan's most profound, but also most independent, disciples' his work by consequently conceptualizing along an inherent criticism of psychoanalysis in Lacan's own work: 'In Lacan, the symbolic organization of the structure, with its exclusions that come from the function of the signifier, has as its reverse side the *real inorganization* of desire' (Deleuze/Guattari, quoted in: Smith 2012, 322).

it proves able to absorb the challenges of its consistency (class struggles) and relates to what Robert Kurz calls the ‘esoteric’ aspect of Marxism, the ‘independent’ productivity of capital⁵³: ‘Capital is’, Marx states, ‘*productive*: [...] as the *personification and representative*, the reified shape of the “social productive powers of labour” or the productive powers of social labour. The way in which the law of capitalist production — the creation of surplus value, etc. — enforces [...] appears as inflicted by the capitalists upon each other and upon the workers — hence it in fact appears as a law of capital operating against both capital and labour’ (Marx 1975, 491); thus, ‘value’ transforms into (or ‘mystifies’ as) an ‘automatic subject’. Deleuze/Guattari’s strategy of coupling *Becoming* to chaosmos and its ‘desiring machines’ allows following up this ‘surplus/beyond’. Desiring-machines become the interconnectivity that is desire as concrete production (the ‘striated’), as flow (the ‘smooth’), interrupted, transformed, overlapped, coupled with fragmented, cathexic partial objects, ‘machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 1).

Looking at the complex network (desiring-machineries) of contextualization that plugs into *Becoming*, Deleuze achieves, by reworking multiple planes of previous philosophers’ concepts, to counter-act and destabilize Law and Judgment, which are deduced from a ‘First’ and based on the broken link (the ‘Fall’) that marks re-presentation. Against the hiatus gaping between Being and beings, his concept of univocity of being *affirms*, beyond its conceptual argument, multiplicities as actualizations of its potential forces, of an always already connective and productive stream of life/desire, turning God’s judgment into the readiness for decision, for living the intensity of an ‘incalculable soul’ (Deleuze 1998, 135)⁵⁴. Thus, uprooting the dialectics between the one and the multiple, *multiplicities* remained for Deleuze a key concept of his philosophy (Interview, in: Villani 2007, 43): they ‘cannot be

⁵³ Kurz, in his introductory comments for his anthology of Marx texts for the 21. century (in Marx and Kurz 2008), juxtaposes the ‘exoteric’ and failed Marxism of class struggles with the ‘esoteric’ one that detects the surplus of commodities (value as ‘fetish’) as independently functioning ‘automatic subject’. Affecting equally capitalist and working class, it proves a merely ‘exoteric’ Marxism in form of organized struggle to be inoperative. In *Mystification of Capital* Marx writes: ‘the value of commodities [...] is constantly changing from one form to the other without thereby becoming lost, and thus assumes an automatically active character [*automatisches Subjekt*, Engl. literally ‘automatic subject’] If now we take in turn each of the two different forms which self-expanding value successively assumes in the course of its life, we then arrive at these two propositions: Capital is money: Capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the active factor in a process, in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it at the same time changes in magnitude, differentiates itself by throwing off surplus-value from itself; the original value, in other words, expands spontaneously’ (Marx 2000, 487).

⁵⁴ Deleuze quotes here Spinoza and continues: ‘This is no subjectivism, since to pose the problem in terms of force, and not in other terms, already surpasses all subjectivity’.

reduced to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, nature and history, body and soul [... as they] are reality itself' (Deleuze 2006c, 315). Composed of singularities, their relations are *Becomings*, their *events* (see chapter 2.4) individuations without subject in 'smooth' space/times (heterogeneous, amorphous, not striated, thus conceptually relating to Bergson's duration)⁵⁵. This conceptual un-grounding affirms powerfully the autonomy of difference within *Becoming*, revealing 'the freedom of the non-mediated ground, the discovery of a ground behind every other ground' (Deleuze 2004b: 80). Deleuze's philosophy itself, one could say, actualizes by weaving multiplicities like 'a rhizome, not [like] a classificatory or genealogical tree' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 263), spreading as the *construction* of maps still imbued with desire, with an excess or surplus value of couplings of multiplicities and their dimensions marked by transformative 'lines of flight'. Within the sedimented structure that a rhizome builds as soon as it is represented, these lines of flight, far from any connections to 'flying', are the perpetual movement of points as lines (thus never arresting as single 'point'⁵⁶) that allow the forming assemblage to transform further, to reterritorialize in other assemblages while already destabilizing them. The dynamics of the virtual and the real appear here as 'lines of sedimentation and reterritorialization' (forming/strata/discontinuity) and 'supple lines of creativity and deterritorialization' (transforming/smooth/continuity), and one is unthinkable without the other; yet, their relationship is non-dialectical because of the differentiator, *Becoming* that always already escapes/flights an opposition and transforms the virtual during its actualization i.e., what actualizes differs from the virtual and does not emerge as a synthesis between virtual and real. The 'rhizome' as emerging/represented complex of productive multiplicities and constructed planes contains thus both 'knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 22). The focus of the rhizome, though, remains on 'difference' (with its dependence on differenc/tiation) and *Becoming*, and the coordinates of a rhizome are determined not by 'universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 16). Lines of flight, traversing multiplicities and carrying intensity, work as *a-signifiers* against the closure of a secured relation between signifier and what is signified. Simultaneously, they mark a vibration; an echo of *Becoming* that oscillates as differentiation between/with virtual intensity and something real actualizing.

⁵⁵ In fact, multiplicities and *Becoming* are the same thing: '[...] it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 275).

⁵⁶ 'There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 9)

In the later Deleuze, this oscillation or ‘in between’ is accentuated in his work around the concept of the ‘fold’. Deleuze constructs the ‘fold’ from the composition of Leibniz’ ‘monads’, an infinite number of unsubstantial but individual and dynamic substances, which each contain the whole world, yet from another perspective. Between their two architecturally conceived floors, a window- and doorless upper floor (soul) and a lower floor, ‘pierced with windows’ (senses), communication unfolds as movements and resonances. Prehending what is sensed is thus a translation of ‘the visible movements below into sounds up above’ (Deleuze 2006b, 4), a resonance between a ‘dark ground’ and its translation. Deleuze writes: ‘Essential to the monad is its dark background: everything is drawn out of it, and nothing goes out or comes in from outside [...] the architectural ideal is a room on blackmarble, in which light enters only through orifices so well bent that nothing on the outside can be seen through them, yet they illuminate or color the décor of a pure inside’ (Deleuze 2006b, 30/1). This ground, as it is one side of the fold that links it to prehension, does not suggest an underlying ‘Self’ or an essential ‘first’, but ‘rather constitutes its enfolding, its inside, coextensive with the outside’ (Kaiser 2009, 209); thus, clarity gained will always fall back into obscurity and vice versa, leaving the monad in a state of differentiating ‘chiaroscuro’ (Deleuze 2006b, 36). Deleuze offers here, as Birgit M. Kaiser (2009) shows, an alternative reading of ‘analogy’; freed from Leibniz’ central monad (God)⁵⁷ and its pre-established faculty of harmony, the ‘chiaroscuro’ enables a model of ‘ground’ that becomes enfolded in differentiation by the fold as differentiator. As Daniel W. Smith writes, the fold is

‘a singularity, because folds vary, and every fold is different; all folding proceeds by differentiation. No two things are folded in the same way – no two rocks, no two pieces of paper – nor is there a general rule saying that the same thing will always fold in the same way. In this sense, there are folds everywhere, but the fold is not a universal; rather, it is a “differentiator”, a “differential”’ (Smith 2012, 129).

The two non-essential sides of the fold (crypt/bright room, obscurity/lightness, soul/matter, prehension/senses, virtual/real) are constituted by the fold as differentiator; by its ‘echo’ that is also the oscillation, the echo of *Becoming*. The continuous, never static fold then ‘echoes itself, arching from the two sides according to a different order. It expresses [...] the transformation of the cosmos into a “mundus”’ (Deleuze 2006b, 33), into endless pleats of matter and immanent *Becoming*.

⁵⁷ Deleuze writes: ‘Even God desists from being a Being who compares worlds and chooses the richest compossible. He becomes Process, a process that at once affirms impossibilities and passes through them. The play of the world has changed in a unique way, because now it has become the play that diverges’ (Deleuze 2006b, 92).

As differential oscillation, *Becoming* or 'echo' emphasises its materiality and the involvement of senses, which connects it to perceptions/prehensions, although the source of such perceptions is not anymore a phenomenological subject⁵⁸ but processual subjectivation in a framework of multiplicities. Looking back to the intensities that are linked to problematic ideas in the virtual, *Becoming* oscillates (differentiates) between the latter and an actualization *and* provides (or challenges) a person with a choice how to respond, how to select or allow a deterritorialization. This response to the oscillation of *Becoming* as differentiation suggests, from the angle of this research, a possible link to *aura*.

1.4.2 Potential of Deleuze's *Becoming* for the Notion of *Aura*

Deleuze's concept of *Becoming* can do justice to those aspects of *aura* that are associated with the 'sacred' (the 'numinous') and that cause contemporary reservations due to their stratified vectors back to 'mist-enveloped regions of the religious world' (Marx 2000, 473) and God's judgment (or Law). That is, because Deleuze asks for ways of creating concepts outside of significations i.e., from the inside of univocity, which dissolves the transcendental Idea of God - without having to foreclose its problematic as 'illusion' - into the immanent processuality of creative desire: what *becomes* along differentiating repetition, 'produces nothing other than itself' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 262), 'nothing by filiation'. In the same time, Deleuzian philosophical concepts are always already touching the domain of art and the production of affects and percepts, are, as Smith writes, 'necessarily inseparable from affects and percepts; they make us perceive things differently (percept) and they inspire new modes of feeling in us (affects), thereby modifying, as Spinoza would say, our power of existing' (Smith 2012, 127).

Looking back at *Splendor Solis*, we can find that it is indeed the concept of differentiation at the centre that pushes the visual series ceaselessly ahead via multi-layered assemblages, their dissolution and new Becomings towards a fragile and unstable equilibrium at the 'end': Mercury is here the name of differentiation, of *becoming-other* - 'neither one nor two [...but] the in-between, the border or line of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 3232) - that provides the illuminated framed

⁵⁸ The problem phenomenology encounters Deleuze/Guattari formulate as follows: 'Husserl conceives of immanence as that of the flux lived by subjectivity. But since all this pure and even untamed lived does not belong completely to the self that represents it to itself, something transcendent is re-established on the horizon, in the regions of nonbelonging' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 46).

pictures, the temporary stratified masks of a philosophical stone, which, taking into account that it actualizes itself only as *Becoming* and not as a stable outcome, traverses and coincides with Mercury, the hidden agent: the hardest and the most elusive, rock and fugitive mercury as two simultaneous layers of the alchemical fold. The agent rearranges the continuously dis-organising elements of multiplicities (the white arm, the red head, the brown torso of the man on a virtual flight to the woman and vice versa, his birth out of the mud on Fig. 4; the man and his cut-up double, the variation of his face: value or waste), oscillates at their edges and transforms them as the fold in-between.

The corona in Fig. 7, the sensitive or ‘minor’ triumph at the point of a supposed completion of the alchemical operations appears in this process as a deceptive ‘stop’, actualizing the representation of the ‘agent’ while hinting at its deterritorializing potential (its being ‘event’) while simultaneously castrating its real force. Thus, the *image* of the *aura* carries always a tacit surplus of virtuality. It functions as a frame, ‘constitutes it and ruins it, makes it both hold (as that which causes to hold together, that which constitutes, mounts, inlays, sets, borders, gathers, trims – so many operations gathered together by the *Einfassung*) and collapse’ (Derrida 1987, 73). For Derrida, it is the lacuna ‘of the very unity of the *ergon*’ (ibid., 59) that necessitates this frame as one of lack; in a Deleuzian reading, the corona would hold its lines of flight, traversing it and actualizing other transformations, potentially the ‘new’. Both views, complimentary as they are, support the reading proposed here: that the philosopher’s stone and *aura* is not an end-product but a dynamic, congruent with continuous individuation and co-existing with the complex of mediator, transformation and selection that assembles a framed picture.

But is this dynamic of a ‘folded’ *aura* consistently applicable to *Splendor Solis*? After all, amongst protective hulls and frames, Fig. 7 isolates carefully an *aura* that is explicit (golden, undisturbed) light. It should not be forgotten that light emerges here with the idea of the *lumen naturae*⁵⁹, and this always concealed/concealing light cannot be disentangled from its fusion with darkness. Both ‘completion’ and ‘purity’ are only possibilities, and the painter of the illuminations knows this. It is the introversion and over-protection of such completion that betrays the dependence of such temporary isolation on a space devoid of any contamination by other zones. The king’s *aura* emphasizes the *brilliance* of the agent’s work, Mercury’s as much as *Becoming*’s, which needs to be seen alongside the lines that already traverse the

⁵⁹ A central term in alchemy: ‘... in the very darkness of nature a light is hidden, a little spark without which the darkness would not be darkness ... *lumen naturae*, the divine spark buried in the darkness ... it is the light of the darkness itself, which illuminates its own darkness, and this light the darkness comprehends. Therefore it turns blackness into brightness’ (Jung 1980: § 197, 160).

series as a multiplicity and link/fold it in/to the darkness of *prima materia*. The latter holds virtual dynamics and becomings with new ‘echoes’ or *aura* and equals the almost blind ‘ground’ (the complex problem, the sensate) of the fold as differentiator, the ‘chiaroscuro’ as in-complete involvement of light and dark⁶⁰. Then, as Michael Goddard writes, ‘the spiritual and the material are simply two distinct yet indiscernible sides of the same fold’ that alchemy maps, suggesting, in relation to the process of individuation that *Becoming* always affects ‘a complete immersion in life and in love as a process of metamorphic subjectivation and the elaboration of a crystalline [new] regime of signs’ (in: Bryden 2001: 62).

There is another aspect that justifies reading *Splendor Solis* and its clandestine doorways to processual *aura* from a Deleuzian angle of ‘*Becoming as differentiation*’⁶¹. Deleuze understood himself as ‘a pure metaphysician’ (Interview with Villani, in: Villani 2007, 42) who engages with ‘first realities’, an exception in contemporary philosophy and, of course, unambiguously overstepping Heidegger’s cautious *posing the question* of ‘ontological difference’ in his attempt to overcome metaphysics, with which this section began. But in contrast to metaphysics as a conceptual ‘proof’ of transcendence, Deleuze’s work around ‘first’ realities concerns mainly, as Arnaud Villani writes it, the ‘*isolation of the conditions of possibility for a complex act*’ (Villani 2007, 57) on the plane of immanence, and as such it is understood in this research. This focus on the ‘complex act’ is a direct consequence of the pragmatics of ‘difference in movement’⁶², which extend tacitly to art practice

⁶⁰ Gershom Scholem, in *Alchemy and Kabbalah*, supports a connection, already earlier suggested, between *Shekinah* and *aura*: ‘It is undeniable that the symbolism of the *Shekinah*, the female aspect of the divine world of the *sefirot* – which represents the last of the ten steps of emanation within the Godhead, as it is richly developed in the *Zohar* – exhibits close parallels to the alchemical symbolism of the *prima materia*. [...] there is a structural relation between the ascension from the lowest to the highest *sefirah* and the alchemical steps involved in the refining of the philosophical gold according to a mystical view of the *ars magna* {Great Work}’ (Scholem and Ottmann 2006, 42). This would suggest a reading of the *lumen naturae* as *Shekinah* (divine presence), though in a ‘vertical’ i.e., transcendent context or interpretation.

⁶¹ Joshua Ramey, in a comprehensive study just published (Oct. 2012), undertakes to show in how far the ‘dark precursors’ of Deleuzian philosophy reach into the hermetic and Gnostic tradition of an indissoluble involvement of nature and spirit/mind that in its briefest formula is well-known as ‘as above, so below’ and also part of what *Splendor Solis* is about. Ramey finds it in ‘Deleuze’s insistence upon the nature of thought as spiritual ordeal, as a transformative encounter with nature’ (Ramey 2012, 3). He supports the perspective of this research when he writes with regard to alchemy: ‘The alchemical dream of hermetic science is to complete the task of the redemption of the soul without the sacrifice of the body, and without the sacrificial reduction of matter to form. In the modern, secularized thought of Deleuze, hermeticism takes on the guise of a “deterritorializing” of both spirit and organic matter, envisioning both as expressions of an “anorganic” and “machinic” play of forces’ (Ramey 2012, 29).

⁶² Marty Slaughter, in a paper on Deleuze and art, refers to this implicit ethical aspects as: ‘By understanding the body’s intensities, its becomings, and its will to power, one affirms one’s forces and wrestles with antagonistic forces. The ethical is therefore a process, of resisting, of loosening up rigid

and, in the reading proposed here, affect directly the sensation of *aura* outside of a transformation of its intensity into superordinate signifiers or derivatives of a 'first' truth. In context to the tension between continuity and discontinuity, between *Becoming* and its re-presentation, the task of the 'complex act' - as decisions that concern the pragmatics of *living* differentiation - marks the problem of inevitably downsizing potential complexity from a line of flight to a manageable 'point'. Villani elucidates the specifics of Deleuzian metaphysics:

'If rite, myth and religion can translate the overflowing *feeling* which results from the first fact of the infinity of the 'real' (a sort of "I believe", an adhesion to a type of "faith", an unreflective "natural attitude"), *metaphysics* might be the decision *in thought* to reflect upon the possibility of *giving a full and just account* of this hyper-physical infinity. But then, could one imagine any problem which better articulates what is at stake here, than that of thinking the loss that accompanies certain modes of thinking, and all action in general? To pose this question in all consciousness, is to be a metaphysician. And I wager that Deleuze, in calling himself, and in feeling himself to be, a pure metaphysician, wanted first of all to bring this idea, this problem to the fore' (Villani 2007, 52).

The loss of complexity addressed here might not only concern religious signifiers, which are gained from applying representation onto what continuously differentiates, but also a surrender or reserve in the face of ambivalent notions like the *aura*, which undoubtedly do occupy strata in religious territories and add to their image production. But such notions (and images) might transform when looked at as multiplicities with their inherent lines of flight, their 'shooting points of deterritorialization in assemblages of desire' (Deleuze 2006c); because it is these that pervade the immanent couplings of changing social fields and open them for deterritorialization, not for a return to 'nature', but for a 'new' productivity, and with it a conceptual revaluation within a philosophical framework of metaphysics, when it creates concepts outside of transcendent splitting.

From the perspective of this research, the reprimand of *aura* (understood here as a sensation of what Villani calls 'hyper-physical infinity' or intensity of virtual excess) as 'illusion' or as lost in an 'age' threatening 'uniqueness' seems thus to be purchased too easily with a foreclosure of desire, which, left trapped in a notion like *aura*, supports its substitutes in form of commodity/celebrity-*aura* in a society where life (here as the potential of Deleuzian *Becoming* that can resist/subvert

molar structures so that they become more molecular and permeable, of creating situations for deterritorialization and of pursuing 'lines of flight'. [...] Thus, the ethical is what is creative - creating new forms to be individual, social or political - in order to bring forth the difference that has until now only been possible' (Slaughter 2004, 255).

power⁶³) is in danger to ‘become the ideology of its own absence’ (Adorno 2005, 190).

Deleuzian Philosophy, in its involvement with conceptualizing what emerges by differentiation, filters beyond its traditional limitation as epistemology into creativity and builds thus indissolubly a fold with non-philosophy; therefore, Deleuze’s insistence that philosophy *creates* and abstracts concepts from fields of Becoming and involves art as a complimentary discipline dealing with the creation of affects and percepts, invites a simultaneously conceptual and practice-based approach for *aura* that pervades, so the proposal here, both.

The following chapter 2 documents how practice and philosophical elements of this thesis have interwoven.

⁶³ ‘Life’, as ‘desire’s variable field of immanence’, so writes Deleuze, ‘becomes resistance to power when power takes life as its object’. It affects/is affected by the plane of immanence, which Deleuze conceptualizes as ‘the matrix of indefinite desubjectification’ and ‘virtual indetermination’. Thus ‘life’ encompasses here less an individual’s life than potentiality and lines to ‘pure contemplation without knowledge’, as ‘A LIFE’ it ‘marks the radical impossibility of establishing hierarchies and separations’ (Agamben 1999a, 232/3 (Agamben 1999a, 232/3), a concept an individual might integrate and choose to act upon. Deleuze never suggests that individuals can free themselves from power structures; they remain always multiplicities within in a social field and its desiring-machines of forces and power.

Chapter 2 documents the practice-based element of the research. It is based on notes taken during the practice and follows chronologically the project's gradual development.

2. Practice: 'Mapping/Tracing' *Aura*

2.1. 'Mapping/Tracing' on the Axis between Painting and Digital Technology

Before documenting the practice-based research, one question needs to be considered first: what does the 'axis between painting and digital technologies' encompass, which delineates its scope?

In general, the axis indicates a relationship between the media, an overlapping of what still is devised into such brackets as 'old' (painting) and 'new' (digital media). In connection to *aura* and especially Walter Benjamin's critique, the axis responds to a specific contemporary shift: the age of reproducibility has been followed by one of cybernetics, dealing with a progressive 'man-machine symbiosis' (Paul 2008, 9) and based on communication and control systems, which in the beginning related to military purposes and transformed into the present worldwide accessibility of the internet. Computers and tailored software have become *tool* as well as *medium* for many contemporary artists, often to comment on or counteract the ever expanding ambivalence of the rhizome of the internet as platform of communication. In an essay from 1988, where he applies Benjamin's inquiries to 'the Age of Cybernetic Systems', Bill Nichols juxtaposes the appropriative gesture typical for 'reproduction' with 'digital simulation' and its temporal flow, which 'becomes embedded within a system ready to restore, alter, modify or transform any given moment to us at any time' (Nichols 2003, 631), leaving us, in contrast to the appropriated object as fetish, with a fetishized *process*, the somewhat concealed operation of simulation as output of the engagement with computational systems: '[t]he consequence of systems without aura, systems that replace direct encounter and realize otherwise inconceivable projections and possibilities, is a fetishism of such systems and process of control themselves' (Nichols 2003 632).

Departing here from Benjamin's critique as well, it seemed important not to answer the question whether digital media are alien to *aura* too quickly, especially when used, as in this research, with an awareness of its capacity as *tool*. Christiane Paul (Paul 2008) distinguishes artists integrating digital or 'new' media as *tool* into other practices/media from those disseminating digitally produced and stored,

mostly interactive work as *medium* on the internet. This definition looses its grip when Paul states that 'paint is a medium and the brush is a tool' (quoted in: Graham 2007, 100) as also the brush is involved in 'forming' paint, shapes its materiality and becomes a medium of the visual outcome. Talking here about digital media as a *tool* refers to its capacity 'to allow for multiple kinds of manipulation and a seamless combination of art forms, which can lead to a blurring of the distinctions between different media' (Paul 2008, 28), 'to hybridize and stray across media boundaries' (Graham 2007, 101). One of the reasons not to produce overtly interactive outcomes for this research (which would put a stronger accent on the *medium* aspect) have been the obvious restrictions of given choices suggested by 'interactivity', which, so also Paul states, has 'become almost meaningless due to its inflationary use for numerous levels of exchange' (Paul 2008, 67); another reason has been a planned and limiting focus on producing outcomes that, although produced or involved with an apparently 'smooth' medium of dissemination, somehow could be attributed 'uniqueness'. Following Benjamin's criteria for *aura*, outcomes on the axis or line that differentiates the 'handmade' (painting) and the simulation of the hand (digital) will necessarily be 'contaminated', to various degrees, either by uniqueness (with its connections to *aura*) or simulation. To assure that Benjamin's condition of reproducibility (for *aura*'s decay) has been given enough weight, the practice of both painting and digital input (with outcomes in form of paintings, drawings, films, all involving the axis by using projections of digitized sources onto canvas/paper, digital photographs of paintings as footage for films etc.) is based throughout on reproductions of the main sources, in one case scanned from a book facsimile (*Splendor Solis*), in the other retrieved from a license-free online archive (Grünwald's *Resurrection*).

Thus, blends of obviously heterogeneous media would emerge, hybrids picking up the differences between the materiality of paint and the seeming immateriality of the digital as much as an ambivalence with regard to 'representation' specific to this axis. When Paul writes that pixels do not 'require a physical object to "represent" and are not based on a principle of continuity with a real world' (Paul 2008, 48), it follows that also painting, when involved with the digitized, simulated alterations of sources, might be affected by this loss of an 'object'.

The objective of the practice element has been to find ways of 'tracing' *aura* – questioning Benjamin's concept of uniqueness and transcendent(al) 'origin' - in the (digitized) sources (pieces chosen for their literal iconic dealing with *aura*) where it is *not* visible but intensely present as 'lines of flight', which destabilize the iconic status, deframe, deterritorialize the pictures/image of *aura* into potential new assemblages (the outcomes of this research). This, of course, assumes that a practitioner is part of the dynamic 'spiel' of lines of flight within the multiplicity and

timeline of such an endeavour. The test of this 'set-up' would be to see how far the inherent dissolution of borders between subject (artist) and object (source/outcome) in favour of pre-individual intensities, which are criteria for the creativity of Deleuzian *Becoming*, could be supported.

Deleuze/Guattari discern 'mapping' from 'tracing' when they discuss the construction of rhizomes, especially with concern to their construction of a rhizome of non-genealogical plateaus, which grow into each other like their authors as *A Thousand Plateaus*. This discernment is conceptually important as it supports Deleuze's revaluation of concepts: they are not derived but created; the plane of immanence for a concept or a work of art is not derived but constructed, a turn following Deleuze's insight in the closure of *images* of thought, which cripple the chaotic fecundity and absurdity that thought with its 'outside' provides.

The 'mapping' of a rhizome or growing multiplicity is thus not the reproduction of lines, inflections or landscapes with their hollows and hills, but their construction, the 'the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency [maintaining a consistence of some kind]' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 13). Nevertheless, it is the tracing that 'has already translated the map into an image' and plays its pivotal role in recognizing/prehending/refolding the emerging construction.

Thus, speaking here of 'tracing' links to this pair of construction and reproduction, with a stronger weight on the 'complex act' as 'construction'. However, there is also a line pointing to Walter Benjamin's distinction between *aura* and 'trace' in *The Arcades Project*: 'The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the think that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us' (M16a,4 in: Benjamin 2002a, 447). 'Tracing' in this sense describes the 'in between' of mapping/tracing, mediating the sensation of distance and closeness; 'the thing that calls it [*aura*] close' would then perhaps be a real yet virtual 'pre-individual' intensity pushing into actualization and becoming trace as part of the visual outcome⁶⁴. This Benjaminian aspect, though, differs as it connects to an unadulterated 'first' – a 'distance' Deleuze explicitly dissolves in the dynamics of mapping/tracing as univocal fold.

With regard to the axis between painting and the digital, the outcomes of this research depend on a mediator that, like in the alchemy of *Splendor Solis*, traverses the heterogeneous worlds of paint and pixellation and is attached to the creative 'map' of virtual intensities. These touch (in a painting or drawing) where the

⁶⁴ The German 'Spur' ('trace'), which Benjamin uses in the fragment, has a link to 'footprint' as index of an absence but also to 'spüren' ('to sense'), which suggests stronger the mentioned 'appearance of a nearness'.

projections of digitally altered fragments of sources provide a force field for mapping and meet or reach into another multiplicity (paper/canvas-brush-paint-'a day'-pencil-hand-eye-affect-percept, to name only a few); in the case of film where layers of footage, including digitized fragments of analogue work, are mapped, stencilled, stretched, scaled etc. by smooth transformations⁶⁵. *Becoming*, in a Deleuzian sense, the 'differentiator' of difference (which allow difference to be identified) is such a mediator, the 'middle' as it involves the virtual (*not* in the sense of computer related 'virtual reality') *and* the real i.e., extends to an involvement of desire into technology. If *aura* (as proposed here) 'echoes' *Becoming*, 'provokes' a response (as being involved with virtual problems and questions) and *Becoming* passes through technology, *aura* would also 'work' through/with technology. This contradicts positions like Dieter Mersch's where *aura* depends on existential experience and works, if, *despite* technological input⁶⁶; it supports Josephine Berry's⁶⁷ who locates (with regard to net art dealing with the instable and fluent worlds of the Internet) 'preservation of [...] aura within the unpredictable mutations and instability of digital information' (Berry 2001, 4).

A 'co-operation' of *aura* and technology seems, from a Benjaminian angle, at least problematic, especially as the digital alterations in this research are based on scanned reproductions, which would preclude *aura* (there is even the possibility to claim that it have been exactly those reproductions as sources that, with their *aura*, have stimulated to start a research about them). From a Deleuzian angle, *Becoming* refers always to something 'living', and Martin Stingelin, considering if the Internet can be called a 'rhizome' or a *BwO*, makes a point about the two sides of the term

⁶⁵ Here, the hard disc provides a container and platform for transformation as well as for the outcome. Transformations of footage as long as being altered via software translations of commands are smooth; as a written file on DVD the film loses its smooth state, it striates.

⁶⁶ *Aura*, for Mersch, is destroyed with the loss of alterity and responsivity. Mediality belongs to the code, significant chains, formation, not to materialities, experience, encounter, to the uniqueness of a moment, which is given in the trace left by a performative act (Mersch 2002). *Aura* escapes the machine, which 'degrades the living body [*Leib*] to an element of its functioning. Thus, virtual experience contrasts in peculiar ways with bodily passivity, which eliminates all other stimuli in order to immerse oneself deeper into the *cave*, the "cave of simulacra"' (Mersch 2002, 102; my transl.). At this point, concerning the ontological valuation of the simulacrum, Mersch's position differs from the one of this research, which is inspired by Deleuze and his affirmation of the simulacrum as will become clearer at the end of (this) chapter 2. The 'simulacrum', which ontologically avoids a recurring to the set of original and copy, does not avoid, so the thesis here, a response/ability to alterity; in contrary, the ethical dimensions implied in the 'complex act', as introduced in chapter 1.4.1, strongly suggest it.

⁶⁷ Berry argues from a Benjaminian definition of *aura* when she writes: '[...] the automatic functions of software and the chaotic world which information technologies help to reveal work both to confound the subject and produce a non-instrumental second nature in which art participates. The evasiveness and potentiality of this second nature into which the relations between the social and the technical harden, surfaces in art as a new form of auratic distance' (Berry 2001, 293).

'virtual': 'While the virtual has its reality in its own concept, which abides its actualisation in a real creation, computer virtuality is limited to the realisation of a computational possibility, which equals a mere repetition' (Stingelin 2000, 28). Nevertheless, if *aura* connects to *Becoming* and its virtual surplus, a participation of technology cannot be precluded. A definite statement about this point would frame *aura* as a universal and be forgetful about the highly speculative aspect of this research's scope. What can be affirmed from a Deleuzian angle, though, is the vital role of a decision for *deploying* (in the sense of *dis-plicare*, 'to unfold') technological potential (the digital) for/in 'actualizations' i.e., a creative/complex act involving 'a displacement of the framing function of medial interfaces back onto the body from which they themselves originally sprang' (Hansen 2004, 22); in brief, an ambivalent potential of the relationship between artist/viewer and technology. Will the complexes artist/viewer, when addressed by Deleuze potentially as temporal, interconnecting and interfolding networks of multiplicities, be in danger to disappear in "a system of information" [..., loosing] all freedom as they are "sucked up as standing reserve [resource]" (Dreyfus 2004); producing/consuming art complicit with communication models of advertising and 'a globalisation of the image in the service of capital' (Rosalind Krauss, quoted in: Hansen 2004, 23)? Concerning the *work* or pragmatics of transformation of the self (approaching the *BwO* with its transgressions of thought images and order-language), that seems to be unlikely, as these pragmatics will affect a technological 'awareness'; however, it is a concern of this research, as mentioned earlier, to observe thresholds from which 'subjectivity' might take over the practice and become more delimitable.

Technology - and this has been pointed at already by determining the role of digital media in this research mainly as 'tool'⁶⁸ - is appropriated in this research where it touches a classic medium (painting/mark making) with an uncertainty about an all-changing 'newness' of 'new media'. Considering that 'to mediate', as Alexander Galloway sums up Lev Manovich's core argument, 'is really to reframe, that mediation in general is just repetition in particular, and thus that the "new" media are really all the artifacts and traces of the past coming to appear in an ever-expanding present' (Galloway 2011, 384)⁶⁹, the 'new' points back to 'old' media and,

⁶⁸ In terms of tool or medium, the digital functions as medium where finished films, digital documentation of other outcomes are stored on my website and accessible. The focus of the research, however, remains on production, which deals, from the angle of producing art, with being affected and perhaps affecting *aura*.

⁶⁹ Mark B.N. Hansen objects that this position 'constantly threatens to reduce new media to a mere amplification of what came before' (Hansen 2004, 32). However, in a conversation with Michel Serres, Bruno Latour states: 'This problem of time is the greatest source of incomprehension, in my opinion. What makes other people's "past" empty, frozen, nontemporal, is the supposition that the past is out-of-date' (Serres and Latour 1995).

leaving genealogies behind in favour to more heterogeneous maps, also to the non-linear strands of forgotten media. An uncertainty about the 'new', which might overcome the problems of other, less 'immaterial' technologies, comes clearly with the mountains of toxic waste, which the ever growing industry around digital culture and its 'planned obsolescence' (Parikka 2012, 166) leaves behind; a situation reminding of Benjamin's *angel of history*, driven by a transcendent 'storm irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky' (Benjamin 2003: 392) (see footnote 13).

What seems at the core of dealing with new technology in art is (from the angle of this research and *aura*'s alliance with *Becoming* as vitality) an astute awareness for what Heidegger calls the danger of regarding technology as 'neutral' ('The Question Concerning Technology', in: Heidegger 2008, 312), of remaining blind for technicity as 'technological understanding of beings' (Dreyfus 2004). As *poiesis*, technicity or the ability to order everything everywhere, to 'enframe' world [*stellen/Ge-stell* – to set/enframing] lets, according to Heidegger, 'what presences come forth into unconcealment' (Heidegger 2008, 326). On the one hand, it reveals 'man as the one who is needed and used [in the twofold of Being/being] for the safekeeping' (Heidegger 2008, 338) of what has been forgotten in representational thinking (the fold of unconcealment/concealment); on the other hand, it reveals 'the actual as standing-reserve [*Bestand*]' (Heidegger 2008, 326), as mere resource to be managed from a position of discrete representation. The danger lies in forgetting the potential of technology as a frame-work, a constellation that potentially can serve the creativity within the twofold: 'the essential unfolding of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealment of standing-reserve' (Heidegger 2008, 339). Translated into a model of folding multiplicities (dispersing the 'twofold'), the danger could be forgetting/denying the alignment with actualizations of virtual problem-constellations, 'letting oneself act', as Villani writes, 'to let the virtual infuse, without forcing it', referring here to '*to become*' as the transitive verb that "'lets itself be traversed by'" (Villani 2010, 77).

From this angle, digital technology, which certainly enhances the mapping of creative acts and thus serves *poiesis* [bringing forth], cannot simply be reduced to binary coding as a mode of representation⁷⁰. Challenging Deleuze's preference of the

⁷⁰ Also the above-mentioned 'danger' should not deflect from the positive potential of digital networks; as Andrew Feinberg writes in 1999: 'From the standpoint of the ordinary human being – and even system managers and philosophers are ordinary human beings in their spare time – networks are lived worlds in which humans and things participate through disclosive practices. This lifeworld of technology is the place of meaning in modern societies. [...] our contact with the earth is technically

analogue on grounds of its lines to intensity, also those between body and *BwO* (Deleuze 2005, 79/80), Jussi Parikka, in his paper *Ethologies of Software Art*, suggests 'we bracket the question of binary codes as secondary to the more specific and important role software plays as part of cultural assemblages'. As '*executable*' code (in connection to this research software that allows to transform a file in the mode of 'smoothness', stretchable, extendable, shrinkable etc.), the digital code moves away from functioning as representation; it carries 'a surplus value that is not reducible to [its] function of coding and recoding'. Parikka quotes Deleuze/Guattari: 'Every code is affected by a margin of decoding due to these supplements and surplus values – supplements in the order of the rhizome. [...] codes fundamentally include all phenomena of relative decoding that are all the more usable, composable, and addable by virtue of being relative, always "beside"' (Parikka 2010, 122).

It could be said that on the one hand the potential of digital software to transform in a state of 'smooth' provides its materiality, visible pixellation, contortion, keying etc. in the transformed picture/footage/projection; it 'simulates' or actually performs the actualization of a virtual intensity. On the other hand, it is certainly true for this research, which throughout involves experientially analog reproductions, that, as Brian Massumi emphasizes, '*[t]he processing may be digital – but the analog is the process*. The virtuality involves, and any new possibility that may arise, is entirely bound up with the potentializing relay [as the experiential relays the reception of digital outcomes sets in motion]'. For Massumi, the 'new' is 'not contained in the code' (Massumi 2002a, 142). Which of both is more accurate, cannot be decided here.

Mapping along the axis between painting and digital input concerns here foremost mapping and finding those lines of flight, which destabilize the metaphysics of representation developed in (thought) *images of aura*. 'First', so writes Deleuze about the untimeliness of the line of flight as rupture of the 'new', 'one must trace it out, know where and how to trace it out', being well aware of the risk of destruction coming with it (Deleuze 2006a, 105). This quote confirms that a supposed 'either/or' distinction of 'mapping' and 'tracing' is difficult; both coincide in the act of making and the emergence of a piece of art.

'Knowing where and how' (from Deleuze's quote above) concerns also a reflection of the media axis onto another axis, the rapport between Renaissance and contemporary art practice, which, especially in connection to *Splendor Solis* and its alchemical transformations, can reveal forgotten dynamics of 'old' media that relativise the distinction of newness of 'new' media. The elusive alchemical mediator that actualizes and, simultaneously, sabotages the striation of the 'philosophical

mediated: what comes into focus as nature is not the pure immediate but what is lived at the limit of *techné*' ('Critical Evaluation of Heidegger and Borgmann' in: Scharff and Dusek 2003, 334/5).

stone' (the immediacy of *Becoming*) can be followed in what 'he' leaves behind, a series of framed temporality not so distant from a series of image file transformations induced by working with a software and framed by a screen. The Renaissance Mercury/Hermes leaves messages behind that touch and embody heterogeneous strands, messages like in the digital world that 'might have several embodiments automatically derivable from the same data' (Nicolas Negroponte, quoted in: Braudy and Cohen 2009). The juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary art practice might add a heterogeneous moment to the 'media-archaeological record' of what Siegfried Zielinski (2006) calls 'deep time of the media': as tracking trails, 'impregnations of events and movements'. For even Renaissance alchemists, like contemporary media archaeologists and artist researchers, 'needed to learn much in order to decode, read, and classify the signs' (Zielinski 2006, 27) in a fold between calculation and imagination, a 'tension between reality that is filed away in concepts and a reality that is experienced' (Zielinski 2006, 34)⁷¹.

2.2 Language and Haptic Visuality

Video – Pages I & II (2010) - <http://vimeo.com/mvonbrasch/videos>

The first pieces in the course of this research respond to an underlying aspect of Benjamin's critique of the *aura*, the conception of an 'original' language (as introduced in Chapter 1.1) that formed the world, uncoils as a multi-layered book. This book writes itself. How would the 'book' continue writing itself in a digital film, a medium that in a framework of original truth might hold all the significance of

⁷¹ In a conversation with Catherine Perret, digital video artist Joseph Nechvatal who experiments especially with substituting subjective input in art practice with viral transformations of images online, makes a connection between early Renaissance and digital art: '[...] connectivist non-separateness is part and parcel with a noology of inter-subjectivity, which on one hand, gives art the license to appropriate scientific tropes, and on the other, lends science art's powers of non-utility, freedom, and even excess. It is this border-crossing between Janusian mirror states that leads me to believe that we are entering a state of a new kind of natural magic – in some ways reminiscent of the Florentine 15th Century Neo-Platonists. Take Marsilio Ficino and/or Giovanni Pico as examples. Their thinking typically placed the reign of significance in-between the vast remoteness of spiritual infinity and the baseness of present materialism - therefore concentrating on the zone of transformational actions of humans that lead to a natural magical alchemy. This noology is about knowledge that can transform things and states of the system. In that sense I am maintaining that we are leaving the age of sterile reductive analysis and entering into one of fecund synthesis; much like the poetic-mythic-scientific age of the early Renaissance. The binding force of this synthesis is certainly inter-subjective pleasure (art) and a lust for yeasty comprehensions out of which new possibilities grow. These comprehensions are obtained by experiment/chance/inner-risk [...]' (Nechvatal and Perret 2006).

depletion of 'truth'? How would *aura* - as a distinct and intense sensation of an unfolding emergence, which in the process of making is followed i.e. 'mapped/traced' - be affected by a digital *recording*, an always already reproduced, disseminated unfolding of language

Thinking about the traditional conception of 'artistic' subjectivity (holding a position somewhere between the outcome of a film and the realm of language) and its links to uniqueness, it felt appropriate to include connections to a (disembodied) body uttering language: writing by hand and speaking, thus making a body part of the 'book' writing itself without making it visible and simultaneously exposing the most intimate (writing by hand/audible voice) to the least intimate. Benjamin, who knew a lot about graphology, decided quite early to adopt a neutral handwriting that would defy personal revelations (however, his handwriting betrays his intention). *Pages I* unfolds the recording of normal, (visually) isolated handwriting on footage of an environment impossible to be written on literally; it unfolds itself in a timeline, writes itself on or against a continuous movement of water, spray produced by the movement of a ship. Layering these components could resemble an inscription onto a primordial image of world. The writing is not signed with a name; it makes itself visible, becomes language as writing/reading that lets itself be shown what is said, both personal and impersonal. At this point, Heidegger's questioning meditation on language comes to mind, where language 'needs human speech and is nonetheless not the mere contrivance of our speech activities', where speech 'as listening to language lets itself be told the saying'. However, 'the saying' [*die Sage*], conjoined with the reiterations of speech by a 'stream of stillness', does not refer here to a cause or ground but to 'appropriation' as the event of the ability to reflect and speak about being and its 'There is/It gives', which being needs 'if, as presencing, it is to come into its own' (Heidegger 2008, 411/12). This position stands like a mere observation between Benjamin's model of language as filtered and contorted translation of divine Law and Deleuze's understanding of language. In Deleuze/Guattari, language and especially writing challenges to break through the cycles of conventions of meaning toward 'the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow [...]: a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 133). Such a poetic production depends on the openness for or actualisations of events that coincide with new inventions of sense. These emerge along an arch built by the *verb* with its two-folded temporality: the present as succession of instants and the pure infinitive, 'empty form [...], distance [that] does not implicate a time internal to language without expressing the sense or the event, that is to say, the set of problems raised by language' (Deleuze 2004c, 211).

The text written for this temporal unfolding of the infinitive 'to write'⁷² would write itself, as duration ('distance') and succession ('present'), handwritten by someone, using language to fill the gaps between the words it consists of, between things it tries to signify, between one and an other, perhaps a viewer following the unfolding words and the spray on the still dark water, a visual depth that equals the unknown territory of the 'other' in the sense of a person, a face or the own voice reading the unfolding text to itself. The process mediated by the video reconstructs and presents the unfolding of language or, quoting here (despite Benjamin's disdain for him⁷³) Martin Heidegger who speaks in *The Way to Language* (in: 2008: 412) of the 'saying' that discloses itself in the reiteration of speech, the 'stream of stillness'. Both share the idea of an originary language, even if Heidegger thinks the latter as the unconceals its concealment language as a specific. The notion of shares an essential moment with Benjamin's ideas about language, an impossibility of appropriating it.

⁷² It writes / I couldn't find you, couldn't / hear, couldn't read / your skinscripts / serpents of letters / sung spoken / folds over plates full / of fruit and hair and / scents, blindfolded / / couldn't sing / the keys out of range / / distant, however / closer and / couldn't voice the gaps / the delays the / bracketed narrowed image of / you it / writes that is / something, stars, rubber / shoeprints, rusty / waterthreads, buds / a fleeting warmth and ashes / and stained pullovers / in between / folded unfolded / enveloped unenveloped / digitized undigitized

⁷³ In a letter (20.1.1930) to Gershom Scholem, Benjamin considers the importance of a discussion of historical knowledge for an introduction to *Paris Arcades*, now *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 2002a): 'This is where I will find Heidegger, and I expect sparks will fly from the shock of the confrontation between our two different ways of looking at history' (Benjamin 1994, 359-360). Section N3, 1 of *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 2002a, 462) juxtaposes 'images' and their 'historical index' to Heidegger's 'historicity'. Most probably (Benjamin's criticism remains fragmentary), he refers to his own method of interpreting images ('dialectics at a standstill') and retrieving what the constellations reveal about betrayed collective dreams in concrete historical moments – a hermeneutic archaeology. In contrast, 'historicity' is a condition resulting from Heidegger's attempt (in *Being and Time*) to release the limitations of the phenomenological subject into 'Dasein' (*being*) where history appears as less specific 'dispensation', 'sent': 'The analysis of the historicity of Da-sein attempted to show that this being is not "temporal", because it "is in history", but because, on the contrary, it exists and can exist historically only because it is temporal in the ground of its being' (Heidegger and Stambaugh 1996, 345) Peter Garloff observes that Benjamin's and Heidegger's positions overlap in their universalistic foundation ('dreaming collective' vs. 'Da-sein'): both share a 'trans-historical, primal-historical accent' (2003, 310/311) and a critique of 'inauthenticity'.



Fig. 8 - Still from *Pages I* (16:9; 4' 15")

Handwriting as an temporal visual unfolding keeps as a time-based record an indexical allusion to someone writing just now or having written sometime ago and yet disperses a concrete idea of who made the film, of who signed the record; if handwriting unfolds as a kind of signature then also Louis, a figure in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, could have made the film when he says: 'I have signed my name, [...] already twenty times. I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name. Clear-cut and unequivocal am I too. Yet a vast inheritance of experience is packed in me. I have lived thousands of years' (Woolf 2000: 127). 'I have lived thousands of years' can here also indicate, beyond the allusion to his reaching into the depths of collective history or consciousness, a loss of a clearly formed identity, even a dissipating body, a looking-back to opaque blocks of memories and oscillating strands of Becoming.

Technically, the handwriting had to be isolated as a layer on top of other footage in After Effects. The aim was not to produce *aura* but to play with some of the conditions typical for the experience of *aura*: a space of contemplation, disjunction that creates synthesis, suddenness, the gaze of personal signs, the index of someone unfolding a delayed process of thought.

By adding words onto images and associations, I touch on something that seems an integral of *Becoming* in this film: the impossibility of bridging the 'distance, however near it may be' that opens *between* the words and what they intend to mark. The set-up shows that however natural the unfolding and the actualization might manifest, here as words or signatures-becoming-flux, the inherent segmentation of language-through-words and of semantics will necessarily

work towards the fragment. This would have been predictable for a discursive text; but it seems the same for poetic language used to support the consciously developed haptic character of this film.

The notion 'haptic' is used here in the sense Laura Marks develops it in *The Skin of the Film*, as a visuality less concerned with representation or narrative than the evocation of associations and memories: 'While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image' (Marks 1999: 163).

However, language, in the case of *Pages I* unfolding as haptic visual movement, seems also to actualize the problem of 'translation' which Benjamin talks about, problematizing against the blurring of the haptic the 'gap' or the fragment; although visually and semantically blurred and thus 'open', the film manifests both, a haptic 'deviation' from semantics and a fragmentation of language that might reflect what Derrida describes in *Des Tours de Babel* (where he refers to Benjamin's essay on language) as 'the inadequation of one tongue to another, of one place in the encyclopedia to another, of language to itself and to meaning' (Derrida and Kamuf 1991: 244).

This aspect points to and reflects a general problem of this project: the interweaving movements that lead from an image (painting) to language, from art practice to its contextualization and vice versa; there are equally specific differences between working visually around the *aura* and working around it in the form of a discourse, and both are envisaged by engaging with this research.

At this point it might become clear why *aura* is a subject that seems to evade a discourse: it works and is 'placed' along the axis of closeness/distance, and these are the keywords referring to a haptic experience: in between the medium and the artist, in connection to the screen and viewing a work 'the dynamic activity of viewing that is engaged in both the film and the spectator, each as *viewing subjects*' (Vivian Sobchack, quoted in: Hansen 2004: 274).

While it seems possible to engage a haptic flux within a frame (the canvas, paper, the screen) that denotes the *différance*⁷⁴ as well as the potential of 'lines of flight that pass through the territory only in order to open it onto the universe' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 187), this haptic flux is broken up in any written body of work about it.

⁷⁴ 'Différance' is here understood as lack – not as a negative but as a heterogeneous presence/absence – in its relationship to the set of work (*ergon*) and frame (*parergon*): the work (the '*energeia*') protects itself from what is lacking: 'Although apparently opposed – or because opposed – these two *bordering* determinations of what the *parergon* is working against (the operation of free energy and of pure productivity or the operation of the essential lack) are *the same* (metaphysical/metaphysics)' (Derrida 1987, 80; transl. slightly altered).

The second film followed a similar line of an unfolding of 'writing' but the significant difference is that it looks at the problem from the angle of an abstraction of handwriting as illegible mark making, thus not providing clear language, but perhaps allusions. The film shows a hand forming lines and signs on paper, tracing its moving along its shadow and naturally never arriving.

The film – more than the first one – focuses on layering, reveals underneath, through keying and thus isolating the mark making, multiple layers, which are stencilled, used only partially and arranged in the 3D workspace of After Effects. Although the first version of this software was released just in 1993, its workspace is not much different from a typical baroque opera set with its 'painted backdrops, side panels that slid back and forth into the wings and borders that were raised or lowered from the ceiling' (operaatelier.com 2010). But there is another curious parallel to the Baroque opera stage. Joanna Norman notes in *Performance and Performativity. Baroque Art and Design for the Theatre* (in Snodin and Llewellyn 2009, 145) that a court theatre like that at Český Krumlov (Czech Republic) with its 'several pairs of wings receding towards a backdrop, ... the illusion of infinite stage depth ... favoured a privileged viewer seated in the optimum location'; the central-point perspective thus created mirrored the ruler's power who 'should be the only one able to appreciate the spectacle in its entirety, and it also served to direct the audience's attention towards the ruler as the real focus of the event'. From this perspective, the presentation of a digital film on flat screen mirrors a similar set-up: the isolated viewer, perhaps wishing to merge with the haptic visuals and their backdrop layers, thus augmenting his/her own 'field' of presence, occupies a somewhat deceptive central position as a ruler (of this establishing field); a row of flatscreens with viewers in the same order would emphasize this strange connection between power and isolation.

The visible film might potentially flow over the frame of the screen, i.e. it is less designed to support the window effect than to blur the experience of it and 'to touch the eye' or be touched by the eye⁷⁵; it shows tarnished forms, dark matter, moving star constellations derived from the pixellation of colour layers, creating what typically would be called haptic visuality. 'The tactile quality of the video image is most apparent in the work of videomakers', writes Laura Marks, 'who experiment with the disappearance and transformation of the image due to analog and digital effects. Electronic effects such as pixellation can render the object indistinct while drawing attention to the perception of textures' (Marks 1999, 176). But it is remarkable how haptic film and the illusion of a digital 'flow' and continuity are technically organized. Following Edmond Couchet, the 'numerical image is an image

⁷⁵ As for example in the video *uplifting murmuring tongue Of Ovid* by Joseph Nechvatal (Nechvatal 2009)

composed of small "discrete" fragments or elementary points, to each of which can be attributed whole numerical values ... These numerical values render each fragment an entirely discontinuous and quantified element' (quoted in: Hansen 2004: 9): the digital image appears to be a problematic hybrid of 'analog surface and a digital infrastructure', a 'disjunction between surface appearance and materiality' as Mark Hansen formulates in his *New Philosophy for New Media* (Hansen 2004, 9).

The subcutaneous stars in *Pages II* (built as flickering digits left visible for the viewer below continuously shifting and keyed top layers) refer to the already quoted note by Benjamin asking whether 'the stars and their gaze from the distance [are] the original phenomenon of aura' (Ms 931, Benjamin Archive, in: Benjamin 1991, Vol. 2.3.: 958) as much as to the alchemical *lumen naturae* as sparks of light inherent to darkness, to what is concealed or covered by earth or skin. The stars are juxtaposed to close-up footage of earth that has been altered (darkened brown) in order to emphasize the character of fermentation and an alchemical memory of the insistence on interweaving both.

Breaking digitally, with 'empty' pixellation through the footage layers and bringing the remaining fragments into motion equals perhaps the spreading of stencils and pin-hole stars on an otherwise petrified mask. They set free some of the masks (layers) inherent in the energy to differentiate itself (again, but anew) towards other forms, a random flow produced in between the intensity of intention, keyboard commands, the medium of the framing screen and the software as agent and messenger of this transformation.

Transformation is thus a doubly encountered subject, as much on a 'semantic' level as on a technological one, confirming Laura Marks when she writes: 'In utter contrast to McLuhan and the many critics who followed him in asserting that video is a cool and distancing medium, I argue that video's tactile qualities make it a warm medium. It is the crisp resolution into optical visuality that makes an image cool and distant' (Marks 1999: 176).

Transformation, questioning the rigidity of established states, carries inherently an aspect of mourning and melancholy related to the loss that is a necessity on a way to healing and integration. Music seemed important as a support of this aspect, and as part of the practice a piece was produced that creates an atmosphere contrasting with the moving abstractions; the music starts very suddenly after a longer period of silence and the film ends with a longer period of silence.

Using the digital image as a layered stream means also to deal with what Deleuze describes as their 'power to turn back on themselves [... as] object[s] of a perpetual reorganization, in which a new image can arise from any point whatever of the preceding image'. The space they are generating and that *Pages II* intends to establish is an 'omni-directional space' that intends to 'exchange the vertical and the

horizontal' (Deleuze 2008a: 254). This kind of space resembles a labyrinth, alternating haptic and optic qualities, perhaps similar to the one Benjamin encountered in a dream: climbing up and down a labyrinth of partially covered staircases (close vision), a labyrinth that extends into all directions, he finds himself suddenly on a peak (distant vision), discovering other people on other peaks, but soon one by one falls back in a vertigo that suddenly had started to spread out (Dream 28th June 1938, in: Benjamin 2008: 59).

The conflict between the haptic, 'smooth' effect and the stencilled flow of words and illegible marks suggests that *aura* with its pull can be made a subject for the digital medium. According to Deleuze, with the new image the screen loses its connection to the human 'posture' and becomes a 'table of information, an opaque surface on which are inscribed "data", information replacing nature, and the brain-city, the third eye, replacing the eyes of nature', an automatism 'worthless in itself if it is not put to the service of a powerful, obscure, condensed will to art' (Deleuze 2008a: 255). This position asks to realize that technology and its possibilities need to be used in unpredictable and creative ways, as a conscious extension of *Becoming*, the actualization of the virtual, into the appropriation of technologies for art, in ways that undermine the will *for* power that seems, alongside a more and more confusing projection of community, the biggest danger of the digital economic regime.

The films presented here followed an auratic 'trace' in Benjamin's work, the idea of language as unfolding creativity. The question whether such films, which deal with the subject of *aura* in the ways described produce *aura* for a viewer will be left open in this research as it depends entirely on the unique constellation of a viewer's encounter with them.

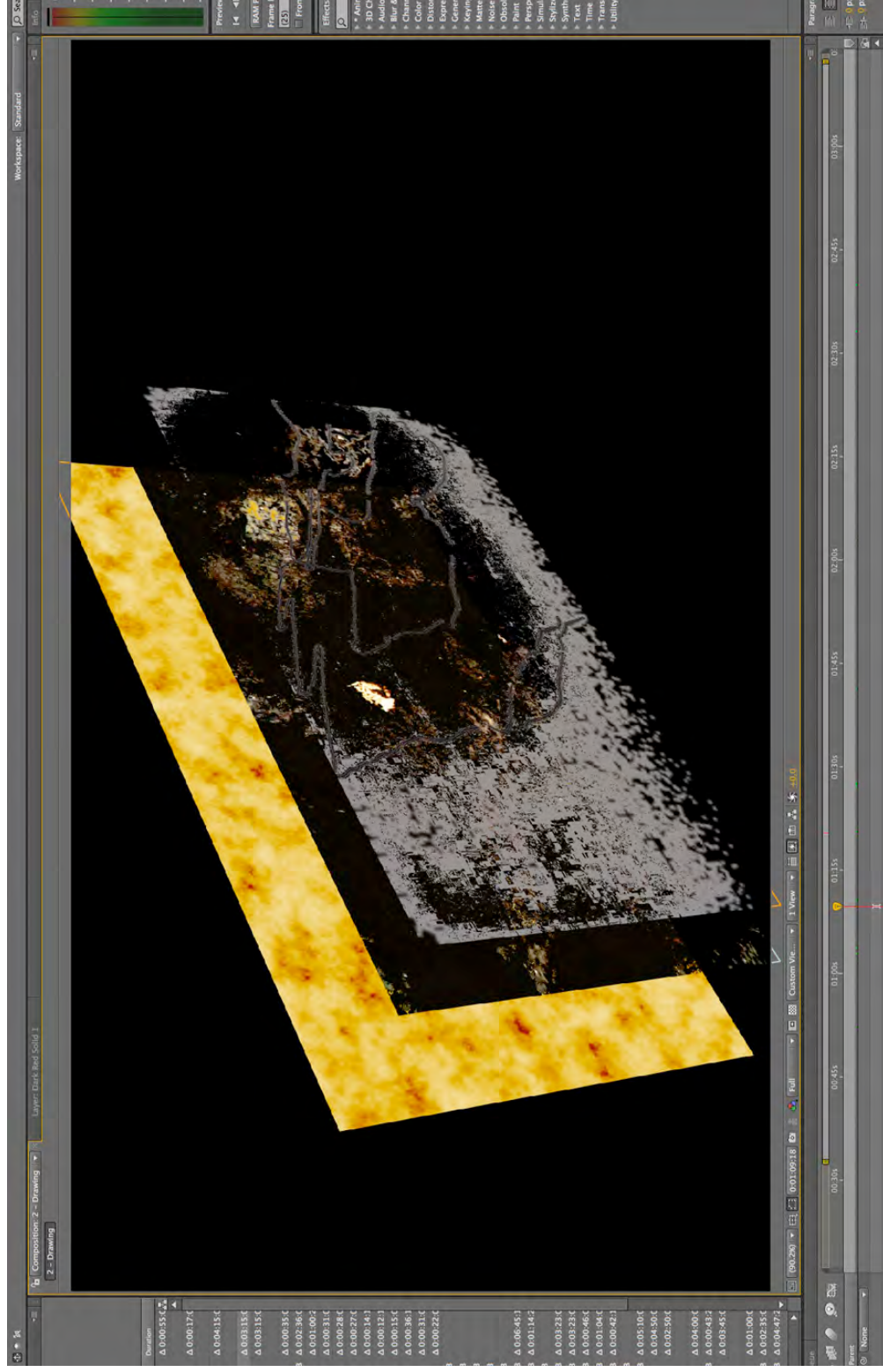


Fig. 9 – Screenshot After Effects interface for a sequence of *Pages II*



Fig. 10 – Still from *Pages II* (16:9; 3' 15")

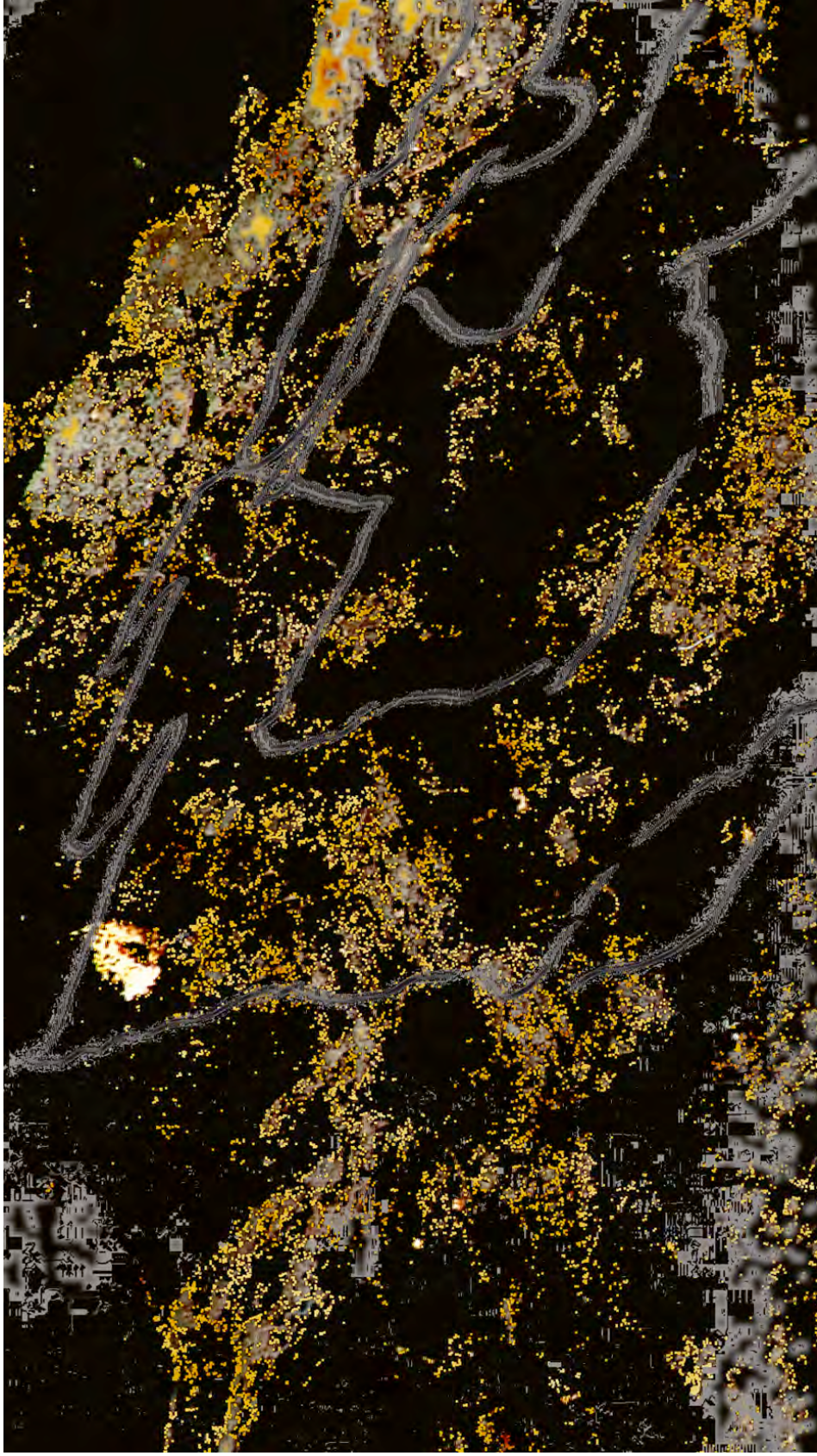


Fig. 11 – Still from *Pages II*

2.3 Working with a 'Cult-Object'

Drawing - *Studies after Grünewald* (2010) -

http://www.mariusvonbrasch.co.uk/aura_research/drawings.html

Gershom Scholem recalls in *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship* that Benjamin owned 'a print of Mathis Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece [that] hung on the wall of his study, where it would remain for many years to come. In 1913 as a student he had made a special trip to Colmar to see the original. His notes from those years often refer to the Isenheim panels; he was overwhelmed by what he called *das Ausdruckslose*, their quality of expressionlessness.' (Scholem 2001: 47)

For Benjamin, the 'expressionless' is the 'objection' to harmony and semblance provided by form that enchants 'chaos momentarily into world' (Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, in: Benjamin 1996: 340), the witness that art does not originate from 'nothingness' but chaos that ultimately it cannot sublimate; the expressionless 'interrupts the harmony ... grounds the mystery; this petrification grounds the content in the work', it 'compels the trembling harmony to stop and through its objection immortalizes its quivering' (Benjamin 1996: 340), thus opening the 'beautiful appearance to the dimension of the ethical' (Werner Hamacher, *Afformative, Strike*, in: Benjamin and Osborne 1994: 124)⁷⁶.

When he finds the 'expressionless' in an early paper on *Socrates* in Grünewald's 'halos emerg[ing] from the greenest black' (Benjamin 1996, 52), it can be assumed (Weigel 2008) that Benjamin refers also to the *Resurrection*. The halting moment of the 'expressionless' will be introduced at a later point (chapter 3.1).

Following Benjamin, the 'expressionless' belongs to the circle that assigns meaningfulness to the *aura* by giving it an ontological status as an index of redemption within a teleological and theological concept of history. The Isenheim altar and especially Grünewald's *Resurrection* (Fig. 12) have made a long lasting and deep impression on me as they did on Benjamin. An old postcard from Colmar had been unfortunately lost for this research. The reproduction has been imported from a copyright online archive.

⁷⁶ Hamacher connects the 'expressionless' to Benjamin's *Critique of Violence*. Benjamin makes here a far-reaching distinction between lawmaking or -preserving and divine violence: '... all mythic, lawmaking violence, which we may call "executive," is pernicious. Pernicious, too, is the law-preserving, "administrative" violence that serves it. Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred dispatch, may be called "sovereign" violence'. (Benjamin 1996, p. 252)



Fig. 12 - Mathis Grünewald, *Resurrection* from *Isenheim Altarpiece* (completed 1515), Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar

More than the 'face' with its gentle gaze of other victories (not the big ones) and the direct and luminous dispersion of the halo, the lines and flows leading to the guardian shoved into the bottom left corner became the trigger for drawing/mark making as 'map', following the deviations of a dialogue between, the inseparable equality of the halo and the blinding helmet covering the guardian's face: the release of separation between those figures, denouncing hierarchies between transcendence and immanence; proposing immanence and painted by Grünewald, a man whose traces of life vanish toward a blank screen, become '*a life*'. Objective of working with this picture has to be a foregoing of the gaze for the reason that it would limit the project to a phenomenological or psychoanalytic register of 'relating' between one face and another face ('those glum face-to-face- encounters between signifying subjectivities'), which finally would reduce *aura* to Benjamin's impoverished (later) version as 'projection of a human social experience onto nature: the gaze is returned' (Benjamin 2003, 173)⁷⁷. In contrast, the objective is 'rather to escape the face [thus the gaze], to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine [...] true becomings that [...] make *faciality traits* themselves finally elude the organization of the face'. In brief, to move '[o]n the road to the asignifying and asubjective' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 189/90). Such a move is by no means intended as defilement; it is a practical consequence of experimenting with the virtual questions attached to a 'sacred' idea (its problems) in immanence i.e., to test its potential for 'profane illumination' in a framework of the differentiations of immanent *Becoming*. When Deleuze writes, 'Christ invented the face', he alludes to the image production of incarnated subjectivity and the need of 'our societies [...] to produce the face'. Liberating the image of *aura* as a 'second' face, that of *Becoming* of subjectivity (as subjectivation) follows then the question: 'how to unmake the face, by liberating ourselves the questing heads which trace the lines of becoming?' (Deleuze 2006a, 34).

The traditional approach to this painting departs from a separation between matter and spirit. Jeffrey Chipps Smith in his *The Northern Renaissance* comfortably reassures us that 'Christ is transcendent. His body and his five principal wounds radiate with divine light, and are set against the starry heavens, a cosmic backdrop far different from gloomy Golgatha' (Smith 2004: 221). The reading invites us to pursue a hierarchical structure down from divine light to the 'helplessly' stumbling guard. The *aura* around the head alludes then, extending the matter/spirit division to the hierarchised bodies, to 'spirit'. Such reading is supported by the positioning of the Isenheim Altar in a chapel dedicated to it in Colmar, a hybrid of museum and devotional space, a fixed artificial environment of association and reconstruction. It was originally commissioned for the altar of a hospital run by monks of the Antonius

⁷⁷ Impoverished because anthropomorphized

order and specialized in treating a fungal infection (then known because of the burning pain it caused as 'holy fire' or 'St. Anthony fire'); one of the central pieces of the altar, the *Temptation of St Anthony* refers to this circumstance. The altar was dismantled in 1793 by French troops, succeeding the power of Catholicism with that of reason.



Fig. 13 Fête de la Raison (Festival of Reason), 1793. Etching, 12 x 20 cm. Estampes, coll. Hennin, t. 133, n° 11687⁷⁸

It is a curious fact though, as a contemporary etching (Fig. 13) illustrates, that reason, the medium of promising enlightenment of and liberation from religion, disappears behind the veil of numinosity to take over the vacant space left by a transcendent god.

How the altar in the Musée Unter den Linden in Colmar has been reassembled does not necessarily mirror its original arrangement. What now looks like a chapel is a museum and what looks like a museum is a chapel (fig. 14).

The staged *Resurrection*, arguably one of the most iconic depictions of *aura*, feeds with its imaginary re- or dislocation devoid of the immediacy of necessity (maintaining life, place of care for those with diseases) a taste for keeping framed and territorialized what as 'expressionless' transgresses already forcefully the signifying conjunction of Christ/Church, feeds, as Deleuze would say, the 'taste for castration, which animates the great Signifier as proposed finality of the work' (Deleuze 2006a, 37); the picture remains 'pinned against the wall of dominant signification' (Deleuze 2006a, 34).

Freeing (by addressing its virtual problematic) the work from its position will allow following those lines of flights, which deterritorialize the literalness of the face-

⁷⁸ Public domain image, accessed 8.2.2012

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fête_de_la_Raison_1793.jpg

gaze-*aura* complex, following against and with the striated, beautiful image and the adhered traditions of beliefs, the minor moments of Grünewald's painting, the aliveness and folds of individuation, giving the picture another set of meanings. It would also suggest that a painting contains time as a 'crumpling, a multiple, foldable diversity', as Michel Serres says in an interview with Bruno Latour, 'polychronic, multitemporal, [...] a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats' (Serres and Latour 1995, 59/60), which works as a virtual surplus toward new actualizations.



Fig. 14 - Isenheim Altar at the Musée Unter den Linden, Colmar. Photo © Andreas Tille

An *auratic* flow actualizes between the Christ figure and the guardian whose face is guarded by a helmet. His colours refer back to the pictorial *aura*, extending lines from the guardian back to the risen figure, interweaving both intrinsically into one movement differentiating itself. Verticality thus 'does not merely rise up', as Jean-François Lyotard writes with regard to a work by Barnett Newman, 'it descends like a thunderbolt. [...] The work rises up (*se dress*) in an instant, but the flash of the instant strikes it like a minimal command: *Be*' (Lyotard 2006, 338). The flash can be read here as the intuitive grasp of another folding than the visually obvious one that leads to a supposed climax in the *aura*/halo; the symbolic verticality has been left in favour of the 'instant', the instantaneity of differentiation. The experiment has been to engage with the chosen digitized sections as intermediate folds, pointing at less obvious rhythms, directions, proportions and even colours, focusing on a shift from the iconic to the intimate. Software (Photoshop) mediates the alienation of chosen fragments of the scanned reproduction (and perhaps what is ideologically attached

to it), exposing it to manipulations it in a 'smooth' state, destabilizing its solidity and setting free another 'dynamic system' (Peter Weibel quoted in: Rush 2005: 181) of its status as information. The drawings result from experimenting with projections of the resulting digital striated alterations of Grünewald's *Resurrection* and mark making with coloured pencil onto handmade drawing paper. A new state of *Becoming* would be triggered with the spontaneous associations or intensities that would occur while working with the projection, switched on and off (Fig. 15, 16; see also Appendix Fig. 51, 52).

Drawing in this way, as the editors of *Drawing Now* note, focuses 'on perspectives that align drawing with thinking and ideas, rather than with representing the appearance of object', and the emphasis is 'on how the process of making the drawing contributes to its content, a concept which we describe as "performative"' (Downs et al. 2007: ix).

The Swiss artist Britta Huttenlocher (Fig. 17) deals with aspects constituting *Studies after Grünewald*, which concern an ambivalence of the role, as Ernst van Alphen remarks, writing on Huttenlocher, of the 'directing hand of the draughtsman and elements which have to be accepted when they emerge [... and yet] don't seem to be drawn by a directing subject [...] seem to have emerged in the wake of other lines.' (Garner 2008: 67) Working with digital projections suggests this doubling process of lines in drawing, an emergence of repetition out of emergence, a 'conjunction' of emergence and plan.

The drawings emerge in between the folds of this encounter with several mediators (Grünewald, the digital, the projection, the colour, me) folding the dispersions (projection) of an altered image into something new. Although seeing, the projected image of the digital manipulation on the paper operates as a blindfold that has dissolved into a luminous intangible veil in my seeing, making it at times impossible to see where I am with my drawing; there is no emphasis on representation, but still some forms, like folded mountains, reappear again and again; a situation that reflects what Derrida writes in *The Memoirs of the Blind*: 'It is as if a lidless eye had opened at the tip of the fingers, as if one eye too many had just grown right next to the nail, ..., [it] guides the prothesis of a seer who is himself invisible' (Derrida 1993: 3). The intensities that are part of a subjective experience leave their traces in the mark making that itself closes/opens a cycle of different/ciation of folds inherent, so the thesis here, in Grünewald's *Resurrection*. The particular shift, from the iconic to the intimate and emphasizing the process of deterritorializing, leads to a stumbling, '[a] trembling, that is no longer psychological but linguistic [and affects as well the language of mark making and makes] language itself stutter [...] at the deepest level of style' (Deleuze 1998, 55); to careful navigating in between a manipulated source image and the evolving new, inside the

territory and landscape of sedimented historical interpretation and ideology. This process follows in a visual way Deleuze's dealings with the figure of Christ, which, according to Clemens Porschlegel appears at various places in Deleuze's work. Deleuze aims to 'obstruct any dogmatic recording of the figure of Christ, to make Christ 'faceless' and to let the figure drift away further and further. The historic Christ is given back by Deleuze to finity and immanence, while the endeavour of liberation and redemption, the movement of absolute decoding has to be repeated anew incessantly' ('Notre Frère à tous in: Balke 1996, 289; my transl.).

During such a decoding of an *image* of the face of the 'other' (irrespectively of how masterful it is) and its gaze, the drawing process in this set-up resembles in part an experience of blindness, a paradoxical and blind faith in the drawing which 'sacrifices sight, even if it does so with an eye to seeing at last' (Derrida 1993, 30), or as Jason Powell puts it, 'this blindness [...], constitutive of any attempt at knowledge at all, [...] demands faith and a certain passion for the unknown, a certain openness to the future and to others' (Powell 2006: 174)⁷⁹. However, this blindness extends to the question: *who* makes the drawing? There is lived experience, 'not subjective, or not necessarily' as Deleuze claims, 'the flow and the interruption of flow', and there are names (Grünwald, Deleuze, for the outcomes of this research my own), intensities, which can 'be lived only in relation to its mobile inscription on a body, and to the moving exteriority of a proper name, and this is what it means for a proper name to be always a mask, the mask of an operator' (Deleuze 2004a, 257): reason enough to honour the names, to make them part of the works that 'sprang' from them.

The next (longer) section examines the fold between 'flux and fragment' closer, based on paintings and drawings engaging with *Splendor Solis*.

⁷⁹ And, in Derrida's own words: 'A hand ... feels its way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes, trusting in the memory of signs and supplementing sight. It is as if a lidless eye had opened at the tip of the fingers, as if one eye too many had just grown right next to the nail, a single eye, the eye of a Cyclops This eye guides the tracing or outline (trace); it is a miner's lamp at the point of writing, a curious and vigilant substitute, the prothesis of a seer who himself is invisible.' (Derrida 1993: 3) This quote illustrates beautifully the closeness (and distance) between writing and mark making.



Fig. 15 – Marius von Brasch, *Study after Grunewald*, coloured pencils on paper 56 x 75 cm, 2010



Fig. 16– Marius von Brasch, *Study after Grunewald*, coloured pencils on paper 56 x 75 cm, 2010



Fig. 17 Britta Huttenlocher, *Untitled*, 2007, pencil on canvas on wood, 76 x 82 cm. Photo: Peter Cox. Courtesy Galerie Paul Andriessse

2.4 Flux and Fragment

2.4.1 *Splendor Solis*' Frames, Continued

Painting - *Forgotten/Preceding Spaces* (2010); *Paraphrases* (2010/11); *Sleeper* (2010)

http://www.mariusvonbrasch.co.uk/aura_research/painting.html

Drawing - *Line of Flight* (2011)

http://www.mariusvonbrasch.co.uk/aura_research/drawings.html

Working with *Splendor Solis* meant applying the process of dismantling *aura*, which had started with 'mapping/tracing' other strands than the visible ones in a single painting by Grünewald, to an ancient series of paintings that endeavours to trace a gradual unfolding of *aura* itself.

To recapitulate: the *Splendor Solis* images, windows allowing the view of certain thresholds, of complex alchemical i.e. integrative *Becoming* with its landscapes and personages, are left behind by a fugitive agent in-between potential and actualisation (see Chapter 1.3), the alchemical Mercury or, as proposed here, *Becoming* itself. The difficulties involved in their 'job' to condense the complexity of elusive processes betray a general dilemma of the presence of time (as both durational and linear time) on a static carrier: the pictures deal with forces of unfolding to be depicted, perhaps even re-presented by a painter, but the composites and their paradoxes, which make the images, clearly subvert representation. They deal with forces of *Becoming* that they can only trace retrospectively by framing them. Deleuze and Guattari delineate this inside/outside interwovenness of forces, involved in (in the case of this research) painting: '... art is never an end in itself; it is only a tool for blazing life lines, in other words, all of those real becomings that are not produced only *in* art, and all of those active escapes that do not consist in fleeing *into* art, taking refuge in art, and all of those positive deterritorializations that never reterritorialize on art, but instead sweep it away with them toward the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 208).

What they describe is a scenario that involves the painter as *part* of transversally working forces of unfolding, not as 'author', which puts his/her ability of being in control radically in question in between the emergences or ruptures of such dynamics into new open constellations. From this perspective, the separation between an artist's subjectivity and the outside, the materials and thoughts and actions that mend them, starts to crumble and open up a field of interacting

tendencies and differences. This point is a consequence of Deleuze's project that is about how to find ways to describe how experiences 'give' us the agency of subjectivity at all, and *not* how to determine the conditions for a subject to gain experience (in the form of categories for example).

Positing inwardness as a source against or medium of an outside world would suggest a static 'self' unable to align to a potential metamorphosis and is thus contrasted with questions about how to gain a fluent form of 'self' by building experiences within an immanent field of forces into assemblages or 'styles' that are open enough for the forces involved to initialize further changes.

Painting in this multiplicity of forces is not grounded in what traditionally would be seen as 'the artist'; it is taking part in an experience 'in between', an individuation or *Becoming*: amongst different durations, measures of experience, and influences of forces, affects, tools. The scenario critiques authorship and the emphasis of a signature on painting as much as it points at the artist's specific role of assisting art's coming forth into being⁸⁰. However there remains the ambivalent 'inscription' of the name attached to the outcome of a differentiating process that leads away from the name, which affects, and this point has been an important aspect of making *Studies after Grünewald*, the concept of a drawing/painting as 'outcome'. It subverts the demand to complete a work in the sense of 'folding it up', as François Jullien calls it in his book on emptiness (as the space in between subject-object and object-object as space of emergence) in classic Chinese painting, of sealing a state where the 'work falls into a slumber upon being finished' and 'luxuriates in the comfort procured by its gradual certainty about itself' (Jullien 2009:60). This confirms Paul Cezanne's somewhat morose remark about finished painting enjoying merely 'the admiration of imbeciles' (quoted in Jullien 2009: 60).

Working with images from *Splendor Solis* was thus initially led by questions about how to mirror and continue this 'labour' in the series, pictures and frames into new works. During the process of making the paintings, the following questions emerged: why did the practice lead repeatedly back to one specific image of *Splendor Solis*, the 'Hermaphrodite'?

Splendor Solis, one could say, is caught up and made possible by frames, or as a whole series, by one arching 'line' or frame. A frame acts as a first boundary and 'skeleton' for the actualization of new expressions and forms, thus simultaneously condensing the potential further flow of forces that, in the frame, necessarily appear

⁸⁰ Barbara Bolt, under the heading 'The Challenge of Contemporary Practice', writes: 'I would like to argue that artists in the modern age are so focussed on creating and marketing artwork that they forget they are co-responsible (along with other contributors) for letting art come forth into being. In their pre-occupation with being be-ings, some artists become engaged in art business and tend to reduce their materials and tools to a means to an end' (Bolt 2004, 85).

to be harnessed in order to build an expression. Elizabeth Grosz observes: '... [T]he frame's most elementary form is the partition, whether wall or screen, that, projected downward, generates the smoothness of a floor, that "rarefies" and smoothes over the surface of the earth, creating a first (human) territorialisation' (Grosz 2008: 14).

From Deleuze/Guattari's point of view (which is effectively very similar to Derrida's, see Chapter 1.3.1), the individual images and the series as a chronology are 'traversed by a deframing power that opens it onto a plane of composition or an infinite field of forces [...] The painter's action never stays within the frame; it leaves the frame and does not begin with it' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 188). *Becoming*, then, needs to be 'framed', be shown the evidence of its singularities in order to become visible at all and borders over the frames, destabilizes what the frames hold together into moving shards of a kaleidoscope.

Against the evidently grounding force of the frames stands thus the force of transformation, explicitly addressed by *Splendor Solis*, which inherently will enforce a potential destabilization of these frames. And the same is true for the territories of the individual images, as all the figures are composites already about to dissolve into new constellations. They traverse from frame to frame, at once interior space, interpretation, body, social environment and (non-human) nature. This ambivalence attached to thresholds pointing out a flux is maybe one reason why the entrance and disappearance of these figures and composites remain so curiously impersonal and unannounced.

Exploring *Splendor Solis*' frames and the inherent fragmentation resulting from their ambivalence in *individual* pictures (rather than an open series) had been the thread for the two paintings *Preceding/Forgotten Spaces* (Fig. 18 and 19). The interweaving of such layers and fragment composites of *Splendor Solis* with layers of contemporary associations would allow the emergence of something new. This process follows *Splendor*'s modelling of alchemical operations in the sense that the emerging new images would conceal and 'frame' the complexity of layers of different places, times and durations (the ancient book illumination / the duration of experience as time of change while working on the pictures / elements of collapsing contemporary houses / the association of one motif, the Hermaphrodite, with a still from Bertrand Bonello's film *Tiresia* from 2003).

An image with such properties just listed resembles what Deleuze calls a 'crystal image', which holds 'the present [as] the actual, and *its* contemporaneous past [as] the virtual image' (Deleuze 2008a: 76), a notion that encompasses the visible and simultaneously present invisible layers of time and potential. Actualization of the virtual within this set-up does not introduce a separation between a manifest and another, 'spiritual' realm: both the actual and the virtual are

folded into each other, are aspects of the dynamics of emergence in a plane of immanence. Time, as involved in these dynamics, splits, 'has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we see in the crystal. The crystal-image was not time, but we see time in the crystal. We see in the crystal the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time....' (Deleuze 2008a: 79). With its shifting, distancing and approaching layers of different time zones, the build-up of these pictures remains a nevertheless very material and haptic assemblage of zones, evoking thus what Beth Harland calls 'haptic time', 'a time without entry or exit' proposing 'itself as a time which eschews narrative, one which privileges material presence over representational structure, a [quoting then Laura Marks] "direct experience of time through the body"' (Harland 2009, 66).⁸¹

These properties of immanence in the crystal-image relate (although Deleuze never makes such connections himself) to the *lumen naturae* in *Splendor Solis*, the light inherent in dark matter that houses the potential dynamics to push something into emergence, holding thus simultaneously microscopic and cosmic forces and layers like a 'crystal' structure: 'The little crystalline seed and the vast crystallisable universe: everything is included in the capacity for expansion of the collection constituted by the seed and the universe,' (Deleuze 2008a: 78).

After *Preceding/Forgotten Spaces*, I focused in *Paraphrases* (2010/11) (Fig. 23 – 28⁸²) making a series of paintings that could be interpreted as depicting a time-line (depending on its display as one line or cluster on a wall). I followed here *Splendor Solis*' proposed structure of a transformation with its implied teleology from its alleged start to its end, which in the newly evolving series is broken up into a new but deceptive time-line consisting of frames that retell the story with jumbled up fragments from pictures that, in the chronology of *Splendor Solis*, were distances apart. This 'breaking-up' of *Splendor*'s chronology has been motivated mainly by the fact that metamorphoses do not show a neat, clearly segmented line in real experience, but are, exactly because of a necessary loss of control during the process, experiences of confusion, juxtaposition, disorientation, of unexpected layers of regressions, progressions and dynamics. *Splendor Solis* highlights this, as already mentioned, by interweaving complexity into single pictures with their symbolic composites of heterogeneous elements.

Although *Paraphrases* has emerged with the input of a variety of digitally manipulated fragments from *Splendor Solis*, I came back again and again to one single picture, the motif of the 'Hermaphrodite'. It exerted a specific fascination on

⁸¹ The crucial role time, especially as a qualitative instant (event, *kairos*) and two distinct readings of time, is introduced in chapter 2.5.

⁸² The nucleus for this series, *Paraphrases 0*, is reproduced in the Appendix on p. 207 (Fig. 54).

me, and assuming significance for this research, I shall introduce it here in more depth.



Fig. 18 - Marius von Brasch, *Preceding/Forgotten Spaces 1*. Oil on linen. 3ft x 3ft. 2010



Fig. 19 - Marius von Brasch, *Preceding/Forgotten Spaces 2* (2010). Oil on linen. 92 x 92 cm

2.4.2 The Work of the 'Hermaphrodite'

Paraphrases emerged mainly from working with *Splendor Solis*, but also from others with more contemporary material. For *Preceding/Forgotten Spaces 2* (Fig. 19) and already for an earlier picture (*Sleeper*, Fig. 22) I used stills from Bertrand Bonello's film *Tiresia* (2003, Fig. 20, 22). This film connects to the subject of the Hermaphrodite and provides in my view a major contemporary contribution to the subject of gender polarisation. Following the Greek myth of Tiresias, the blind seer transgressing a consistent gender identity, the film sets out to retell the story in two parts. In the first part, a transsexual (played by a female, Clara Choveaux) is held captive by an art lover who is ambivalently obsessed with her. He blinds her as her identity shifts back due to the missing hormones. In the second part the blinded Tiresia (played now by a male, Thiago Telès) recovers, cared for by a woman in a small village, and begins to discover his gift of second sight. More and more villagers come to him because he sees what they need and wants to help. The priest of the village (the role of the priest and the writer from the first part are played by the same actor) suspects him of leading 'his people' away from the church and kills him. Both, the fascination with beauty and perfection (the aesthete) and institutionalisation of spiritual experience (the priest) lead to the double destruction of Tiresia, based on jealousy. He/she tries to escape gender, her kidnapper, her/his second sight⁸³.

In an interview, Bonello makes an important point about the reason why he did not choose a transsexual for the role, but split the role:

'I refused to cast a real transsexual for ethical reasons. I think that becoming a woman for them is real war. A war against the world, a war against their own body. It's very difficult physically and psychologically and I think that to ask a real transsexual to become a man again in the second part of the film would have been too hard psychologically. I didn't want to take the risk. Also, I didn't want the audience to look at the main character as a freak. By taking a woman and a man, you get the mental (and mathematical) idea of what a transsexual is and it brings us back to the myth, which is good. Of course, it was out of the question to take only a man or only a woman. A transsexual is not a transvestite. But all the other "roses" in the film are real transsexuals. I have to say that they all really understood my point of view of not taking one of them for the part of *Tiresia*.' (Bonello 2005)

⁸³ We will encounter Teiresia/Tiresia again at a later point (Chapter 3.2) as the blind(ed) dweller of the threshold between different concepts of time, announcing the incision or *caesura* in consciousness when it strives to represent presence.



Fig. 20 – Still from Bertrand Bonello's *Tiresia* (2003)



Fig. 21 – Still from Bertrand Bonello's *Tiresia* (2003)

Like Bonello, this thesis refers to the virtual potential of the Hermaphrodite in the sense of a metaphor, but metaphors in a Deleuzian framework have become metamorphoses because of the expressive intensities involved (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 22), which, far from being signals of castration, emphasize the indivisible blend of sexualities (Serres 1987) and challenge the binarity of male/female and its extension to the one of matter/spirit: can one go so far to claim that the the drawings and paintings dealing with this central complex of *Splendor Solis* become

hermaphroditic *metamorphoses*? That, of course, depends entirely on a creative interpretation. In terms of *aura* as a pointer to emergence of what has not yet been, i.e. the 'new', the Hermaphrodite encompasses the potential fluency or fold between heterogeneous thresholds of actualizations; he could be seen as an imagined 'stop' between the folding movements.

In *Splendor Solis*, Fig. 22, the alchemical Hermaphrodite stands for the somewhat stable merging, a disjunctive synthesis of the two figures from the previous picture in the series, the encounter of a male rising from the mud and a winged, crowned female. A temporary conjunction, robed in the colour of night and gestation, they fold into each other, transcend the state of being 'individual' and 'opposed', but the colours of their wings, red and white, anticipate further alchemical stages, unfoldings in between black (dark matter and putrefaction), white (purification) and red (new vitalization).⁸⁴

Splendor Solis claims: 'The Philosophers give to this Art two bodies, namely: Sun and Moon, which are Earth and Water, they also call them Man and Wife, and they bring forth four children, two boys, which are heat and cold, and two girls, as moisture and dryness. These are the four elements, constituting the QUINTESENCE, that is the proper MAGNESIA, wherein there is nothing false' (Trismosin 1920, 32). What we find encapsulated in the symbol of the hermaphrodite is a conjunction that never rests in a simple opposition but is thought and depicted as a fusion of body composites, as inherent differentiations into new composites: the two bodies flow into each other and differentiate into gendered elements, dissolve the Vitruvian model of man with his/her five anchor points of touching the cosmic world into interacting virtual forces that condense back into bodies and pictures. Although this symbol could indicate a possible 'beginning' of all operations (as a anthropocentric 'first', if instable conjunction), the pictured stage is only *one* fold among others in the *Splendor Solis* series, foreclosing the path toward an 'origin'.

The small cosmic egg held in the left hand of the hermaphrodite repeats the subject and reminds the viewer of what the alchemical, fluid operation can be about: working with the creative potential (the elements) that chaosmos and the fears associated to it hold. *Splendor Solis* doubles the themes but veils the elements and their vitality convex and protective shell of the egg, taking up the most ancient symbol for cosmic forces to unfold, and it is perhaps its inconspicuousness, the fact that the viewer needs to discover it and appreciate the preciousness of a minor detail, is *Splendor's* very own slant on the subject.

⁸⁴ See Abraham (1998, 98): 'Sir George Ripley [who] spoke of the joining of 'the *Red Man* and the *Whyte Woman* at the coniunctio. The resultant hermaphroditic being is thus represented in alchemical emblems as red and white.'



Fig. 22 - from the first series of *Splendor Solis*. Manuscript Cod. Germ. Fol. 42, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz



Fig. 23 –Marius von Brasch, *Sleeper* (2010). Oil on linen. 90 x 120 cm

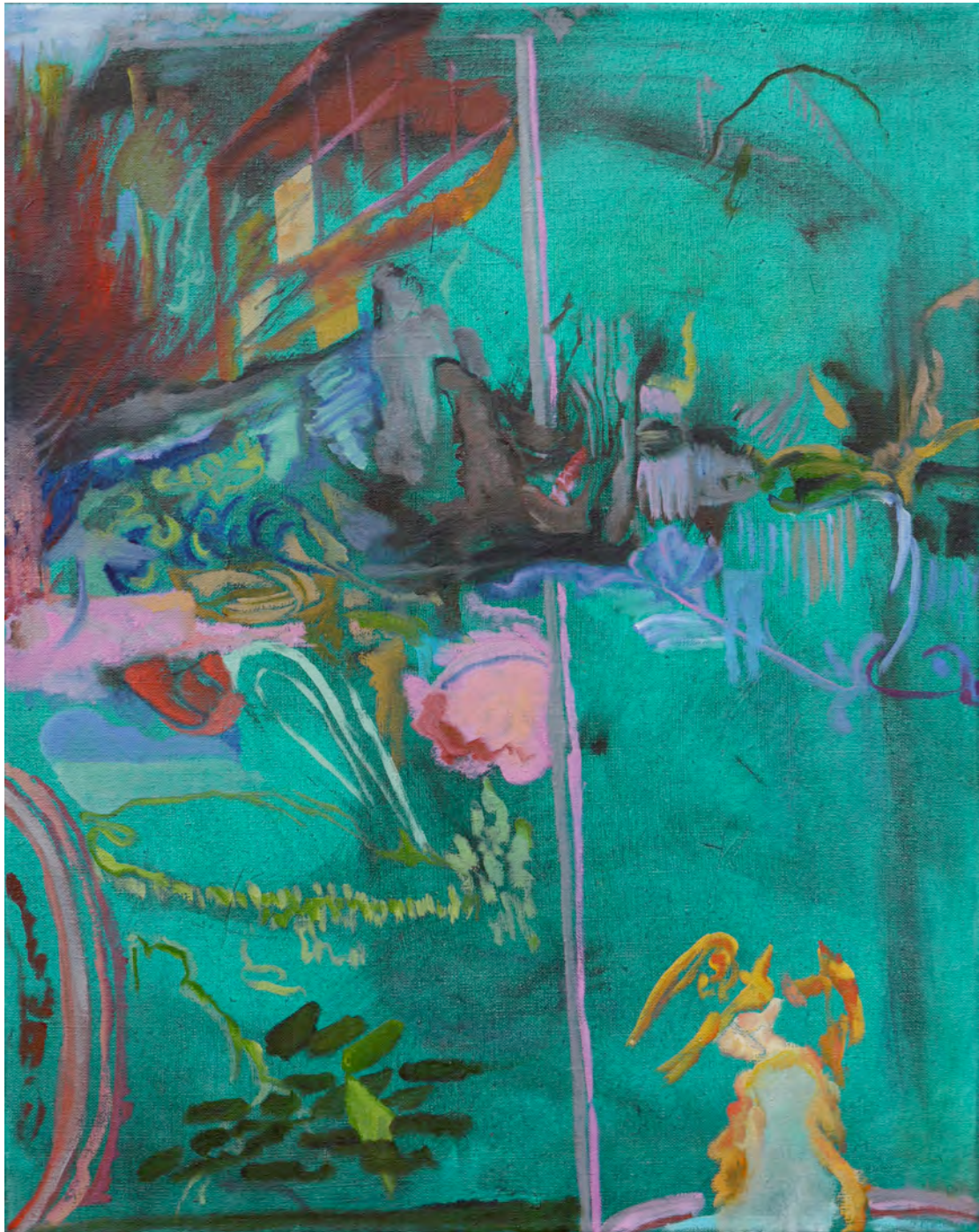


Fig. 24 - Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrases 1* (2010/11). Oil on linen. Each 36 x 48 cm



Fig. 25 - Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrases 2* (2010/11). Oil on linen. Each 36 x 48 cm



Fig. 26 - Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrases 3* (2010/11). Oil on linen. Each 36 x 48 cm



Fig. 27 - Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrases 4* (2010/11). Oil on linen. Each 36 x 48 cm

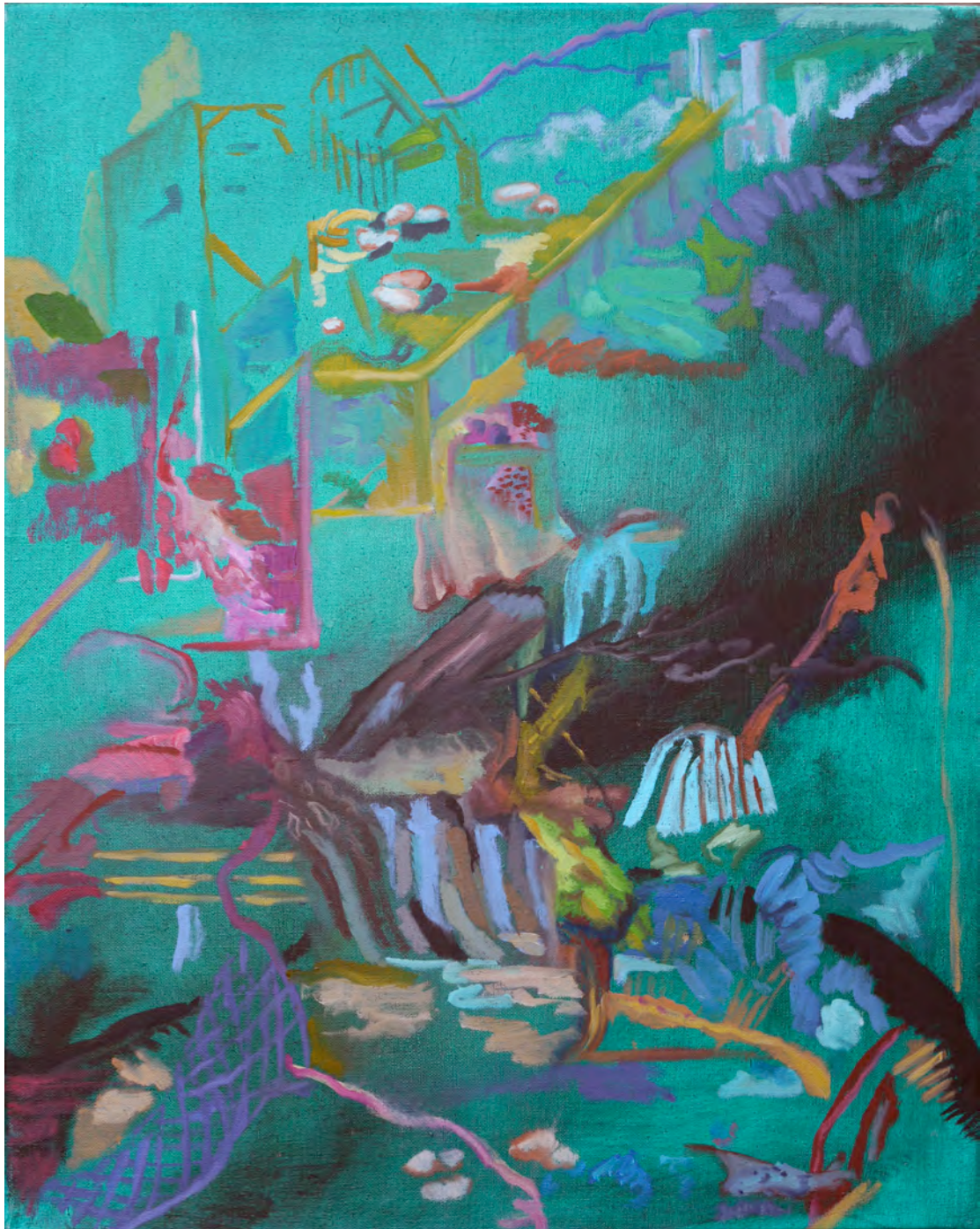


Fig. 28 - Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrases 5* (2010/11). Oil on linen. Each 36 x 48 cm



Fig. 29 - Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrases 6* (2010/11). Oil on linen. Each 36 x 48 cm

The cosmic egg appears frequently in Deleuze/Guattari's metaphysics as the free flowing 'chaotic' desire, the all-encompassing libido that inevitably will trigger the assembling of 'machinic' intertwined connections and stratifications. The 'machinic' aspect highlights Deleuze/Guattari's interest to conceptualize the unconscious as a plane of 'production', in contrast to a classic psychoanalytic theatre of mythical re-presentation by euphemistically examining the typical disruption of a functioning integration into the symbolic order as the potential of a pre-individual fluidity, which in the image of the egg is also alluded to by the fluids enfolded by the shell. Artists, according to Deleuze/Guattari, most possibly realize working with this pre-individual flow creatively. Their practice stages and demands the task/desire to bring forth spontaneous formations of desire which can break through the shell of the already-known, also in a sense of 'form', which a closeness or appropriation of strands of the 'affective, intensive, anarchist body that consists solely of poles, zones, thresholds, and gradients' (Deleuze 1998: 131), the *BwO* suggest .

The egg folds the *Body without Organs* and holds as 'the field of immanence of desire' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 170) also the plane on which creative processes as much as alchemical transformations emerge freely, chaotically. Unrestricted by the psychoanalytic models of lack or fulfilment, the hermaphrodite's egg is 'intense [and] defined by axes and vectors, gradients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinematic movements involving group displacements, by migrations: all independent of *accessory forms* because the organs appear and function here only as intensities' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 170). The freeing of the folds of the cosmic egg, its letting-itself-unfold equals the breakthrough of free flowing, creative psyche that differentiates itself spontaneously in a field of immanent life.

But why (in *Splendor Solis*) does it have to be the Hermaphrodite that presents the egg?

In the middle of the dynamics of desire opens another disjunctive synthesis, which puts the alchemists' allusion of the conjunction of opposites (the *coniunctio oppositorum*) as the goal of the 'work', into another light. The picture of the hermaphrodite conveys a fundamental ambivalence: on the one hand, it is built upon the unquestioned and deeply rooted equations of man=sun and woman=moon, which force both genders for generations into the mimicry of fixed 'constellations'; and on the other hand, by collaging and merging those constellations, the picture subverts such constitutive fixations and virtually liquefies them.

It must be made clear at this point that in this research the complementariness of male/female is not understood as (necessarily) identified with man/woman. As

early as 1949, Erich Neumann (who engaged with alchemy in depth) introduced the terms *masculine* and *feminine* in his important study on *The Origins and History of Consciousness*:

'not as personal sex-linked characteristics, but as symbolic expressions. When we say masculine or feminine dominants obtrude themselves at certain stages, or in certain cultures or types of person, this is a psychological statement which must not be reduced to biological or sociological terms. ... In reality every individual is a psychological hybrid. Even sexual symbolism cannot be derived from the person, because it is prior to the person. Conversely, it is one of the complications of individual psychology that in all cultures the integrity of the personality is violated when it is identified with either the masculine or the feminine side of the symbolic principle of opposite.' (Neumann 1954, xxii)

The quote with its *a priori* claim of sexual symbolism refers to Jungian archetypes; however, it can be read as well as a potential of a not-yet-lived past to be actualized in heterogeneous assemblages. Deleuze finds in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (written between 1909 and 1922) a model of transsexuality that is 'no longer an *aggregate and specific homosexuality*, in which men relate to men and women to women in a separation of the two series, but a *local and nonspecific homosexuality*, in which a man seeks also what is masculine in a woman and a woman what is feminine in a man, and this in the portioned contiguity of the two sexes as partial objects' (Deleuze 2008b: 88).

As a very specific composite, the egg/hermaphrodite threshold is thus associated with questions about sexual identity, as the hermaphrodite emphasizes that 'the separated, partitioned sexes coexist in the same individual' (Deleuze 2008b: 51). If the outside and inside of desire fold into each other, also the boundaries of gender specific expression might collapse and open the work of the alchemist (and the artist) towards a practice that departs quite certainly from a fragmented stability of 'approved' gender expression in art. The *coniunctio oppositorum* steps out of a binary dualism into a fluid axis of vectors and – extending this into the environment of an emerging piece of art – media of desire.

Curiously enough and playing into the subject of flux and fragment, it is exactly the fragmentary and unsustainable character of the conjunction of opposites, of its reductive image of thought⁸⁵, that allows Deleuze/Guattari to extend to a statement like the following: 'everywhere a microscopic transsexuality, resulting in the woman containing as many men as the man, and the man as many women, all capable of entering men with women, women with men – into relations of production of desire that overturn the statistical order of the sexes. Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand. Desiring

⁸⁵ Brian Massumi gives this clear definition of the Deleuzian term: 'An image of thought is an imagining of the imageless' (Massumi 2002a, 137).

machines or the nonhuman sex: not one or even two sexes, but *n* sexes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 295).

If the Hermaphrodite holds the augmentation of its symbolic (cosmic) forces in the miniature form of an egg⁸⁶, one could ask if there might be a connection between these inherent forces and the *name* that houses this conjunction, a mythological figure as much as a composite of two mythological key figures: Hermes and Aphrodite.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁸⁷ we are told that Hermaphroditus was the son of Mercury (Hermes) and Venus (Aphrodite), and that 'in his features, it was easy to trace a resemblance to his father and to his mother'. At the age of fifteen, he started to travel and arrived at a pool of clear water. Here lived the nymph Salmacis⁸⁸ who 'as soon as she had seen him, ... longed to possess him', but all attempts to seduce him failed. After exhausting struggles for the boy's love she prayed: "May the gods grant me this, may no time to come ever separate him me, or me from him!" ... as they lay together, their bodies were united and from being two persons

⁸⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant write: 'In the beginning the hermaphrodite was merely an aspect or anthropomorphic representation of the Cosmic EGG. It occurs at the beginning of all cosmogonies and at the end of all eschatologies. The fullness of fundamental Oneness stands at the alpha as well as at the omega of the world and of manifested being, when opposites are fused together, either because they are still only potentialities or else because they have achieved their final reconciliation and integration.' (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996, 497) Such beginnings, ends or oneness are distinct human constructions though – interestingly, in *Splendor Solis*, this seems acknowledged.

⁸⁷ Ovid sourced for his account of the story older tales from Asia Minor. The excellent volume *Classical Mythology* gives a concise summary of the factual background: 'The name "Hermaphroditus" was first used by the philosopher Theophrastus in about 320 B.C., describing how on the fourth and seventh days of the month (the fourth day was sacred to Hermes and Aphrodite) the superstitious man "spends all day putting wreaths on the Hermaphrodites." By this time Hermaphroditus was worshipped as a god embodying the union of Hermes, with his erect phallus, and Aphrodite, as the physical expression of female fertility. He was, then, a minor fertility god, described by the historian Diodorus Siculus in the first century B.C. as "very like Priapus", but his reputation received a boost from Polycles' statue (which was said to have "made him noble"). Nevertheless, Ovid's story, with its explicit focus on emasculation and physical weakness, has concealed whatever divine authority Hermaphroditus may once have held, and at Rome hermaphrodites were considered to be ill-omened prodigies and were drowned' (Morford et al. 2011, 293).

⁸⁸ Nymphs in mythology, associated with water and caverns, are often the mothers of heroes. Salmacis is described as isolating herself from hunting with Diana and the other nymphs (a popular topic of Baroque painting, for example Domenichino, 1616/17, Galleria Borghese, Rome). Their reputation of being seductive, elusive and violent was the reason to approach them with an 'ambivalent feeling of fear and attraction [knowing that] the fascination of the nymphs brings madness, the destruction of personality' (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996, 708), an interesting polarity to the young man, a composite of the trickster (Hermes) and beauty (Aphrodite). Bonello's *Tiresia* takes up the Diana connection. In the very beginning, the man whose obsession with the Hermaphrodite will lead him to captivate Tiresia, inspects in the Louvre first the sculptures of the so-called Borghese Hermaphroditus (Hermaphroditus asleep - on a comforting mattress added by Bernini), then of *Artémis à la biche* [Diana with stag].

they became one ... a single form, possessed by a dual nature, which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither.' But also the boy's wish was granted that whoever might touch the water of the pool, 'may ... suddenly grow weak and effeminate.' His parents, the gods, 'infected the pool with this horrible magic power' (Ovid 1955, 110-113).

The alchemical Hermaphrodite is born in different stages: as a mythological son with great resemblance to characteristics of his parents (which gives him particular smooth appearance according to Ovid) and he comes into his mythological mask only through a quite violent struggle around desire. As Antoine-Joseph Pernety points out in his *Dictionnaire mytho-hermétique* (Pernety 1787), he does not become what he is before 'the union with the nymph' and shows a significant parallel between this the scene in the water of Salmacis and the becoming of the Hermaphrodite in alchemy. The latter cannot function as the alchemical 'Mercury' (which contains as the agent, as already discussed, both male and female seeds of metals and is, thus identical with the Hermaphrodite) before the *coniunctio oppositorum* of king and queen, which takes place in the form of a bath in the fountain of 'the sages' (Pernety 1787, 191).

Hermes/Mercury is, as mentioned, the fugitive mediator between heterogeneous worlds and thus a messenger of communication, language and sense (rhetoric)⁸⁹; there is no reason not to associate him with *Becoming* in general and more specifically, to the production of pictures, the merging of disparate elements and media, e.g. traditional drawing/painting and digital technology: Hermes' activity is restless and active, it 'constructs itself', as Michel Serres says about his 'patronymic', 'it creates itself, following the fluctuations of time. It could only be sketches out at the risk of freezing it once again into statuelike concepts, operations, or verbs, too simplistic and coarse' (Serres and Latour 1995, 116/7).

But it seems that Hermes' work is incomplete without the input of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sensation and desire, and the various and unpredictable

⁸⁹ This makes him the first Greek mythological personage defending his breaking the law (some activities as the archetypal 'trickster') in a skilful speech (Homeric Hymns, in: Cashford 2003). The Sophists, especially Gorgias of Leontini, continue the tradition of juxtaposing rhetoric perspectivism to truth and jurisdiction in speeches. As such, they are the first ones arguing for the simulacrum vs. Idea. (Texts by and about Gorgias in: Dillon and Gergel 2003)

Carl Kerényi points out also Hermes' function as *psychopomp* (guide of souls, or I would like to add 'individuation'), which in my view connects to *Becoming* and the 'egg' as 'seed'. He guides '[t]hat which hovers between being and non-being, seemingly powerless, repressed in servitude, reduced to the life in the nocturnal darkness of the seed, finds its way upward.' (Kerényi 1986, 85)

Hermes is a transformation of the older Egyptian Thoth, also 'a conciliator among the deities', giving the 'knowledge of how to write by picture symbols, hence hieroglyphs could always possess a magical force [hence the necessity to develop strategies of persuasion]. Scribes ... were a privileged professional class' (Hart 1986, 215).

changes and eruptions of new composites and assemblages that Mercury induces, the lines of flight and deterritorialization become unthinkable, in an alchemical sense, without the desiring machines with which new metamorphoses and stages of a piece of art emerge. In Ovid's story, the besotted Salmacis asks Hermaphroditus: 'Fair boy, you surely deserve to be thought a god. If you are, perhaps you may be Cupid?' (Ovid 1955, 111), and gives away what is encapsulated also in the somewhat serene *Splendor Solis* picture: the eruptive power of the fusion of fugitive agent and desire, of blind erotic transit⁹⁰ in the unfolding and emergence, in the context of this research, of art. Perhaps this is the reason why in its framed and fragmented form (as a picture condensing a threshold, a cut in the flux) the painted image of the Hermaphrodite has to be pacified, doubly encircled and condensed, as a figure presenting its own encapsulated version. Does this doubling express the volatile instability of the image of thought that a conjunction provides? Beyond the obvious reason why the story of the fusion in the water of Salmacis puts such an emphasis on the forceful, 'weakening' aspect, namely the compensatory effect on the male who is the protagonist of Ovid's story, the double potential of *Becoming* (elusive agent, or medium, and erotic blind transit) expressed/condensed in the Hermaphrodite suggests a link to 'eternal return' that difference in its movement of repetition entails. The fragment is stifled on the one hand, potentially differentiating on the other. When Deleuze refers to the Nietzschean Dionysos, it is the latter's being torn apart and resurrected, in this context the de-framing power of the conjunction (or better disjunctive synthesis, but I like to use here the alchemical term with its inherent instability) of flux and fragment.

In Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* we find proof for this thought, a curious connection between Hermaphroditus ('a youth with womanish breasts and long hair'), *androgynē* ('or bearded woman') and 'womanish gods like Dionysus' (Graves 1960, 73), another indicator and support for the significance of the Hermaphrodite in relation to *Becoming* (which, of course, is conceptually positioned in closest proximity to Dionysos as the masked 'eternal return' in the Deleuzian sense). As god of the theatre where his 'effeminacy is a sign of hidden power' (Zeitlin and Winkler 1990, 64), he shows *Becoming* literally in its fragmentary, yet hermaphroditic (unlimited) mask. What better image could be found for *Becoming's* specific ambivalence and state of being in between, being what traditionally has been named a 'god'?

⁹⁰ I use the term 'transit' here in adapting Perniola's term, which builds connections with its associations of shifting, displacement and decentralisation to 'simulacrum' in movement (or *Becoming*): 'the loosening of the bond with a place of origin is no longer rewarded by a search for a promised land' (Perniola 2000, 44).

2.4.3 *Aura* and the Affirmation of the Simulacrum

The practice, as might have become more and more obvious, focused on figuring out the paradox of the simultaneity of flux and fragment, a subject that might provide some substantial clues about *aura*, which will be introduced in the following paragraphs. To summarize: the initial question of this chapter concerning where flux and fragment touch, where painting 'unfolds', appears to extend to the framing of *Becoming*, to a reality of finding oneself (here as a painter) positioned within the emergence of a multiplicity - the painting itself - traversed by a deframing power of an infinite field of forces.

As an outcome of this project based on *Splendor Solis*, a painting and subsequent series embodies inevitably a fragment, a mask in the performative unfurling of a death instinct that promises freedom⁹¹. It holds strata of memories: of the processuality of *Becoming*, of the painters and authors of *Splendor Solis*, spectres of others whose mercurial desire has a virtual presence despite the vanishing historical conditions and techniques. The layers of an ancient source coexist with traces of their digital appropriation. The latter does not restrict or deny the deframing power perceived as *aura* but responds to the intensities the source holds and involves it into new metamorphoses, acknowledging, as Deleuze might have said, its being 'larval' beyond a division between old and 'new' media. Thus, the processuality of *aura* that is the *pictorial* subject of *Splendor Solis* finds (perhaps inadvertently) its dynamic disjunction in an art practice involving what on the surface might appear as incompatible, a medium associated with 'uniqueness' and a medium of inherent instant dissemination. Then, the effect of *Splendor Solis'* *aura* (from a reproduction) on the artist, which does not depend on its being the pictorial

⁹¹ This point elucidates a constellation between Walter Benjamin and Deleuze. In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* Benjamin claims, referring here to an article by Max Horkheimer, that Bergson's *durée* (duration) - by eliminating death (Horkheimer: "Bergson the metaphysician suppresses death") - 'isolates it effectively from a historical (as well prehistorical) order', thus also from tradition (Benjamin 2003, 336). The critique highlights both interests of Benjamin: the fusion of historical materialism and messianism. In Deleuze's version of Bergson, which builds the moment of repetition as an instant of death into the actualisation i.e. the process of becoming of what the *élan vital* instigates as potentiality, this verdict seems only partially just. The foregoing of tradition is intended by Deleuze in order to liberate new actualisations for a time to come, which, as Daniel Smith puts it, 'is not the future of history, but the Now that is distinguished from every present; it is not an instant but a becoming, the "actual" or the "untimely", the conditions for the production of the new' (Smith 2012). History as past dissolves into instants that mark events and their interpretation as reflected in the chapter structure of *A Thousand Plateaus*, where Deleuze and Guattari write: 'Real history undoubtedly recounts the actions and passions of the bodies that develop in a social field; it communicates them in a certain fashion; but it also transmits order-words, in other words, pure acts intercalated into that development. History will never be rid of dates' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 90).

subject, has instigated its repetition by differentiation, not by guarding its traditional criterion of uniqueness but by deflagrating or expanding it and revealing it as a multiplicity that is neither original nor copy.

The agent of this process, the Hermaphrodite/Mercury as auratic conduit, dies with the deliverance of his/her/its message: following, one could add, or drawing other lines of flights of mediation. And with his disappearance is left a silence in-between the joints of the new assemblage that signalizes a halt within a process that potentially holds no ending, is infinite. The props of Mercury have vanished and 'unfinishedness' seems to depend on a sustained ambivalence of 'empty' and 'full', a still open field for *Becoming* or Mercury/Hermes to navigate with his/her fugitive force (for example in the drawing *Line of Flight*, Fig. 30).

If the framed actualisation (painting, drawing, even film as time-based, but thus also time-*limited* outcome) holds a deframing potential of *Becoming* (as something to be uncovered, unfolded by a viewer) and functions as a 'fragment', then, in equal measure and at the same time, it holds connotations of something to be anticipated, yet-to-come *and* something indexical, historic and melancholic. It stresses that this open piece of art can act simultaneously as a messenger of something that potentially has not yet been past and will only emerge in a field that encloses it and a viewer, *and* as a fragmented witness and trace of missed encounters, of always already-passed or not-yet-arriving instants of unfolding.

Looking closer at the (sometimes emotive) valuation of such connotations reveals how intricately they depend on different metaphysical 'outlooks' i.e. ethical positions. 'Emptiness' in this context for example, can refer to Lacan's concept of the Real (that comes to mind with a 'missed encounter'), which is explicitly out of bounds of communicability. In a Deleuzian framework though, emptiness or the desert provides an image of thought that allows remaining open for the input of virtual intensities, which might introduce with the new possible 'solutions' in the realm of the actual. The latter assumes a transformed Real (*das Ding*, the Thing), which is possible only when the question *what* the *Ding-an-sich* (the thing in itself) could be has become obsolete. It is based on the conceptual move towards the simulacrum, which arises as image of thought from difference and differenc/tiation as the centre of *Becoming*. In this sense the painting as fragment (as in this study) is also a simulacrum as the picture holds '[p]ure Becoming, the unlimited, ... the matter of the simulacrum insofar it contests *both* model *and* copy at once' (Deleuze 2004c, 4)⁹². How is the 'simulacrum' to be understood here?

⁹² 'Pure' shouldn't be understood in a moral sense but (as always in Deleuze) as indicating its virtual state.



Fig. 30 – Marius von Brasch, *Line of flight*. Coloured pencil on paper. Framed 100 x 200 cm. 2011

In his paper *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx*, Michel Foucault explains how the pre-modern model of *resemblance* was based on two distinct models of knowledge: on '*cognitio*, which was the transition, in some lateral fashion, from one resemblance to another; and *divinatio*, which was knowledge in depth, going from a superficial resemblance to a deeper resemblance' (Foucault 2000, 271). Via interpretation and elaborate determinations of how resemblances interacted, the various phenomena of the world would generate a '*consensus*' that in turn would ground resemblances themselves. In this generative model of original-copy, resemblances 'are opposed to the *simulacrum*, the false resemblance, which is based on the dissension between God and the Devil'.

It felt a felicitous moment to discover during a museum visit Martino di Bartolomeo's *Exchange and Abduction of the newly born Saint Stephen* (early 15th century), one panel of an altar piece, which could be representative for what Walter Benjamin had in mind when he critiqued the passivity of contemplation adhered to the *aura* in Church art: it illustrates the story of St Stephen who as an infant had been exchanged by the devil for a changeling, been brought up by a hind, discovered by a bishop and finally, after a life of conversions, had suffered martyrdom by stoning. The first panel (Fig. 31) builds an overture that presents the leitmotif of the act of exchange. Interesting here is the narrative line between the lower right and the upper left corner: in the lower right, the simulacrum, the 'changeling' - as such also always and already 'change' - has just been bedded carefully in the crib by the dark, winged and horned figure. Both infants are juxtaposed for a moment: Stephen's head is already clamped by a frozen aura, while most of his body, except the noticeably red feet, seems mummified; the changeling, almost a perfect copy, wears black horns like the mounted reminiscences of Pan, the pagan god of nature.

The winged devil or blackness - from an alchemical perspective most likely lively dark matter with its inherent light and mutability that has no place in the representation of 'a life' (Stephen) in ecclesiastical imagery - traverses the rectangular spatial frame of the house and looks back, as if to make sure the changeling is safe; perhaps he reminds us in his theriomorphic appearance of the possibility that the frightening 'groundlessness' he alludes to, 'swarms', as Deleuze writes, with differences and differentiations (quoted in: Grant 2000, 38)⁹³. Nature and transcendence are clearly juxtaposed, and it will be the labour of the saint (with the help of the bishop's intervention as authority) to regain transcendence by

⁹³ In his paper *The Chemistry of Darkness*, Iain Hamilton Grant expands on this. I insert here a longer quote that builds a link to *Splendor Solis*: 'To save the earth's sur-face from the face behind it, what is required is a chemical sensibility, since chemistry has always been the science and art of the imperceptible, of what escapes the imprisonment of sensibility behind a face (the superficial redundancies of recognition and their maturation into features) to go directly to the earth, or to earths, to be dispersed and molecularised in the black. Even etymology serves to remind us of this: "*chemistry* derives from the Egyptian word for "black", which is itself named for the black earth of Egypt"' (Grant 2000, 38).



Fig. 31 - Martino di Bartolomeo (ca. 1370-1434/35), *Exchange and Abduction of the newly born Saint Stephen*. 74,3 x 58,5 cm. Mixed Media on poplar wood. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main. Photo © U. Edelmann-Städel Museum-ARTOTHEK

purging nature, which, as this image vividly depicts, is kept resolutely in a state of denial: the horns of the changeling are also the signifier of the scapegoat. None of the women has noticed what happened. Why?

There is a strange cluelessness about the mother and the figure in green (most likely another woman); and *Becoming*, the birth and subsequent complications could be both a secret agreement and a question: the hands knowingly, inquisitively touch the red of blood and passion that covers the mother's lower body. There could be a possibility that the picture inadvertently compensates, by telling its story, for the theological denial of nature and women (as 'gateway' for the extension of the Fall, thus the tradition to position the 'feminine' closer to nature, feeling, intuition etc.), tells its reverse and subverts what it is supposed to mediate.

Becoming is visualized in this panel as being torn into two fragmented and juxtaposed blocks: the saint and the changeling; and in its compensatory work, the image highlights the problematic of this state of being: the masculine remains split between logos (flying, surveying) and lust (Pan, the goat) while the feminine remains the secret accomplice in keeping the split reproduced; she is 'protected' by a framework, the house that cuts her off with its ceiling, the domain of the logos. One side of the split becomes desirable: the saint as role model; the other side becomes the denigrated cause of the problem, finally the cause of its own denigration: but thus, the devil, desire itself, becomes the accuser that recognizes the split⁹⁴.

The timeline of the devil's movement in the image shows how this split of *Becoming* into static blocks develops further and further: leaving on the one hand a creationist, fixed 'world' of resemblance and on the other hand a 'transcendent light' that is doomed, reminded of its being-part-of-the-earth by stoning.

From an angle of *Becoming*, *aura* needs to be freed from the context pictured in Fig. 31, to be liquefied as already done in alchemy. It underlies thus conditions of interpretation and especially, *valuation*: in its traditional function and imagery (as analysed by Benjamin), which refers explicitly to a concealed and *original* source of power (transcendent reign), it remains of course insupportable as a critical notion and could not be used in a set-up that *affirms* the simulacrum. But even a contemplative panel like the one presented here holds a subversive potential that breaks it up from within and forces, one could say, the simulacrum affirmatively onto the contemplating viewer.

⁹⁴ With *differentiation* of desire, Deleuze addresses exactly this moral split: '*difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude*' (Deleuze 2004b, 174).

A newer publication by Italian philosopher Mario Perniola keeps *aura* conceptually in its traditional framework but speaks about its 'shadow'. Does this mean that this subversive side of *aura* has been integrated or not?

2.4.4 *Aura* as Shadow

Mario Perniola engaged with *aura* in his *Art and its shadow* (1995) and proposed to substitute the term 'shadow' for *aura*. The 'shadow' adheres immanently to the concrete piece of art and contains the traces of its historic folds:

'the keeper of a knowledge and a feeling which it alone can reach, only to disappear when the full light wants to appropriate it ... it does [as it transgresses the concept of conflict exerted in institutions and communication] not agree with the idealization of conflict or victory implicit in the dialectic. For the shadow, winning is impossible and to think of winning is naïve' (Perniola 1995, xix).

Perniola argues here effectively for a materialized *aura* by affirming a '*third system of art and aesthetic experience* that lies beyond the traditional *aura* and mechanical disenchantment' (Perniola 2004, 51) i.e. by turning positively what Walter Benjamin (based on a Freudian and Marxist reading of the 'tool' i.e. the inorganic) calls the 'sex appeal of the organic'.⁹⁵ Thus, Perniola tries to rescue what in the process of demystification has been overlooked: that instead of liberating subjects to their individual potential and political power, the deprivation of *aura* through technological reproducibility 'ends up by levelling art at the most insignificant reality, reducing it to an instrument of recreation and edifying spectacle.' (Perniola 1995, 48) Demystification then, against its intention, emphasizes and supports a process of reification 'with respect to the demands of a society that no longer has any need to maintain the relative autonomy of symbolical activities such as art, philosophy and, more generally, humanistic studies.' (Perniola 1995, 49) In this set-up, of course, the element of transgression that once served effectively the release of religious transcendence and its shadow-in-denial, has been integrated solidly into art market strategies and institutions, has become *mot d'ordre* and thus 'annull[ed] the transgressive effect of artistic innovation.' (Perniola 1995, 48) The 'third system' extends in Perniola's book to the necessary compromises ('third') in between what *appear to be* experiences of

⁹⁵ For example in the *Arcades Project*: 'Grandville extends the authority of fashion to objects of everyday use, as well as to the cosmos. In taking it to the extreme, he reveals its nature. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the right of the corpse. The fetishism which thus succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve' (Benjamin 2002a, 18/19).

transcendence, e.g. 'originality' and its construction and fetishization through societal operations.

Although some of the statements about contemporary art and its being 'levelled at the most insignificant reality' are generalized in an unfortunate way, Perniola's reflections on the *aura's* or *shadow's* potential to resist reification seem important to the present research. Among many other points, he achieves firstly acknowledgment of the place of auratic experience in the framework of social construction without denying its potential and significance beyond this framework and secondly to assign an ethical dimension to posthuman aesthetics that is based on a principal critique of binary oppositions without having to recruit transcendent origins (thus his thought image *shadow*). But at the same time an impression remains that the desired reconciliation of two systems, basically the human and the tool, thought of at first as an opposition in order to dissolve or be sublated into a 'third' that celebrates the erotic transfer of the inorganic, might be too limited.

In a framework of *Becoming* or actualisation of the virtual, such a primary distinction would be questioned, and technology most possibly be seen as expression of possibilities to resolve questions resulting from the complexity of life; a view that does not necessarily entail a neglect of life in the sense of non-human nature. Working within such an open framework demands, and this is a growing objective of this research, to work out carefully some ethical navigation marks.

That flux and fragment, this very specific distinction in connection to this research's theme *aura*, could become an important complex to engage with in detail, might have to do the possibility that *aura* is neither one or the other but intricately participating in both without being consumed or extinguished. As an 'in between' or 'either-and-or' it functions as a curiously paradoxical index, of different times, of the ambivalence of oppositions, of desire and abrupt shifts (as condensed in the image of the Hermaphrodite). It remembers, reminds *and* anticipates simultaneously the processual flux and its becoming-sediment and is thus closely linked to *Becoming* (which never actualizes itself), but as a *material trace* referring haptically to virtual and non-chronological time, the time of pure *Becoming* or incorporeal events 'with all of [the] characteristic reversals between future and past, active and passive, cause and effect, more or less, too much and not enough, already and not yet' (Deleuze 2004c, 10).⁹⁶

The interest of my painting has been (and initially I was not conscious of this) to trap or trace, to get hold of the process of emerging, of *Becoming* itself; rather than creating *aura*, it has been the attempt to trace what I experienced as auratic element during the process of making: the fugitiveness of what slips away by tracing it and the blindfolded desire to continue with what I do. Contextualizing this practice with *Splendor Solis* and its -

⁹⁶ The next chapter deals with these concepts of time in more detail.

albeit different formal criteria - similar departure point, has gradually slowed down this process; but I have not changed the fundamental element of my practice, positioning myself in this kind of 'trembling', unstable conjunction.

How *aura* works i.e., what *auratic* experience conveys is culturally and critically *valued* depends on the slant of interpretation⁹⁷ of individual authors and their position within a discourse that has to engage with it. I find it striking to discover how Perniola forms with the term *shadow* a complement to *aura* and its etymological connections to *aurum* (lat.) and *or* (hebr.) that both refer to gold.⁹⁸ Both *shadow* and *gold* make allusions to what to expect and how to value what such an experience, made during a personal contact with art or the making of art, is about: one refers to light (with its associations of, for example: sun, soul, enlightenment, preciousness, day, the open, unconcealed), the other to darkness ('inside', earth, body, night, shadow, the uncanny, the intimate, the concealed). Following the paradoxical intimations of alchemists, both should be layered and interwoven in the fountain of the always already liquefied conjunction: as an inseparable flux of gold and black.

Avoiding obscure neologisms, I will keep the term *aura* with an acknowledgement of its processual and integrative strands: as such it cannot be reified, nor is it mysterious or only available for initiates. As always in a state of open differentiation, it can't be the subject of or directive for law i.e. no dogma or authority will contain it. The 'splendour' that *Splendor Solis* makes its heart, is (asserted already in these alchemical images) the splendour of the real, of the potential of aliveness and as such very fragile and to be discovered.⁹⁹ From a theological point of view a reading of *aura* as developed here profanes it, puts it before ('*pro*'), outside the temple ('*fanum*'). This is, of course, fully intended, and an author supporting such an approach seems to be Giorgio Agamben.

⁹⁷ Interpretation (hermeneutics) has got, according to Heidegger, a 'hermetic' aspect 'in a play of thought, which is more obliging than the rigour of science [...] *hermeneuein* is that unveiling, which brings knowledge, in so far it is able to listen to a message' (Heidegger 2007, 121; my transl.).

⁹⁸ Of course, here is an obvious link of *aura* referring to *gold* and the foundation of capitalism (the accumulation of gold) on a religiously supported and reinforced model of hierarchy, greatness and stasis, which I try to read against the grain and to disable in this research.

⁹⁹ I agree here in part with Perniola's (concealed) criticism of Deleuze's vitalism when he says: '... I have always felt completely extraneous to the idea of life as an inexhaustible fount, as an infinite productive force, as an irresistible power. On the contrary, it has seemed to me that life is something extremely poor, delicate and fragile, which must alienate itself from things, from reality, and from the world, in order to keep itself and develop' (Perniola 2000, 52).

2.4.5 *Aura* and Profanation

Giorgio Agamben speaks, in connection to the image of the halo, which in the framework of this research appears as processual unstable 'portrait' of the *aura*, of '[t]his imperceptible trembling of the finite' (Agamben 2009a, 56), placing it irrevocably into immanence and outside of religion. Agamben notes that the etymological roots of 'religion' are not to be found in *religare* (binding back) but in *relegere* i.e. 'rereading', 'which indicates the stance of scrupulousness and attention that must be adopted in relations with the gods, the uneasy hesitation ... before forms – and formulae – that must be observed in order to respect the separation between the sacred and the profane' (Agamben 2007, 74, 75). In his essay *Praise of Profanation* (Agamben 2007), he proposes profanation as the re-appropriation of objects and concepts reserved for the diagram of the sacred (undergirding the separation between man and god) for free and experimental use. This free use allows stepping out of diagrams that hold the empty promises of attaining a satisfaction from lack, which underlie the mechanisms of capitalism and its 'gigantic apparatus for capturing pure means, that is, profanatory behaviors' (Agamben 2007, 87). The fulfilment of the capitalist dream, 'of producing an unprofanable' (Agamben 2007, 89) holds the religious diagram on a level of profanation: the fetishized commodity has taken the place of a sacred object, and pure means, free use is projected into a consciousness of lack. This phenomenon can be clearly identified in the current fetishization of art objects as commodities, of paintings becoming museums in themselves¹⁰⁰, which act as if they had been freed of *aura*. This understanding and association of *aura* is still clearly drawn from its traditional religious diagram that unhindered continues into its reduction to criteria for measurements of 'value', of 'greatness' that can be indexed by the few who are in possession of knowledge of these criteria, of what is ingrained in the diagram.

But such a concept of *aura* misses exactly its positive potential, its connection to *Becoming* and differentiation, which, in an encounter with art, might trigger an impulse in an individual with its deframing force. What such a trigger evokes, must be, according to the results of this research up to now, marked by both: on the one hand the historical trace or 'signature'¹⁰¹ and its links to fragments and allegories, which are, according to Benjamin

¹⁰⁰ '... everything today can become a Museum', writes Agamben, 'because this term simply designates the exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experience' (Agamben 2007, 84).

¹⁰¹ With regard to the power of signatures (as indices of diagrams), I agree with Agamben's critique of Deleuze: 'Gilles Deleuze wrote once that a philosophical inquiry entails at least two elements: the identification of the problem and the choice of concepts that are adequate for approaching it. It is necessary to add that concepts entail signatures, without which they remain inert and unproductive. It may even happen that what at first appears to be a concept is later revealed to be a signature (or vice versa)' (Agamben 2009b, 76).

'in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things'; on the other hand, the potential of the emergence of something from the pure past (a past that never has been actualised) and its links to the flux of virtual multiplicities and strands of the new. Can reading *aura* in this way be called a profanation?

Agamben distinguishes between profanation and secularization; the latter 'leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus the political secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact'; in contrast, profanation 'neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. ... [T]he first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized' (Agamben 2007, 77). Agamben's 'profanation' alludes, of course, to Benjamin's project of 'profane illumination' as 'the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination [...], a materialistic, anthropological inspiration' (Benjamin 1999, 209), based on his speculation: 'It might be worth while to investigate the origin of the dogma of the sacredness of life' (quoted in: De la Durantaye 2009, 354)¹⁰². It is an interesting twist that what is understood in this project as a necessary and overdue profanation of *aura*, exactly in order to free up its potential of use for the emergence of something new, not-yet reified (in art practice and a viewer) will cause, according to Agamben, who leaves *aura* in its secularized diagram, the loss of its *aura*. While Agamben's profanation builds upon 'potentiality', the conception of *aura* remains in its traditional religious diagram as index of a transcendent split.

Would not *aura* - based on the knowledge of its differentiating agent, its being transmissibility and its resistance against fixation - respond to a situation where the transmission of truth, and in connection to art, the aesthetics of pleasure consumption are more and more disabled? Would it not contribute to what Agamben describes so poignantly in his essay *The Melancholy Angel*: 'By transforming the principle of man's delay before truth into a poetic process and renouncing the guarantees of truth for love of

¹⁰² Agamben's 'profanation' seeks to obsolete the power of the 'sacred' as exclusion of what community is founded upon: 'However one interprets the sacrificial function, the essential thing is that in every case, the action of the human community is grounded in another action ... At the center of the sacrifice is simply a determinate *action* that, as such, is separated and marked by exclusion; in this way it becomes *sacer* and is invested with a series of prohibitions and ritual precepts. Forbidden action, marked by sacredness, is not, however, simply excluded; rather it is now only accessible for certain people and according to determinate rules. In this way, it furnishes society and its ungrounded legislation with the fiction of a beginning: that which is excluded from the community is, in reality, that on which the entire life of the community is founded' (quoted in: De la Durantaye 2009, 353).

transmissibility, art succeeds once again in transforming man's inability to exit his historical status, perennially suspended in the inter-world between old and new, past and future, into the very space in which he can take the original measure of his dwelling in the present and recover each time the meaning of his action' (in: Agamben 1999b, 114).

Recognizing every moment as 'man's' opportunity to 'face his own responsibility' (Agamben 1999b, 114) mirrors also aspects of 'being with' the emergence of for example a painting. On a conceptual level this significance of the 'moment' provides a tangency, not exactly a reconciliation though, between what I read as an ethical layer in Deleuze's concept of *Becoming* (the moment of selection within emergence) and Benjamin's potential of the instant - 'For every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter' (Benjamin 2003, 397) - which Agamben updates in his critique of contemporary culture.

The simulacrum as ontological status of the outcomes of this research in its connection to a profaned *aura* does not point to artistic production as an indifferent accumulation of 'and, and, and' (in the sense of an unreflected progressive line of vitalist desire-couplings) but a connective practice element to sheets of memory and those problematic ideas 'of which we are effects' (Colebrook 2002, 80) and which, if we choose so, are in a state of creative differentiation¹⁰³.

The further course of this research, concerning time and its connection to *aura*, poses questions about how it affects: when and how is a moment of quality in the practice element of this research encountered? In which ways does the fugitive agent *Becoming* make itself felt in (this) art practice? How does it keep the attention and communicate within a process of actualisation? How do 'I' partake - beyond a purely psychological level that reduces the creative act to the juxtaposition of subject and object - in the 'unfolding' of a piece of art with its sensations of closeness and distance, its 'already and not yet'? And how can 'my' work, intended or not, affect someone else?

¹⁰³ Also Sabine Eckmann, in her paper *Aura, Virtuality, and the Simulacrum*, comes to the result that 'the concept of the simulacrum opens up another space through which to re-envision aura: since the simulacrum abandons the dichotomy of original and copy, making a differentiation between technology and man-made artistic creations redundant, we must also understand it as non-reducible'; the digital 'carries traces of empirical reality. In addition then to artworks that are based in temporal situations and may enable aura through performative encounters between subject and object and among various subjects, we may also understand the simulacrum as a register of uniqueness that may enhance moments of aura - that is, experience with existence and otherness'. For Eckmann, 'the post-auratic artist provides aesthetic encounters that are interwoven with, yet also detached from, experiential reality'; she assesses Benjamin's *aura* mainly from the angle that it is 'connected with the idea of an artwork as an index of human subjectivity and art as the sphere of human freedom' (in: Koepnick and McGlothlin 2009, 75). The present research differs here, as Benjamin's *aura* seems much deeper rooted in an ambivalent theological model.

2.5 A Passage of Intensities

2.5.1 *Aura*: Feelings and Intensities in Research

Drawing – *diversely streaming*

– *You're right. Secrets have to circulate (Study after Grünewald, for H.G.).*

http://www.mariusvonbrasch.co.uk/aura_research/drawings.html

Video – *The Visit*

<http://vimeo.com/mvonbrasch/videos>

Working on the last part of the triptych *diversely streaming*¹⁰⁴, three large-scale drawings (Fig. 32, 33) extending on the Grünewald works, confronted with an unexpected, sudden intrusion of emotions, a caesura, which addresses the difficulty of what Deleuze's insistence of the 'pre-individual' entails in art/practice. It is the point where the rhetoric voice changes for a while.\

I started on the third drawing after completing an article about the connection between flux and fragment, which argues against a subject-centred image of the artist in favour of a field of involved forces. Thus, fragment and flux interweave, repeat and differentiate what appears as transformation, triggered by an agent of *Becoming* (an alchemical threshold, an affect, a pencil, the digital), traverses and dissolves the distinction between media and their associated notions of uniqueness (me, the precious painting) and dispersion (the digital) in art.

The occurrence of unexpected emotions, which I will examine in this section, is of course no coincidence, taking into account the paramount influence of 'driving' forces or 'intensities' involved in an art practice that self-admittedly deals with and is nurtured by 'transformation'. Nevertheless, the reality of increasingly personal, disturbing, non-visual and at first nameless feelings of grief, anger, love and loss intruding into my practice felt different to the fairly balanced approach of the research so far; it felt inappropriate, not belonging to the way I have directed my project, or if belonging to it subcutaneously then embarrassing. I couldn't identify what these emotions were about. Their invigorating effect, though, became noticeable. Mark making and the emergence of allusions to forms (particularly body fragments) felt intensified; being unreservedly part of a process and an exact intuitive 'knowing' about the 'right' arrangement of the fragments in question became obvious. Due to their size (1.50 height x 3m width) these drawings provide a large open space to be manipulated with the involvement of the whole body, and this, the most

¹⁰⁴ The title refers to a line of D.H. Lawrence's poem *Fidelity* (Lawrence 1993, 476)

immediate medium, felt intensely sad, in love with what emerged, angry, tender, violent and 'myself'. How is it possible to contextualize feelings?

In a conference talk, Mario Perniola introduced links between Deleuzian ontology and classical Chinese thought, the presence of *Becoming* and 'emptiness' as a space of letting-happen, that allow percepts and affects to form beyond the emotional limits of subjectivity, affected by and affecting a creative c(ha)osmos. When we talk about feelings, Perniola observes in his book *Über das Fühlen* (2009, 72) [*On Feeling or Sensibility*]¹⁰⁵, we are left to a 'horizon of externalized feeling', to clichés lubricating the machines of consumerism and media in luxurious and cunning ways. Perniola looks for alternatives to what he calls a culture of the 'already-felt', the reified realm of ready-made perceptions that have lost any quality of intentionality and passivize the subject to being always already related instead of relating. Referring to 'ideology' as exertion of power over thinking, and to 'bureaucracy' as exertion of power over action (agency), he suggests 'sensology' and 'mediacracy' as exerting the same effects on feelings. Perniola makes a case for an approach toward feeling as a 'birth repeating itself again and again, ... a process of ceaseless transition, in which the place of the old is taken over by the new, which on its part passes down the old through the times and guarantees the continuation of an opposition to metaphysical feeling' (Perniola 2009, 138). Detaching from the passivity of 'passion', which traditionally qualifies as feeling, he argues for a very careful practice of awareness, a selective openness that differs from pure spontaneity as 'letting-oneself-be-felt', referring thus to a subversive strategy of surrendering oneself for 'difference to become reality, event, history through us' (Perniola 2009, 140). This active passivity reminds me of qualities Roland Barthes ascribes to the 'Neutral': '... as that which outplays the paradigm, ... everything that baffles the paradigm, ... [the] injunctions addressed by the world to "choose", to produce meaning, to enter conflicts, to "take responsibility", etc. ... The Neutral – my Neutral – can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states. "To outplay the paradigm" is an ardent, burning activity'

¹⁰⁵ I use here - due to the lack of an English one - the German translation of *Del Sentire* (1991), which translates into English as *On Feeling* or *On Sensibility*. Engelen (2009) in her survey of newer philosophical texts on feelings (including a review of Perniola's book) notes that Perniola uses 'sentire' in its wider sense of the Greek 'aisthesis', which of course broadens the scope to perception, sensation etc. The text, though, shows Perniola's specific interest in 'feeling' in the sense of emotions, feelings and their devaluation compared to the superiority of 'spirit' and thinking (reason) in the history of metaphysics. In its traditional role of 'passion', feeling is 'subordinated to the intellectual agency [activity] as an inferior state of idleness', based on a pure agency of thinking (Perniola 2009, 132). His arguments convey sometimes generalizations, for example when he claims, commencing an 'archeology of feeling', that the generation of our grand parents had not been 'gripped, yet, by the externalization and reification of emotions and affects' (Perniola 2009, 70), which would need more clarification. However, because *On Feeling* works for strategies that sidestep postmodern indifference towards ethical questions in the face of perforated subjectivity as much as any recourse to outlived paradigms, I consider Perniola's work as very relevant for my research (which is based on similar intentions).

(Barthes 2005, 6 and 7). Thus speaking of subjective feelings implicitly requires in accordance with Perniola's diagnosis of diagrams of the 'already-felt' to touch some arrested, frozen and tamed shadows. It requires being aware of the danger of resigning to or being confused by the 'already-felt' on the one hand, and of the potential of the new that 'channels' the intensity of a virtual multiplicity, a potential contribution to a solution into lived experience and art practice. Such an attitude towards art practice is obviously linked to 'ethical' experience, which would be impossible if there was a destined substance to subjectivity ('Ethics', Agamben 2009a, 43). The experience of *aura* as a part of it, clearly linked to feelings, would connect to potentiality and the freedom to act upon or not.



Fig. 32 – Marius von Brasch, *diversely streaming*. Detail. 150 x 300 cm. Coloured pencil on paper. 2011



Fig. 33 – Marius von Brasch, *diversely streaming*. Installation view. Each 150 x 300 cm. Coloured pencil on paper. 2011

Feelings and emotions are very powerful aspects of the practice element of this research (and in contrast to the writing element), grades on a thoroughly reliable and at the same time intangible compass: they indicate new questions and differentiating solutions concerning virtual complexes that respond as (what Deleuze calls) 'intensities' to unresolved problems. Thus, in contrast to Freud's notion of repetition, the intensity linked to a unveiling memory can indicate the differentiated version of a problematic multiplicity that touches both, the highly personal and what in a wider social field emerges as complex, as multiplicity of a question concerning the reality of how to live (to be) difference.

When at this point a reconstruction of how these intensities emerged, it happens for the following reasons:

1. the point in time marked a poignant threshold, which reflected in the art practice; as such it could be an indicator pointing to a relevant aspect of *aura*;
2. in order to track - by reference to an individual experience - how *aura* and its links to *Becoming* might provokes the emergence of possible strands of 'solutions' of wider issues (in the sense of healing) that in their minor ways, art works can be;
3. to show that although this 'event' was experienced as highly personal (re-presented as 'subjective'), it is unthinkable and impossible to be felt outside the folds of collective questions and complexes that need to be addressed through the input of individual intensity and choice of expression; working with it contributes to the fact that 'behind the historically different concepts of emotions are hidden different interests of knowledge' (Engelen 2009, 798) as much as to the inverted possibility that the historically different concepts of knowledge might be influenced by potent affects;
4. to allow an aspect to emerge more clearly that concerns the mutuality of art practice and contextualization with philosophical concepts: Pierre Hadot, a philosopher and historian of philosophy whose work was influential on Foucault's notion of 'care for the self', showed how philosophy in its ancient schools was appreciated and applied as a 'way of life', a way of working toward knowledge and its connection to 'values'¹⁰⁶ (f.e. Hadot 2002, 33).
5. in the framework of this research the 'confessional' looses its bite of privacy; in fact, there is nothing to confess.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault adapted this suggestion in later courses, and, as easily detectable, in the above interview for *Gai Pied*.

2.5.2 A 'Wound'

Before completing an article on 'Flux and Fragment' (von Brasch 2011a), I had contributed a text for *Feint: tackle/wield*, a publication in conjunction with a group exhibition in London. The 3 drawings of *diversely streaming* were part of this exhibition, suspended in a large space and avoiding one continuous 'line' on a wall space, thus reflecting in terms of installation the prevalence of fragmentation in this work. My text for the publication responded to the subject 'feint and subterfuge' and emphasized the presence and healing force of the 'wound' in art against an art practice that might jeopardize this potential by limiting itself to a framework of controlling strategies. It quotes repeatedly from Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, a text that has fascinated me for many years. The article introduces *Perceval* briefly:

'In Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* (1182/83) only the spear that wounded him can heal the king of the grail. His wound is so grave that the only thing left to do for him is fishing, to pull up fish like dreams from a river. And only the one, who asks him about the wound, can heal him by touching the wound with the lance that has caused it. Perceval is the one, but he doesn't know, not even his name, and has to make up his name and dare to ask. After many complications he asks the question, is affected by the old king's suffering, heals the wound with the lance and becomes king of the grail himself.

The set Old King/Perceval: isn't this everyone/everything holding/being a force field to be framed (the grail) in order to develop a temporary assemblage of self, wounded by the task to break the security of the frame/mould again and again, to become 'larval', as Deleuze would say?

Perceval, on his journey: "'[...] Is there a bridge across / This river?" The man who sat there / Fishing answered, "No, / My friend ... / No boat, no bridge, no ford." (Chrétien 1999: 96)

The *Perceval* scenario suggests – thus encircling the feint and its identity based on opposition – the vital importance of pain and questions that assist processes of transformation. The 'death' of the old king, becoming-Perceval is granted only by being-affected - fulfilling thus Deleuze's somewhat utopian reminder: 'One should only die through love, and not a tragic death' (Deleuze 2006a: 38). It is acknowledging otherness and the hurt of losing what has been a 'reliability' that brings transformation in flow.' (von Brasch 2011b)

This text makes no mention of the cause of the old king's suffering and wound, which is located in his groin and traditionally refers to sexual transgression, and, according to the diagram of the 'Law' which first and foremost can establish the concept, to sin. Some might flinch from the overtones of pious morality detected in the ancient *Perceval* story, which are, of course, cemented in its better known version by Wagner, *Parsifal*, with an intolerable twist of degradation toward the main female character (and contradicting the deliriously sensuous music) onto whom all sensuality is projected and who ruefully, robed in sack and ashes, has to sigh out her soul as a maid servant to renunciation.

This operatic coup affects the virtual multiplicity that the king's wound holds and confirms Giorgio Agamben's observation that the sacrifice (here the feminine, sensual) functions as 'apparatus that activates and regulates separation ... sacrifice sanctions the passage of something from the profane to the sacred [Agamben limits the 'sacred' to 'reserved for celestial beings'], from the human sphere to the divine.' (Agamben 2009c, 18) Examining theological elements and genealogy in Foucault's notion of the 'dispositif' ('apparatus', 'diagram'), he comes to the conclusion that the theologically affirmed apparatus of governance overviewed and guaranteed the process of subjectivation; in late capitalism, with the 'nontruth of the subject, its own truth is no longer at stake' (Agamben 2009c, 21), an indifference between subjectivation and desubjectivation has taken over and aggravates any attempt to claim back the power of governance through 'profanation', thus restores 'to common use what sacrifice had separated and divided' (Agamben 2009c, 19)). When Agamben states that the potential of profanation lies in bringing 'to light the Ungovernable' and to develop the ability 'to intervene in [one's] own processes of subjectivation' (Agamben 2009c, 24), he touches on what at this moment of my research appears as problem: the reality of subjectivity in a framework that departed initially to dissolve any separation between subject and object.

Stripped of its moral apparatus of penitence and thus separation, the Perceval story is a profound parable of subjectivation through opening towards an other, through learning and healing: on the one hand proposing what caused the wound, a mysterious lance that bleeds itself as the medium of healing, on the other hand stressing the importance of questioning a (personal, social) wound relating to sexuality, power and gender. Agamben writes: 'Like Perceval in the novel by Chrétien de Troyes, humans are guilty for what they lack, for an act they have not committed' (Agamben 2009a, 44).

But what, in my experience, was this *auratic* lance that pierced from within and folded with its emergence into visibility in the lines of almost synchronistic events, by 'finding at the right moment' the 'right' books, encounters?

While looking for some of Foucault's texts relating further to the notion of the 'dispositif' as frame for *aura*, I came across the late interview *Friendship as a way of life* that he gave for *Gai Pied* in 1981. There he makes a poignant remark about a diagram of homosexuality, about what makes homosexuality

"disturbing": the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself. To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love one another – there's the problem. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it which at one and the same time keep it going and shake it up. Look at the army, where love between men is ceaselessly provoked [*appelé*] and shamed. Institutional codes can't validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and

introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit.' (Foucault and Rabinow 2000)

Living in a long-term relationship and civil partnership, having legally achieved what I was fighting for in my early twenties in the gay liberation movement, I have hardly any reason to wrangle; yet Foucault's remark hit a sensitive nerve. I knew he died of Aids-related illnesses and wanted to know more about a man who had obviously very similar ideas about what normally is compartmentalized into the notion of 'homosexuality', a notion that I dislike because of its pseudoscientific 'cohorting' of difference or for the simple reason that it shouldn't matter anyway. The more euphemistic but strangely programmatic 'being gay' seems better only on the surface, betraying a secret hope to achieve easier acceptance by being bright and happy, i.e. without the shadow side that every mature human being carries. So Foucault's mentioning of 'love' and 'friendship' shows a much more potent stance; both resonated with (what is called here) the '*auratic* experience' during the making of the drawings.

Further reading in James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993) led to Hervé Guibert's *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* (1991)¹⁰⁷ which recounts – but not mainly – some of Guibert's experiences during the last months of his friend Foucault's life (who appears as 'Muzil', thus probably alluding to Robert Musil's novel about de-centred subjectivity in modernity, *Man without Qualities*).

Reading Guibert's text, a powerful, fragmentary account of his also dealing with the Aids-related breakdown of his own health and world caused vivid flashbacks of friends lost to Aids, of the shame attached to their illness, the role of shame in my own difficult coming-out process at the end of the 1970s in Germany with its subtle undertones and afterimages of Nazi culture, of degenerateness and its cure in concentration camps, and the specific feelings that had accompanied early, many and quickly extinguishing, rarely mutually reciprocated attempts to love or to relate. The books that spoke with a voice 'as if it was mine' in this time were Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* and the book on himself.

Reading now, years later, almost compulsively whatever I could get hold of by Guibert confronted me with what I thought I had left behind. The fears and confusion around the rise of Aids in the eighties, a time where 'life – blood, sexual fluids – is itself the bearer of contamination', as Susan Sontag wrote then in *Aids and its Metaphors* (1990, 159), resurfaced, blinded from being locked away. Aids had

¹⁰⁷ Guibert (1955-1991) wrote many, mostly short and sometimes experimental 'novels' (amongst them *Blindsight*, *Incognito*, *My Parents*) before *To the friend...* made him suddenly famous for its frank account of his Aids-related illness and being a roman à clef about Foucault's death. This text introduces a whole series of what Boulé (1999) categorizes as 'thanatographical writing', but there are many more layers to his work as his photographic output shows as well.

transformed the innocence of experimentation, the reality of same-sex love between men in its core, equalized being gay with being contaminated, had taken the lives of friends and ex-lovers and been utilized to justify religious morality by mythologizing Aids as an answer of 'nature', the consequence of a way of life against 'Law'. This somehow not underrated death wish towards homosexuality might be mirrored in Guibert's often repeated observation of an unconscious death urge in the gay experience, for which he has been posthumously attacked for example by Simon Watney in *These waves of dying friends* (in: Lewis and Horne 1996, 165) for well-meant but superficial emancipatory reasons.¹⁰⁸

When in 1994 after a long drawn out decline a very close friend died (a month after his partner), and a previous long-term partner of mine got his 'positive' results, I felt intensely traumatized and hardly able to cope with the grief; another typical feeling was a guilt not to have been infected, not to have died myself.¹⁰⁹

Nearly twenty years later, I thought I had left most of this behind. I had worked on myself for a long time, even, after a professional training, worked with, helped others, had followed a path along a wound that 'existed before me' (Deleuze 2001, 31) as much as questioning the diagram of the gay community and its visibility, which on the one hand allows a 'language' of belonging and recognizable signs and, on the other hand, can limit a more radical differentiation because of an expectation for default options, signs and recognisability.

In the already mentioned interview for *Gai Pied* Foucault supports this double-faced critical view by combining his claim for a need of a specific gay 'care' for the self with a very Deleuzian demand for invention: 'We've rid ourselves of asceticism. Yet it's up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent – I do not say discover – a manner of being that is still improbable' (Foucault and Rabinow 2000, 137). The emphasis on 'discovery' vs. 'invention' roots, as far as I can see, in the distinction between the 'possible' as that which refers to already acquired options, and the invention, which connects to the emergence of the new that actualises a 'solution' not derived from an already existing concept.

When this story has been fanned out at some length, it happened for the reason that a conceptually unprepared 'solution' irrupted at a meaningful point of this research. Coinciding with 'mapping/tracing' *aura* in Grünewald's *Resurrectioin* while working on *diverely streaming*, it became significant, an 'event' combining two figures: *Chiron* the mythical personage of the one who learns through wound and

¹⁰⁸ A text that confirms with its account of typical feelings related to the loss of friends/lovers through Aids, from grief to guilt, the above descriptions.

¹⁰⁹ These feeling are listed as typical in Watney's essay (in: Lewis and Horne 1996).

can communicate what has been learnt, and *Kairos*, a moment in time with an intense quality.¹¹⁰

2.5.3 Kairos/Chiron/Aion and 'Event'

When can we speak about *Kairos*, about an 'event'?

Kairos, a notion closely linked to Stoicism and 'the axiom of alignment to flows of nature and to a physical and ethical 'Now'' (Ritter et al. 1971, Vol.4, 668), concerns in Deleuze the more radical dynamics of the invention and the event that assists the breakthrough of a 'solution' without concept. It relates thus to Deleuze's specific concept of 'Ideas' in *Difference and Repetition*; 'Ideas', in contrast to Plato's concept of an original that can only be deduced and apprehended from its imperfect state of a copy or mere appearance, Deleuze's inversion of Plato's model unfolds the Idea(s) as non-essentialist multiplicities of the virtual that creatively 'respond' to and break up actual states of affairs. Thus, there is no opposition between virtual multiplicities or 'Ideas' and the actual but 'the variety of multiplicity – in other words, difference' (Deleuze 2004b, 230). The potential problem 'solutions'¹¹¹ are triggered in actual experience by ruptures of *kairos* or the event, themselves expressions of the intensive nature of differentiation within the Idea. 'Differentiation' holds thus the *potential* of the event, and this is where the 'auspicious', 'fortunate' aspect of *kairos* suddenly gains shape. The hinge of the inseparable connectivity between the virtual and the actual maintained in this version of 'Ideas' is Deleuze's concept of difference that pervades both in series of differentials as living, creative and problematic folds¹¹².

Applied to the reality of an individual (and thus of the experimental 'field' of art practice), the response to the question posed by the event or *kairos* depends

¹¹⁰ There is a clear connection between *Kairos* and the wound in Homer's *Ilias* where the related word *kairion* refers to a living being's most vulnerable place and the opening in an enemy's armour that exposes it (Ritter et al. 1971, Vol 12, 1192).

¹¹¹ Problems in connection to their genesis of solutions appear as 'condensation of singularities', '... the varieties of the multiplicity in all its dimensions, the fragments of ideal future or past events which, by the same token, render the problem solvable ...' (Deleuze 2004b, 239).

¹¹² Confirming thereby Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the concept: 'The concept is defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed. ... The "survey" [survole] is the state of the concept or its specific infinity, although the infinities may be larger or smaller according to the number of components, thresholds and bridges.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 21) What the concept brings to knowledge 'is the pure event' extracted from the actual, and philosophical concepts create bridges (and rhizomes) between extracted singularities and the 'overflight' – this translation of 'survole' used by Ronald Bogue (2003, 171); they 'set up the new event from things and beings ...' (ibid., 33).

entirely on a selective decision between fear (and consequently preclusion from transformation) and embracing (not the 'fate' of the event but) the potential shift.

Ideas, writes Deleuze,

'precipitate all the circumstances, points of fusion, congelation or condensation in a sublime occasion, *Kairos*, which makes the solution explode like something abrupt, brutal and revolutionary....It is as though every Idea has two faces, which are like love and anger: love in search of the fragments, the progressive determination and linking of the ideal adjoint fields; anger in the condensation of singularities which, by dint of ideal events, defines the concentration of a "revolutionary situation" and causes the Idea to explode into the actual' (Deleuze 2004b, 239).

Obviously, I choose here to read Deleuze's *kairos* on a micro-political scale (of making a piece of art, inventing conceptual connections) opting for an understanding of the infinite aspect of unfolding that pervade experience on all levels. What had been experienced as *kairos* coincided with a threshold in this research: I had just started to test the axis between the order of conceptualization and the intensity (i.e. of what resonates in images like the depth of a volcano, the *BwO* thereby continuing and varying a subject of the previous chapter, the asymmetrical opposition contained in the image or symbol of the Hermaphrodite).

The specific event, the actualisation of 'a' wound, pointed at 'mourning', is a notion one might – at first sight – consider as neglected by Deleuze.¹¹³ His take on 'mourning' and the 'wound', which I like to develop here as far as it is relevant for my research, links to the thorough revaluation of 'death' and thus 'fear' he undertakes, both being traditional key holders of transcendence and closely linked to what Nietzsche terms 'ressentiment' in *Genealogy of Morals*, a submission to judgements derived from constructions around ideas of transcendence, which displace life beyond its embodiment and turn the embodied vitality of life against itself¹¹⁴. The image of 'God' as the accusing judge compensates the anger about

¹¹³ There is this exception in a brief obituary for Félix Guattari: 'Perhaps the most painful aspects of remembering a dead friend are the gestures and glances that still reach us, that still come to us long after he is gone' (Deleuze 2006c, 387). These 'gestures and glances' are perhaps a connection to the specific aspect of 'fragments' that I have worked on in the last chapter.

¹¹⁴ In one of Nietzsche's late notebooks, we find the following fragment (1887, 8[2]):

'On the psychology of metaphysics

This world is illusory – *consequently* there is a true world.

This world is conditioned – *consequently* there is an unconditioned world.

This world is contradictory – *consequently* there is a world free of contradictions.

This world is a world that becomes – *consequently* there is a world that is.

All false conclusions (blind trust in reason: if A *is*, then its opposite concept B must *be* as well)

These conclusions are *inspired by suffering*: at bottom they are *wishes* that there might be such a world; in the same way, hatred of a world that makes us suffer expresses itself in the imagining of a different

death (and all its faces) with submission to 'God'/fate and installs a securely locked internalized consciousness of guilt. Thus, it consoles the fear of death with disembodied life but causes, as Deleuze writes ('Nietzsche', in: Deleuze 2001, 68), *'the triumph of "reaction" over active life and of negation over affirmative thought'*. Fear, one could infer, is the hidden cause of the separation between immanence and transcendence as the latter blocks the full impact of suffering or the wound, creates an empty buffer of protective, threatening distance. Nietzsche, juxtaposing 'slave revolt in morality' with 'noble morality' of 'triumphant affirmation of itself' (GoM I, 10, in: 1992), counters this fear with an affirmative readiness for transformation and death as 'festival', '[f]ree for death and free in death, one who solemnly says No when there is no longer time for Yes: thus he understands life and death' ('Of Voluntary Death' in: Nietzsche 1961, 99). Deleuze's affirmation of the eternal repetition of difference dissolves the juxtaposition of slave/noble and becomes the heart of the affirmation of *Becoming*.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze distinguishes two faces of death. Both are 'inscribed in the I and the self', challenging with a 'degradation which compensates for the process of differentiation' (Deleuze 2004b, 322): on the one hand it is the inevitable violence 'from the outside' (in the sense of an incompatibility with outside forces), on the other hand an 'internal power' that enables the individual to grow and to stay in resonance with *Becoming* and the 'death masks' of temporary states. To resist death's second face equals thus to resent 'dying', which in its form as infinitive verb points with much more precision to death's extension into time as 'dying', its presence in the arch over the past and future that is 'cut' at every moment or at every in-between of what always already happened or is not-yet. The readiness for 'dying' and acceptance of death is perhaps one of the key aspects of what Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* calls becoming 'worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event, to become the offspring of one's own events, and thereby to be reborn' (Deleuze 2004c). Transmutation, thus also the affect of others dying away, 'is the point at which death turns against death; where dying is the negation of death, and the impersonality of dying no longer indicates only the moment when I disappear outside of myself, but rather the moment when death loses itself in itself, and also the figure which the most singular life takes on in order to substitutes itself for me (Deleuze 2004c, 173/4). However, with regard to mourning and its liaison with a 'tragic' (or even neurotic) position, an impression cannot be denied that Deleuze's insistence on positivity, his 'disgust' of 'every type of complaint in regard of life, every tragic culture, that is to say, neuroses' (Interview in: Villani 2007, 42) might be tainted

world, a *valuable* one: here, the metaphysicians' *ressentiment* towards the real is creative.' (Nietzsche 2003, 141)

itself by the 'supremely spiritualized spirit of revenge' that Heidegger already suspected in Nietzsche's aphorism about *impressing* affirmatively 'the character of Being upon Becoming' (in section 617 of *The Will to Power*), 'of which', Heidegger considers, 'constant collision, suffering, is a part' (Heidegger 1967, 426/7).

The affirmation of time as that which passes away or more precisely, of every repetition of a differentiating instant, which equals an affirmation of the 'eternal return' of differentiation, embraces the potential of being 'in between' two faces of time: between the face of *Chronos* as an ordered and cyclical measure of 'interlocking presents' and that of *Aion*, a neutral and empty present of eternity from which past and future flee 'in both directions at once, towards the future and towards the past' (Deleuze 2004c, 73). When Deleuze extends this, writing that 'Aion is smaller than the smallest subdivision of Chronos; but it is greater than the greatest divisor of Chronos, namely, the entire cycle' (Deleuze 2004c, 74), one could be tempted to assume that 'Aion' encompasses or causes 'Chronos'. But, in *The Logic of Sense*, both times exist simultaneously: *Aion* does not cause anything, thus neither *Chronos* (the order of presents with their distances to past or future moments). It consist of 'incorporeals', of verbs, infinitives, of *Becomings* and questions, i.e. 'singularities deployed in a problematic field' (Deleuze 2004c, 66); thus, as we have seen above, *Aion* builds the line or surface on which intensities and potential solutions find an expression as *Kairos* or *event*.

That the actualisation of a virtual problematic field or question is never, in Deleuze, a copy but a differentiated question/answer (a 'potential' solution in contrast to the merely 'possible' solution), is explicitly emphasised when he writes that both behave/relate to each other (in terms of those two readings of time) as 'two dissymmetrical halves of an ultimate instant' (Deleuze 2004c, 78).

The event itself, 'coextensive with becoming' (Deleuze 2004c, 11), emerges on the surface of *Aion*, on a straight line eluding the present by fleeing in both future and past directions at once without filling the line or surface. One must take into account here the Stoic distinction between corporeals (bodies with depth, nouns, segments) and incorporeals (effects on those bodies i.e. located on the surface, infinitives, 'becoming-green' etc.), both examined in *The Logic of Sense* in connection to the problem of sense in between bodies, events and language. Deleuze also uses the terms 'depth' for the actual and 'surface' for the virtual, a move within Deleuze's project to reverse Platonism (the depth understood as the truth to be revealed behind layers covering the Idea), which leaves the Deleuzian Idea, involved dissymmetrically, as multiplicity, with the problematic of differentiation within the actual state of affairs in *Chronos*. In 'depth', infinite identities communicate as part, relation and the whole (elsewhere developed as 'discontinuity'), whereas at the surface 'only infinitive events are deployed',

communicating by the 'affirmative character of the disjunction' (Deleuze 2004c, 200); this corresponds to the position of 'philosophical stone', which, so it reads in *Splendor Solis*, 'is produced by means of the Greening and Growing Nature [...]': "This stone rises in growing, greening things" (Trismosin and K. 1920, 17). Underlying the transmutations of the alchemical operations, the infinitive surface breaks through in the series as the depth of the actual book illuminations, which communicate as destabilized identities and divisions.

Aion, as a surface and double-faced line on which singularities and intensities emerge, suggests a new labyrinth without any anchor points, aleatoric and unpredictable, which, for Deleuze, 'commands *another* eternal return and another ethic (an ethic of Effects)' (Deleuze 2004c, 72). The aleatoric aspect of *Aion*, here at the core of an open serialism¹¹⁵, seems anticipated already in an ancient fragment by Heraclitos (Diels/Kranz B 52) drafting the following scenario: 'Eternity [*aion*] is a child at play, playing draughts: the kingdom is a child's' (Barnes 1987, 50).

Aion, the 'royal child', exerts power as if it did not have any. Thus, its random spontaneity suggests non-intentionality, an involvement without the prospect of a result, of success, but with a curiosity to 'be with' the emergences that every move of the game creates, leaves behind or projects. And the moment in between, when the hand moves the figure (or the dice), holds both: the divider of moments before and after an emergence on the one hand, and on the other hand the empty space that sidesteps the instants with infinite potentials and *Becomings* in both directions.

Thus, the Heraclitian image encompasses qualities of the mythological *Aion* (in Homer for example) that engulfs 'being, having been and due to be' (Ritter et al. 1971, Vol 12, 1192). *Aion*, on an early point of symbolization, is not yet split into *Aion* and *Chronos*, is thus the 'older' one who encompasses Chronos like the archaic symbol of the *Ourorboros*, a snake building a circle by biting its tail.¹¹⁶ Much later, in Plato, *Aion* 'signifies for the first time the life-time of an intelligible being, eternity resting in itself beyond time. Chronos, created simultaneously with the world, is a moving, yet eternal copy of Aion' (Ritter et al. 1971, Vol 1, 117). Deleuze achieves their simultaneity by introducing difference and differentials pervading both.

¹¹⁵ Where it became a predominant feature in music of the 60s i.e. Boulez, Stockhausen and Barraqué; Campbell (2010) shows the mutual influences between Deleuze and Boulez. *The Logic of Sense* is built in numbered series, interlinked by transversing aleatoric elements, which reflects 'sense' as in-between the series generated by language, time, becoming.

¹¹⁶ Battistini shows that etymologically *ouro* (Coptic 'king') merges with *ob* (Hebrew 'snake') (Battistini 2005, 10). In this case, 'king' – as in alchemical contexts – should not be limited to its personal, geographical and temporal sense but as 'reign', following here an important distinction made by Agamben, which links it 'also [to] wider issues about sovereignty and power' (Bussolini 2010, 111) and the diagram underlying concepts of spiritual origins and governmental power structures.

The previous significant split has a fascinating background: in one of the Greek myths of beginnings, *Ouranos*, one of the mythological personifications of *Aion*, is castrated by his son Chronos, as told in Hesiod's *Theogony* (verses 146-206). The reason for this castration amplifies an understanding of the set virtual/actual: *Ouranos* (Heaven) hides his children with 'Earth' in Earth as soon as born so that he 'would not suffer them to come up into the light: and Heaven [*Ouranos*] rejoiced in his evil doing' (Hesiod 2000-2010). This, of course, means that the children will never be enabled to be the potential lines of flight or singularities 'in between' but remain in fact trapped and obstructed. Thus, the castration takes place at the request of 'Earth', and *Chronos* throws *Ouranos*' phallus into the ocean, where, from the foam emerging, *Aphrodite* (Venus) is born. This event suggests that connecting to earth, body and actualisation requests the fragmentation that *Chronos* causes: the chronological, numbered, lived line of time that co-exists with *Aion* as its creative differenc/tiator. It is *Ouranos*' or *Aion*'s desire for creativity that merges with earth, and with the emergence of *Aphrodite* or 'Love' from his phallus a dissymmetrical feminine opposition in his own multiplicity is liberated.

A statue from the Mithraeum at Ostia (Fig. 34, Vatican City, Vatican Museums) shows a Roman image of *Aion*, contemporaneous with the Stoic movement. It is connected to the Mithras cult but refers to the much older pre-Islamic Iranian god *Zurvan akarana* who incorporated both sexes, 'good' and 'evil' and time in an undifferentiated state. Only at a later date, this god, a condensed mask of Nietzsches eternal return, gave birth to twins that polarize good and evil.

Schütze notes that the snake around his body symbolizes time as 'flowing without beginning or end', which profoundly differs from the occidental understanding of a gradual and linear timeline (Schütze 1960, 44). Lion and serpent, writes Battistini, show the simultaneity of Fire and Water/Earth (Battistini 2005, 17) as much as the devouring aspect of linear time and the endless curling eternal return; he incorporates 'all the cosmic opposites within himself' (Battistini 2005, 17).

The 'eternal return' and its problematic of affirmation of that which eternally repeats as differentiation, which is so important to a Deleuzian understanding of *Becoming*, seems addressed in *Aion* and its imagery. My suspicion of interwoven, even older myths in this Deleuzian concept were confirmed by a link in Vermaseren in *A magical Time god* (Vermaseren 1975) between *Aion* and *Osiris* (here again with the element of castration); the Roman *Aion-Mithras*, adopted from *Zurvan akarana*, so Vermaseren, has parallels to *Aion-Osiris* and *Aion-Saturnus*: 'This theology of the myth of 'eternal return' was vivid [in Roman times] indeed, since there are various indications for the identification of the eternal Time god with Osiris ... [and] with the Phoenix who, like Osiris himself, is a symbol of eternity and therefore the *Aion* idea'



Fig. 34 - Roman Aion, from 2nd and 3rd century

(Vermaseren 1975, 453). Further, the Greeks identified the Egyptian Osiris with Dionysos (Kerényi 1976 ; Larousse 1964, 16), and especially the aspect of Dionysos-Zagreus who is torn to pieces and resurrects has to be read as a precursor or other dramatization of the god-figure of Christ at a later point. The connection between Dionysos and Aion is also present in Deleuze: Nietzsche, so says Deleuze,

‘explored a world of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, a world he then called Dionysian or of the will to power, a free and unbound energy. These are nomadic singularities which are no longer imprisoned within the fixed individuality of the infinite Being (the notorious immutability of God), nor inside the sedentary boundaries of the finite subject (the notorious limits of knowledge). This is something neither individual nor personal, but rather singular. Being not an undifferentiated abyss, it leaps from one singularity to another, casting always the dice belonging to the same cast, always fragmented and formed again in each throw’ (Deleuze 2004c, 122).

This description unfolds also *Aion*. The link in all of the cross connections above is the idea of the ‘eternal return’ as repetition of differentiation, in terms of a ‘proper name’, of symbolism and historical change of dramatization, traversed by ‘fragmentation’ and ‘resurrection’.

Looking back to the initial experience described, and its double as *Kairos*/Chiron, it became suddenly obvious that there is of course a connection between Grünewald's painting, the *Resurrection*, and *Becoming* as the 'eternal return' of difference. What I practised in the pieces for *diversely streaming* was to work intuitively with the heart of this idea or concept: fragmentation, of a body, an identity, a painting, the deaths experienced (of my friends and on other layers, myself), a zone of associations, of drawn forms¹¹⁷. And when the installation, the display of these pieces led to a fragmentation of their 'continuity' as a (time-)line, it has only been the consequence of what the source image, deterritorialized from its religious ideological encrustation, holds as its deframing power. It is the interweaving of the event (the shock of the guard with the helmet and simultaneously the realization on the face of the risen figure) and its potential of emergence or its question of how to emerge (the 'risen', differentiated, new in a state of letting-himself-be-felt, open for the imminent event of a new death/fragmentation that comes towards him in the guard holding the event, the shock; but also the reverse order is a way of reading this emergence).

The unexpected event that opened up the course of considerations above had a guardian of time, could actualize a key holder traversing a personal feeling. It showed the value and necessity of working in this practice element with what is perhaps most painful and what needs to be – again and again – threaded into what Deleuze calls 'a' life (2001) and reminds of a remark by Hervé Guibert about writing his posthumously published *Le Mausolée des amants* (Guibert 2003): 'Very often writing emerges when a theme or personage from inside the journal becomes too insistent, upsets or breaks that ordinary equilibrium' (Genon 2005).¹¹⁸ The journal, a 'personal' diary that he extensively used for his books, posthumously made a book, *Le Mausolée des amants*, is at the same time the result of a process, of reflective and inventive cuts into duration. Although highly personal, filled with intimate details to be reworked into the outside, these details convey nothing less than the disappearance of someone betraying what already circulates (the 'intimate as desiring-machines'): the subject vanishes, in Guibert's case, from what could be seen as 'personal'¹¹⁹, and autobiography becomes autofiction.

¹¹⁷ Dr Jim Mooney pointed out (after this research had been completed) that also Jasper Johns had derived work relating to the Aids crisis from Grünewald's *Resurrection*. It is his *Perilous Nights* from 1982, online on <http://www.nga.gov/feature/artnation/johns/index.shtm> – this work had no influence on the outcomes of this research.

¹¹⁸ 'Très souvent un écrit naît parce qu'il y a, à l'intérieur du journal, un thème ou un personnage qui, devenant trop insistant, déséquilibre ou brisait cet équilibre quotidien.' (my transl. into English)

¹¹⁹ The following short text from Guibert's book about photography, images and memory, *Ghost Image*, might elucidate this point:

"I feel completely empty now that I've told you this story. It's my secret. Do you understand?"



Fig. 35 - Hervé Guibert, *Autoportrait au papillon* (Self-Portrait with Butterfly), 1986. © Christine Guibert

From this angle, the mapping of *aura* in drawings actualizes a diagram that the multiplicity of 'working with Grünewald's *Resurrection*', including the fold of subjectivation with its line to a virtual wound as collective complex, holds; a diagram not as an underlying representation of knowledge and power but as the 'modulator' (Deleuze 2005, 84), the mark of potential deterritorialization, which constitutes 'a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 157). The diagram becomes the aleatoric mark, a differentiated repetition, a sudden dramatization within the digitized projection of source fragments on paper, which empties the drawing/paper of cliché: the diagrammatic (virtual intense) line is, as Joshua Ramey puts it, 'that which is presented enters into polyvalent, unstable relations to otherwise imperceptible forces' (Ramey 2012, 162)

The aspects of dramatization of intensity attached to these aleatoric marks, of personal feelings evoked by *aura* that actually trigger emergences and appear coded in the fragmented and marked drawings with their digital remnants, relativize Deleuze's (and Guattari's) somewhat strained and one-sided emphasis on the pre-

"And now?"

"I don't want to have to ask you not to repeat it."

"Yes, but now your secret has also become my secret. It's part of me, and I'll treat it as I do all my secrets – I'll get rid of it when the time comes. Then it will become someone else's secret."

"You're right. Secrets have to circulate ..."

individual, the non-personal affect in art. When they for example write: 'Affect is the active discharge of emotion, the counterattack, whereas feeling is an always displaced, retarded, resisting emotion' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 441), their target is of course the precarious proximity of emotion to *ressentiment* and its obstruction of actualization of affirmative desire as *Becoming*. With regard to this research though, personal feelings and emotions (even if they show an initial face-value of being somewhat 'retarded, resisting'), a perhaps inevitable rhythm between regression and emergence, provide a positive and enriching input when they are recognized as *questions* (*how* to transform them into affect) and thus pointers toward their potential of *Becoming*, toward singularities and more powerful events that might, once their potential is realized, help to question habitual (collective) responses. This statement aligns with a layer of what an art practice around transformation addresses: to take up and unfold creatively the multiplicity or potential of *Kairos*, a possibly cathartic yet modest event and not to neglect the lines that reach from the 'wound that existed before me' into the field of personal experience; to create the conditions for a complex act face to face with: "[m]y wound existed before me, I was born to embody it" (Joe Bousquet, quoted in: Deleuze 2004c, 169).

'Letting-oneself-be-felt', this somewhat paradoxical notion that Perniola develops in *On Feeling*, could be a determining aspect of an approach to an art practice open for the event in this sense, for the appearance of Hermes/Mercury with its evasive, yet 'really' transformative intensities, which extend to the possibilities of 'smooth' transformation of images with digital software. It is in accord with what Henri Maldiney¹²⁰ calls 'transpassibilité', which allows the emergence of an art of 'appearing', without a 'before', 'not made to be seen but to see' based on feeling, not as 'having sensations' but 'keeping oneself open' (Escoubas 2010, 193-195).

The wound, itself a necessary condition, underlies then what emerges like a trace or a thread, Ariadne's thread that directs not to the monster to be slain but to her lover, the Dionysos-Zagreus to be torn up and resurrected, repeatedly differentiated towards healing, without, maybe, ever to heal.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Maldiney's notion of rhythm of systole/diastole as 'pre-objective fabric of the world that is prior to the dissociation of subject and object' became important for Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation*. Due to no availability of English translations of this important author, I refer here to the concise essay by Eliane Escoubas about Maldiney in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics* (Escoubas 2010).

¹²¹ Ariadne, so Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Deleuze 2010, 177), is the 'Anima ... capable of reconciling us with the unconscious [thus the intensities on the surface of the virtual], of giving us a guiding *thread* for its exploration'; '... according to the constitution of the eternal return Dionysus is the first affirmation, becoming and being, more precisely the becoming which is only being as the object of a second affirmation; Ariadne is the second affirmation, Ariadne is the fiancée, the loving feminine power.'

To successfully deal with the irruption of intensive singularities, Deleuze seems to emphasize, is a question of a loving (I read it as fear-embracing) approach, which extends without question to art practice.

With regard to 'healing': a movement *toward* healing is meant, which arises, as a possibility, from the unfolding of differentiation; *not* a completion which would arrest in stagnation and exclude further 'newness'.



Fig. 36 – Marius von Brasch, *You're right. Secrets have to circulate (Study after Grünewald, for H.G.)*. Coloured pencil, oil stick on paper. 150 x 300 cm. 2011

2.5.4 Affect and 'Exhibition-Value'

The experience of *aura* with a piece of art (as proposed with the practice element of this research here) connects to the deframing power of the forces that constitute the piece of art and simultaneously the remnant questions and potential solutions suggested by their actualisation. Both the deframing questions and forces of a piece of art contain/house further potential of *Becoming* and traces that link to a problem constellation of a virtual multiplicity, which, as in a line of flight, traverses also the multiplicity of a viewer of art and his/her particular responsiveness. Thus, the viewer is a part of the emerging response to the problematic, part of the fold that involves her as a traversed multiplicity, a unique point of view rather than a preconceived structure of subjective perception.

If this scenario binds the artwork and its latent forces into a fold or multiplicity that also extends to and touches the viewer and his/her involvement with 'questions' of *Becoming* (in a personal, societal and cosmic sense), then the experience of this strange virtual, yet immanent tissue of a simultaneous distance and closeness i.e. of *aura* at a qualitative moment in time equals (and here I like to refer back to *Splendor Solis* and its metamorphic, not static model of *aura* as 'work') a request to respond the sensation, feeling, potential triggered. Such a response is unpredictable and depends entirely of the viewer's point of view¹²² framework of perception. Thus, a strong experience in front, or better *with* a (finished, emerging) piece of art is foremost aesthetic (in the sense of 'disinterested pleasure') only as long as it is appreciated for its 'exhibition-value' and not for the unfolding of its further rhizomatic potential or the connective 'plug-ins' of deterritorializing strands of the *BwO*.

Walter Benjamin, obviously alluding to Marx's set of 'use-' and 'exchange-value', observes a 'cult-value' and an 'exhibition-value' adhered to art objects (Benjamin 2002b, 106). Whereas 'cult-value' relates to pre-industrial life and takes into account the re/presentation of a distant divinity (and its *aura*), 'exhibition-value' has been freed from such connotations: technological experimentation (foremost in film) encounters nature from a position of 'openness' (and this includes the

¹²² This thesis cannot cover a discussion of the 'crypt', the dark chamber of each single monad expressing one point of view within the Leibnizian fold (as read by Deleuze), demanding a 'cryptographer' [...], someone who can at once account for nature and decipher the soul, who can peer into the crannies of matter and read into the folds of the soul' (Deleuze 2006b, 3). Such a crypt suggests the extinguishing of the name, 'soul' as a chamber of 'coherence' on a pre-individual level and would provide questions in abundance for another research.

unconscious as human 'nature'), a position of 'play'. Benjamin's hope rested on the 'exhibition-value's' liberating potential (demystification of world/autonomous play/enacting of collective drives). Against this stands film critic Serge Daney's observation (from the 1980s) that the dependence of cinema on advertisements and economic powers has led to – however fertile – 'contamination' of the moving image, so that 'the dominant form of cinema (the kind that "works") has reached a *post-advertising* stage. Cinema now inherits prefabricated shots, ready to use 'clichés', in short – immobile images' (Daney 2008, 337). Is it possible to transpose this view onto the expanded field of painting?

Contemporary painting/mark- and video-making is clearly 'contaminated' by a continuous flux of images (moving, still, spoken, dreamed), which are exclusively designed to re-create hierarchical/hieratical *aura* as that 'which is not obtainable', thus linking to and tapping into desire as 'lack' and social powerlessness: the concealed divinity of the cult-object makes way for a reproducible glow of elevated (ascended) celebrities that is as seductive as it is frustrating, hooking into the drive behind what Jacques Lacan names 'jouissance'¹²³ towards a fulfilment beyond the pleasure principle with its laws of limitation, the promise of enjoyment/orgasm that is potentially never achieved but, with all intensity of desirable but painful transgressions, refers back to its imaginary and impossible dissolution of lack. Dylan Evans writes: 'The term *jouissance* thus nicely expresses the paradoxical satisfaction that the subject derives from his symptoms, or, put it another way, the suffering that he derives from his own satisfaction [...]' (Evans 2005, 92)¹²⁴.

With regard to films made for this research, a certain tendency to hermetic, not easily 'understandable' imagery and usage of sound (voice and text) is based on the wish not to serve the readability of celebrity/advertisement on TV but to use the medium's set-up of intimacy (at 'home'). *The Visit*, in which the return of the 'wound' of lost friends has been consolidate, combines imagery and language, memory, dream, reality, previous 'models' of imagery¹²⁵ in this way, and it produces for its viewer –regarding the various strands it combines – probably very obviously a

¹²³ In French the word refers to both, 'enjoyment' and 'orgasm'; 'jouir' means 'to come'. Lacan discusses 'jouissance' especially in his seminar 20 (1972/73), 'Encore' (Lacan 1998a).

¹²⁴ Could the *literal* repetition of images circumscribe this phenomenon, given its simultaneity of aesthetic doubling and the futile (or ironic) attempt to possess the original? Andy Warhol's multiples are probably archetypal models of exposing the mechanisms of aesthetic reproducibility in this sense, and creating hybrids between art and advertising that become 'exhibition-value' as *aura*.

¹²⁵ The colour scheme, the occasional use of some black and white stills in *The Visit*, is a conscious reference to Hervé Guibert's exclusively black and white photography; it suits also the subject that I found not necessary to explain in what appears to be a narrative. I became aware – in terms of the use of stills and narrative – of slight similarities to Chris Marker's *La jetée* from 1962, but *The Visit* is an entirely realistic piece.

'multiplicity'. It is a TV piece, exactly because it is designed to create a space of silence despite spoken language, of intensive memory becoming, dissolving into facets and veins, i.e. to resist the instant possession of what it is beyond its 'exhibition-value'.



Fig. 37 – Marius von Brasch. Still from *The Visit*. Video. 5' 40".

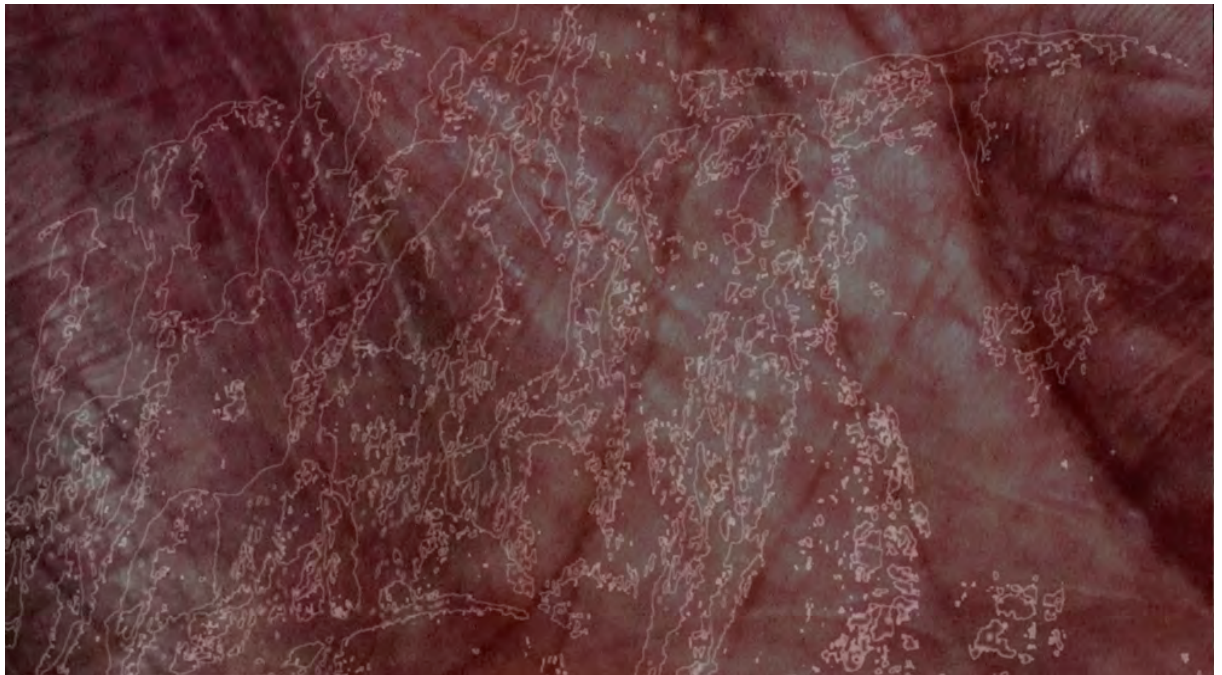


Fig. 38 – Marius von Brasch. Still from *The Visit*. Video. 5' 40".

One important question concerning *aura* is how it is possible to clearly distinguish the very momentary and singular experience of *aura* of a piece of art from 'exhibition-value' and its failed potential, from clever advertised *jouissance* that projects itself or is projected as art, from 'wanting' a piece of art because of its promise to project an *aura* of power by possessing it?

Serge Daney, perhaps not consciously, admits this difficulty in the quote above by simply referring to the 'kind [of cinema, but I expand it here to the axis between painting and digital] that "works"' (Daney 2008, 337), emphasising that – considering how it relates to the rest of the quote – '*it works*', triggers, proposes something in the new that cannot be reiterated, that liquefies 'immobility', questions the constructed judgment of 'greatness' (i.e. the 'thing', the 'essence'), which as an established convention overlooks the significance of new and free use, of lesser, 'minor' individual experiences with forces in (also 'great') art.

Thus, the discussion of both, 'exhibition-' and 'cult-value' leads, from the position and results of the research so far, back to the very different appraisal of the simulacrum proposed in this research, which suggests the artist's role of supporting/living the emergence of a 'not-yet' in a field of immanent material and virtual forces. The focus is non-possession, or renunciation of possession of the 'original' (in contrast, the *aura* of the 'exhibition-value' functions still as in index for transcendence: of lack), on operating in a field of rhizomatic potential, which filters as much through the assemblages of subjectivation and force fields as it operates as a trace of or vector from the *Body without Organs*. It filters by folding i.e., refolding the sensation of the echo in between the emerging piece of art and prehension. Such an encounter of *aura* or prehension of 'echo' of *Becoming* provides an augmented field for a 'complex act' against acquired (homogeneous) style: as '*appropriating depropriation*' (repeating here Arnaud Villani's paradoxical paraphrase of the 'event' introduced already in chapter 1.4.1), 'letting oneself act, to let the virtual infuse, without forcing it' (Villani 2010, 77) and working through conflicts that reach beyond personal feelings into collective virtual problem/solutions. Leaning towards the 'in between' of these folds implies then an augmentation of the multiplicity or force-field of the creative process at 'the interval between past and future [where] man has to face his own responsibility' (Agamben 1999b, 114). But such an ethical approach can only be constituted, as Agamben stresses, on the fact that there is no 'first', 'no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that human enact or realize', because if there were, 'no ethical experience would be possible' (Agamben 2009a, 43). Agamben, arguing here for potentiality and the human freedom to act upon or not, strengthens as much as Villani the inherent ethics of Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, which reflect onto the reading of *aura* as proposed here, echoing the

task of visualizing the power and problem of virtual forces that traverse a fractured yet creative self of subjectivation. When media philosopher Vilém Flusser speaks about the human as 'project' (in contrast to 'subject'), he augments this still somewhat romantic conception by integrating the formal, calculatory and structural consciousness that deploys technologies as to realize 'knots' of potential, of 'selves' as 'digital dispersion' at a point where it is impossible to make a distinction between truth and semblance or science and art ('Digitaler Schein' [Digital Semblance], in: Flusser 2005, 202). this process as machines able to crystallize time, in painting/drawing as well as in film

Openness for the unfolding of something not yet confirmed, the *Becoming* towards equality of difference i.e. a positively turned ignorance of power structures, the integration of darkness (chaos, fear, dream) and light (conceptualization, practice, selection and responsibility), the work toward affect and percept instead of retarded emotion or copy of 'reality', and the weight and value of emptiness within what becomes as disjunctive syntheses are key points of what *aura* holds for this research. In terms of the 'objective of the work' in *Splendor Solis* (read here as always targeted *and* destabilized), *aura* holds an *alchemical* 'request', which is nothing more or less than a continuous re-posing of the question or the quest for how to encounter (here artistically) further individuation with the potential of contemporary media, following on the one hand Zielinski's advice: 'do not seek the old in the new, but find something new in the old' (2006, 3), and supporting on the other hand what Félix Guattari proposes as 'a new type of *arrangement of enunciation*', to find against the clichés of power and order-words 'the microfascism one harbors in oneself' (Guattari 2009, 280)¹²⁶. Inviting *aura* in this sense releases its religious propositions as it cannot but operate exactly *against* being framed in a thought image. Terry Lovat and Inna Semetsky elucidate its 'numinous' aspect, which does certainly not disappear, embedded in immanence: '[t]he practical transformation of the self takes place along the vanishing transversal line at the very limit of human experience that therefore always contains a numinous, religious, bordering on mystical, aspect' (Lovat and Semetsky 2009, 247). If it is this numinosity, which concerns contemporary reservations against *aura*, it can be, as proposed here, liberated from its displacement to transcendence in a Deleuzian framework by dissolving the yawning abyss of mysticism into univocal immanence: *without* having to deny its inherent intensity, its splendour of chiascuro, the echo of

¹²⁶ See also in *Subversions*: 'Neutrality is another illusion: We are ourselves always mixed up in the situation. [...] Instead of conducting a politics of subjection, of identification, normalization, social control and setting the people we are dealing with along a semiotic track, it is possible to opt for a micropolitics that at least takes into account our own humble participation in the story [...]' (Guattari and Lotringer 2009, 54). This foremost political argument extends inherently to art practice/research.

folding desiring-machines that fires/breathes through the pragmatics of practice, old and new media, paint and software.

After documenting the practice-based research in chapter 2, chapter 3 continues by proposing a conceptual persona or ‘masked’ concept in the middle of the fold between practice and theory in art research. It is ‘intuition’, which in this practice-based research involves with *aura* as practice as much as it holds the key for a method of conceptualizing its differentiations.

3. Art Practice/Research as Suspension

3. 1 *Aura* and Intuition: Hölderlin’s *Empedocles at Etna* as Conceptual Persona

3.1.1 Why Hölderlin’s *Empedocles*?

In the last chapter a connection has been made between Deleuze’s quotation “My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it” (Joe Bousquet, quoted in: Deleuze 2004c, 169) and individuated strands of this wound on the side of the artist and his/her practice. If the openness toward a ‘propitious’ moment or emergence of an event presupposes, as shown, degrees of intensity without which *Becoming* is hardly thinkable, then also the experience of *aura* indicates a beginning of an exploration, a trigger for potential in the viewer. It seems as if the rhizomes mapped/traced around/with *aura* in form of artistic outcomes (and writing) might hold a healing aspect; are *aura* and ‘wound’ connected, and if so, how?

Deleuze’s quotation relates to a fracture in modern consciousness, a wound that he associates with the beginning liberation of consciousness from a separating transcendence that would leave the subject intact as a unit, but enveloped in the cyclical and predestining movements of fixed stars and the planets.¹²⁷

Kant introduced time *into* the subject and dissolves thus the concept of circular time, and with this move time becomes subordinated ‘to the course of the world’, ‘as if bent, it becomes circular’ (Deleuze 1978). Linear time is the result of an unrolling of this ancient subordination to movement: ‘the circle snaps, like a spring that uncoils itself’, and builds a straight line with the incision of the *event* with its ‘before’ and ‘after’, builds, reminding us of Jorge Luis Borges, the paradox of the straight line as labyrinth¹²⁸: what seems a predictable line of measurable units, a ‘manageable’

¹²⁷ Plato (in *Timaeus* 37c6-39e2) introduces them as markers of time (Plato and Zeyl 2000).

¹²⁸ Deleuze refers here to Jorge Luis Borges narrative *Death and the Compass*, on the surface a detective story about two antithetical figures, Scharlach and Lönnrot. Both hunt each other through layers of time. “I know of a Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line. Along this line so many philosophers

course, opens at any moment a fissure presenting the incongruence between spontaneity and representation. Thus, says Deleuze, linear time 'no longer limits the world, it will traverse it' (1978) at any moment of differentiation but positions the subject at the disjunctions and pitfalls of a labyrinthine, only seemingly organized vista. In many ways, Deleuze's multi-layered philosophy proposes (for both individuals and their multitude in social bodies) the affirmation of exactly this dilemma, the active and joyful turn of the potential of differentiation and events into assemblages, at the same time 'open to internal antagonisms, to the real forces of destruction and decomposition' (Hardt 1993, 121). The disengagement of 'difference' from its historical dependence on comparison in philosophy is at the heart of this affirmation, and one could see Deleuze as 'redeeming' Immanuel Kant's project, which against its objective to develop a rigorous (transcendental) philosophy of immanence had reintroduced transcendence with the 'supersensible'.

Freeing 'difference' changes the fixed stars and their projections to singularities on differentiating vectors of *Becoming*, confirming Nietzsche's short *Parable* in *The Gay Science*, where it says: 'whoever looks into himself as into vast space and carries galaxies in himself, also knows how irregular all galaxies are; they lead into the chaos and labyrinth of existence' (§ 322, in Nietzsche et al. 2006, 232).

The practice element as presented here, with its rhythms between spontaneous production and reflection, its overlapping frames and irruptive flows, resonates with if not directly links to this 'wound' (of identity). In art practice as research, this wound navigates, guides and challenges as a fissure, vibrating and differentiating, along the gap between the spontaneity of creation, i.e. of painting, drawing, editing and their folds into language; of *Body without Organs* and concept; of intuition and conceptualization.

But what is circumscribed when we talk about 'intuitive practice', how does intuition work, and how could a 'translation' – if there is one – from intuition into concept be described?

Finding answers to or layers of this questions will hopefully contribute to, in a Deleuzian sense, the 'creation' of a concept of *aura*, and it might be such preliminary steps towards a concept that practice-based art research can provide, due to its methods which depart from the impact of percepts and affects on knowledge and thus differ from the creation of concepts. 'The concept', write Deleuze and Guattari, 'is an incorporeal, even though it is incarnated or effectuated in bodies. But, in fact, it is not mixed up with the state of affairs in which it is effectuated. It does not have spatiotemporal coordinates, only intensive ordinates.'

have lost themselves that a mere detective might well do so too." [...] "The next time I kill you," said Scharlach, "I promise you the labyrinth made of the single straight line which is invisible and everlasting" (Borges 1968, 13).

(Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 21) The notion of *aura* as developed in this research – a vibrant potential futurity of *Becoming*, of differentiating emergence along the ‘event’ that leaps into a non-static actualisation, a ‘golden shadow’ or ‘chiaroscuro’ of what seems to be a framed and finished piece of art – comes close to speaking ‘the event, not the essence or the thing’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 21) but necessarily (and desirably) carries along the intensities of an organized artist-body and its passages toward dis-organization that are indissolubly involved in art-practice/research.

A possible (visualized) step towards a *counter-effectuation*¹²⁹ of the event that actualizes a ‘wound that existed before me’ with its vital connection to *aura* and intuition, however, could be a conceptual persona, an incorporeal that wears the projective mask of sensibility; *on the way* to becoming the infinite speed with which a concept surveys its heterogeneous components, the conceptual persona ‘carries out the movements that describe the author’s plane of immanence, and [...] play[s] a part in the very creation of the author’s concept’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 63). As

The search for a focus that would possibly connect some of the seemingly remote strands of this research, would provide a source of visual imagination and be intuitively accessible, lead to the figure of Empedocles at Etna, the protagonist of Friedrich Hölderlin’s unfinished ‘mourning-play’ *Der Tod des Empedokles* [*The Death of Empedocles*], written between 1797 and 1800¹³⁰. The Pre-Socratic philosopher ‘developed his concept of the physical world as an attempt to combine incompatible positions’ (Zielinski 2006, 43), suspended between a pre-individual plane of elements in the volcano Etna, and the ‘knowledge’ of how to create concepts and poetry with them. In Hölderlin’s play, he considers his endeavours as failure, too close to the gods, too distant to his people he is politically committed to. He considers dying by merging with the fire in the depth of the volcano but in fact remains, in Hölderlin’s version, suspended in this state of reflection. Deleuze and Guattari identify the potential of ‘Empedocles and his volcano’ (1994, 72), but, as far as I can see, limit it to his accomplished leap into the volcano: ‘The artist no longer risks [they refer here to Romanticism] dissipation in the milieus but rather sinking

¹²⁹ ‘The event is actualized or effectuated whenever it is inserted, willy-nilly, into a state of affairs; but it is *counter-effectuated* whenever it is abstracted from states of affairs as to isolate its concept’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 159).

¹³⁰ Hölderlin (1770-1843) had a tremendous influence on German modernist poetry (for example Paul Celan) and philosophy (first on Hegel and Schelling, who were both friends of his in earlier years, then Heidegger and his antipodes Adorno and Walter Benjamin); he wrote poems, a novel in letters, philosophical, often fragmentary essays, the *Empedocles* play and produced translations of Sophocles and Pindar. The three unfinished version of *The Death of Empedocles*, much more a reflective literary text than ‘stage action’, were written between 1797 and 1800 alongside his most important and complex poetic and philosophical texts. A few years later he suffered a mental breakdown and spent the last 40 years of his life in care. The translation of *The Death of Empedocles* from German to English used here is by David Farrell Krell (Hölderlin 2008).

too deeply into the earth: Empedocles. The artist no longer identifies with Creation but with the ground or foundation, the foundation has become creative' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 373). But exactly this 'sinking too deeply', the actual leap into the depth of the elements, effectively takes never place in Hölderlin's play.¹³¹

For the context of visualizing *aura*, it is this denial of the sacrificial leap in the unfinished versions of Hölderlin's *Empedocles*, this cut or freeze frame that builds the springboard for the argument here. Of course, this assumes regarding as a solution what seems on the surface a failed project (a play never 'finished'): the close encounter with *aura* this conceptual poetic persona embodies (in between the fold of creating and conceptualizing with it), indicates – following the thesis here – a belief in virtuality, a futurity, i.e. potential for changes in a problematic constellation. Deleuze connects this belief to 'precipitat[ing] events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, [to] engender[ing] new space-times, however small their surface or volume' (Deleuze 1995, 176). However, that does not indicate, as Daniel W. Smith points out in his essay *The Conditions of the New*, 'that the problematic structure has disappeared' (Smith 2007, 17). Hölderlin's effective solution *is* Empedocles' suspension, i.e. a sustained actuality of a problematic structure, a potential, which much later is picked up again by Zielinski when he writes about Empedocles' philosophy as 'a worldview oriented toward succeeding, precisely because it is aware of the possibility of failure' (Zielinski 2006, 41).

The assemblage of a suspended Empedocles in between the unfolding of difference, a plane of immanence and the emergence of art/writing delivers effortlessly on Deleuze's and Guattari's requirements: 'the conceptual persona with its personalized features intervenes between chaos and the diagrammatic features of the plane of immanence and also between the plane and the intensive features of the concepts that happen to populate it' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 75). It delivers also, as will be proposed in this chapter, a focus for some of the positions of Deleuze/Guattari, Benjamin (both refer to Hölderlin frequently) and alchemical thought that have been relevant for the research so far.

¹³¹ Joseph Suglia supports my view. In his inquiry *Hölderlin and Blanchot on Self-Sacrifice* he writes: '[In] this fragmentary work – one of the titles of which announces the death of its tragic hero – death takes place nowhere in the space of its presentation. The absence of anything resembling a scene of self-immolation causes a certain interpretive distress. Empedokles "suicide" is inevitably described as if it were a *fait accompli*, despite its complete absence from the texts in consideration' (Suglia 2004, 5).

3.1.2 *Empedocles' Suspended Sacrifice*

Hölderlin belonged to the first generation that dealt with a specific problem arising from Kant's transcendental philosophy in an open-ended and experimental way, before the encyclopaedic systems of German Idealism (Hegel and Schelling) would emerge from these preliminary intuitions. His *Empedocles* embodies an independent philosophical thought as poetic and intense intervention, embodies a fissure or, in Hölderlin's language, a 'caesura' in modern consciousness, which lets the character of his play already act as a conceptual persona. While this section introduces Empedocles a (historical) figure, the next will provide the philosophical background for Hölderlin's project.

The play deals with a figure (Empedocles) that exists in multiple disguises along a line of witnessed and imaginary history: an aristocratic leader from Agrigentum (Sicily) who rejected political power in favour of democratic developments; an eminent Pre-Socratic philosopher, whose teachings survived in fragments or secondary texts¹³²; a physician who knows about the alchemy of the elements; a healer whose 'spiritual exercises' of remembrance enable him to reveal previous incarnations; a philosopher admired by the people as a god who desires, as to confirm or repent the hubris attached to this idea, to leap into the volcano¹³³.

Empedocles claims that Love and Strife are the forces that make the elements (fire, water, air, earth; they are called *rhizōmata* – rhizomes in Greek¹³⁴) conjoin and transmute perpetually; instead of an origin or beginning he advocates an eternal movement, driven by attraction and destruction, or, put in more contemporary terms, Aphrodite/Eros and Thanatos who enter, exit and interweave, as we have seen, throughout this project.

There are obvious affinities between Empedocles' teachings and the alchemical 'work', and, if we understand 'elements' as the components of matter, perhaps also Deleuze's differential processes. The following fragment, cited by Plutarch, builds a thread of such affinities, showing simultaneously Empedocles' obvious awareness of the gap between language (representation) and 'truth', which his student Gorgias of Leontini then developed much further (we have already encountered him in this research in connection with the 'simulacrum' or critique of 'Ideas'): 'Another thing I

¹³² Hölderlin and authors of his generation got most information on ancient philosophy from Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* (3. century CE) (Laërtius 2010).

¹³³ Empedocles' leap into the Etna is most probably apocryphal (Fóti 2006, 56), Diogenes Laërtius mentions alternative accounts. Practically seen, it seems an impossible endeavour and is thus symbolical.

¹³⁴ R. M. Torrance specifies that Empedocles calls the 'four eternal principles – fire, air, water, and earth / [...] "roots" (*rhizōmata*) [...] which others later called "elements" (*stoikheia*, literally 'letters' of the alphabet) ...' (Torrance 1998, 332).

shall tell you: there is no birth for any mortal thing, nor any cursed end in death; only mixing and interchange of what is mixed, these things are – but men *name* them birth' (Barnes 1987, 129; my italics).

Empedocles departs from the mixture of elements equivalent to those of colours in painting, from the senses, percepts and affects involved in temporary composites formed by the desire of the ever changing elements: 'speculations of philosophers of nature such as Empedocles belonged', so Pierre Hadot, 'rather to the domain of *graphikē*, where *graphikē* is either the art of writing letters or the art of painting. [...] [P]hilosophers of nature seek to reconstruct the universe with a small number of elements analogous to letters or colors [sic]. The philosophy treatise, whether written in prose or in verse, then appears as a kind of microcosm, whose genesis and structure reproduce those of the universe' (Hadot 2006, 207/208). Thus, Empedocles composes via the 'art of painting', as Maurice Blanchot (1993, 89) notes, the '*rhythm*' of the world, its changing configurations, which captures the vibration of matter that accompanies the differentiation of *Becoming*.

Being a composite of the elements entangled in Love/Strife himself, Empedocles standing on Etna is traversed by the vectors of *Becoming*, moving through different layers of time: '*driven*', as Maurice Blanchot paraphrases Empedocles in *The Infinite Conversation*, 'by the heavens to the sea, *spit* from the sea to the earth, *spit out again* toward the sun and *thrown back* by the sun to the heavens; "*exiled from god and in error for having trusted myself to the frenzy of irritation*"' (Blanchot 1993, 26; italics original).

In Hölderlin's 'mourning-play', we find Empedocles on the outside, exiled from Agrigentum. His brother has taken political power. Empedocles, the 'darling' of the gods, regrets his hubris to have prided himself to be in possession of their knowledge, a god himself: he lost the love of the gods and jeopardizes his people. But also the people of Agrigentum have disappointed him. Considering sacrificing himself, to leap into Etna will unify him with the fiery elements and the ethereal fire of the gods, will affirm with an act of love the purging powers of the *ekpyrosis* (Greek for 'conflagration'), the Stoic belief that the primal creative Fire, which remains present yet concealed in the concrete world, will again and again destroy forms in its destructive form ('at the end of a time')¹³⁵. Jochen Schmidt shows how this connects to Hölderlin: at the point of *ekpyrosis* Fire breaks through its concealment in the individual; it 'disengages from its mediation and connection with the other elements where it had been live-giving. In the *ekpyrosis*, it becomes

¹³⁵ The Stoic teachings around Fire are based on Heraclitus: 'The universe is limited in extent, and there is one world. It is generated from fire and it is consumed in fire again, alternating in fixed periods throughout the whole of eternity. And this happens by fate' (DK 22 B 30, in: Barnes 1987, 55 ; see also Schmidt in: Neymeyr et al. 2008, 215).

immediate, unbound, deathly' (in Neymeyr et al. 2008). Fire thus negates, extinguishes the gap between the immediate and representation that establishes human consciousness.

In the play, Empedocles' intended but not offered sacrifice fulfils a double function: firstly to purge a hubris and to commit an act of love for his people, secondly to become a personage for political (historical) *ekpyrosis*.

In which way can Empedocles' 'hubris' be a problem of modernity? For Hölderlin, it connects to 'intuition' of the immediate and therefore to philosophical representations and aesthetic visualizations of how we gain knowledge.

The following paragraphs will introduce briefly the background of Hölderlin's problem. Such an introduction seemed inevitable for *Empedocles* as a conceptual persona that directly connects the strands of the 'wound before me', *aura* and the method of intuition on the one hand, but also highlights the background of how, in philosophy, intuition could develop into a method appropriately applied to the developments of concepts relating to time as duration like the 'wound' and possibly *aura*. It revealed an unexpected encounter between Deleuze's and Benjamin's concepts of time, which extends on and refines earlier results of my research¹³⁶.

3.1.3 'The immediate [...] is impossible for mortals'

The questions of how to link our ability to make spontaneous judgments to the ways we represent the world in our consciousness, and of how these conditions affect freedom, were a major concern for artists and intellectuals after Kant's critiques had been published around the time of the French revolution.

With the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87), Kant proposed a model of human consciousness that contested any legitimacy of religious dogma by showing the subjective condition of our perception that can never reliably derive 'truths' about perceived phenomena or capture the 'thing itself' in the sense of an essence. It becomes obvious here that Deleuze's project is intensely engaged with radicalising Kant's transcendental philosophy. A dilemma rises for Kant with the restrictions consciousness meets to represent itself: 'since the subject intuits itself, not as it would represent itself immediately and spontaneously, but according to the manner

¹³⁶ Although the 'Empedocles'-phase of the research started with a video (*Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling*, see 3.2.2), thus before researching the background in more depth, it made more sense to place the background introduction first; the creative work that followed the video (the paintings for *Empedocles Assemblage* and the video *Deerfeathers*, see 3.2) resulted from ideas arising with the theoretical explorations and might profit from such an introduction.

in which the mind is internally affected, consequently, as it appears, and not as it is' (Kant 2007b, I §8, B68). For a German reader, the English translation 'intuition', although commonly used, seems imprecise, as Kant relates 'intuition' in the original clearly to 'representation' (literally 'looking-at'), not to the commonly applied 'ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning' (according to Oxford Dictionaries).

In Henri Bergson's view, which links to Deleuze's take on Kant, Kant confuses 'the symbolical representation of the ego with the ego itself', which leads him to conceptualize time as a homogenous condition of subjectivity instead of noticing 'that real duration is made up of moments inside one another' (Bergson 2001, 232)¹³⁷.

The bracketing of and weight on subjective conditions of representation forces Kant also into having to link the 'ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning' to agencies *beyond* representation. In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), he observes that our appreciation of beauty sidelines the deduction of reasonable thinking from sensuous intuition and declares it as a *symbol* of 'the morally good', pointing 'to something in the subject itself and outside it, and which is not nature, nor yet freedom, but still is connected with the ground of the latter, i.e. the supersensible – a something in which the theoretical faculty is combined with the practical in a shared and unknown matter' (Kant 2007a, § 59, p. 181).

With the introduction of the supersensible, Kant allows a zone immune to critical forces and thus takes back some of the potential of his initial approach for a thorough critique, which, writes Michael Hardt, 'requires a materialistic, monistic perspective in which the entire unified horizon is open and vulnerable to the critique's destabilizing inquiry' (Hardt 1993, 29).

Deleuze, following Bergson's criticism of Kant's model of time, uncouples the transcendental from its ground in empirical representation in the subject and thus opens the notion toward a transcendental *field* of singularities, 'a pure stream of a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without a self' (Deleuze 2001, 25), which we have repeatedly encountered in the course of this research.

However, for the generation directly after Kant, his move – to infer from aesthetic experience, from the experience of beauty, a 'beyond' mediating between nature and reason in historical time – suggested that it must be the *artist* who could

¹³⁷ In Kant's *Critique of Reason*, writes Bergson, '[there is never any question of] a knowledge from within, that could grasp them in their springing forth instead of taking them already sprung, that would dig beneath space and spatialized time [...] Yet it is indeed beneath this plane that our consciousness places us; there flows true duration' (Bergson 1954, 382).

intuit the work of nature. Frederick Beiser (2003, 83) shows how in Early Romanticism the rise of organic theories of nature coincided with a great interest in 'forces' of nature and the rediscovery of Spinoza's philosophy of nature as immanent unfolding, undivided by transcendence. Nature became an organic process to be intuited.

Artistic inspiration, intuition gained from a flash seemingly originating from beyond the sensuous (thus 'intellectual') becomes a marker within the organic process, inflicting wounds not only on the individual but also on history. Here, at a point before the established philosophies of 'German Idealism', 'intuition' begins to form its common association of an ability to grasp the internal *processes* of nature, mirrored and completed in the production of art: in poetry, language achieves pushing through discourses of representation, thus touching also on problems engaged with writing on art the methods introduced here as to engage with *aura*.

The artist, in this early Idealistic view, co-creates and brings nature to its reflected self, and it is 'intellectual intuition' that realizes the gap between reason, language and what they fail to grasp, irrupts and reveals that in the medium of linear time '[t]he immediate, strictly speaking, is impossible for mortals' (Hölderlin 2009, 336).

A writer like Hölderlin was thoroughly aware of the radical changes indicated by these new outlooks and hoped for new political conditions, gained from the reconciliation between nature and history that would improve on what in the late 1790s appeared to be a betrayal of the opportunities proposed by the French revolution. The idea for *Empedocles* at Etna, as a conceptual embodiment of the problematic intellectual intuition, endeavours to put into a processual form – a 'play(-ing)' destined for 'mourning' – its tragic inflictions on the subject's consciousness *and* history.

Hölderlin – and we need to keep in mind that for him Empedocles is a tragic poetic character – associates intellectual intuition with the tragic: 'The tragic [...] poem [...] is the metaphor of an intellectual intuition' (Hölderlin 2009, 302). How is this possible?

In one of his last works before his mental breakdown, the annotations for his translations of Sophocles *Oedipus* and *Antigone* (published 1804), Hölderlin describes the quality of this moment in depth. The instant, the in-between of what has been and what is not yet which holds the potential of 'the fearful enormity of God and man uniting', opens a gap, in which God ('power of nature') and man (the

‘innermost being in rage¹³⁸’) betray each other by turning away from each other according to their differences of being time:

‘man forgets himself there because he is wholly in the moment; and God, because he is nothing else than time. And both are unfaithful: time, because at such a moment it reverses categorically – [and] beginning and end simply cannot be connected; and man, because at this moment he must follow the categorical reversal, and therefore simply cannot be in the following what he was at the beginning. [...] And thus Oedipus [stands] himself at the centre of the tragedy of *Oedipus*’ (Hölderlin 2009, 324).

Oedipus, in this sense, *is* the gap between ‘god’ and ‘man’ or *caesura* in Sophocles’ play, and, with another emphasis, Empedocles will become the conceptual persona for what Hölderlin develops further as *caesura* in his own tragedy¹³⁹.

Hölderlin suggests in his dense text that the staged experience of mutual betrayal in Greek tragedy confuses and purifies man by making him realise the urgency of an unambiguous (‘categorical’) turn. The German *Umkehr*, here translated as ‘reversal’, indicates also a political overthrow or ‘revolution’ (Editors’ notes in Hölderlin and Schmidt 1994, 1392). Tragedy prevents God as ‘time’, different from the one of reflexivity, from being forgotten, and the gap or *caesura*, as Hölderlin calls it, functions ‘so that no gap occurs on the course of the world’ (Hölderlin 2009, 324), permeating both the subject and the course of history. However, at the same time the mutual betrayal between God and man signifies the moment where, as Deleuze, who had a great interest in this central aspect of Hölderlin’s work, writes, man will ‘accomplish the subjective mission of God’, will be liberated from the signifying regime to a ‘subjective regime or regime of passion’, as ‘God [becomes] Point of subjectivation’ (Deleuze 2006a, 79/80).

The moment in time of the ‘reversal’ reflects here also the beginning dissolution of the metaphysical separation on which, as shown, the traditional conception of *aura* as static, bright, divine ‘reward’ is based.

The *caesura* (in the context Hölderlin positions it) relates foremost to tragedy and language, but intrinsically it provides a metaphor for the ‘tragic’ condition of language as the medium of reflexivity, and, more generally, of art: ‘a pure word, *that*

¹³⁸ ‘Rage’ signifies here, so the editors of the most up-to-date German Hölderlin edition, less a common affect but ‘a state of the extreme dissolution of the individual in direction toward the absolute [...] a being-enraptured by the forces of nature’ (Hölderlin and Schmidt 1994, 1381).

¹³⁹ Unexpected support for my efforts to bind the alchemical Hermaphrodite to *aura* (and the connection to Bonello’s film *Tiresia*) comes from Hölderlin (and Sophocles via Hölderlin), when we find in his *Notes on the ‘Oedipus’*: ‘In both plays [*Oedipus*, *Antigone*], it is the speeches of Tiresias which constitute the caesura.’ (Hölderlin 2009, 318)¹³⁹ Again, the hermaphroditic and blind prophet Tiresias mediates the transgression of the event into linear time.

which in metrics is called a caesura, in order to confront the speeding alternation of ideas at its climax, so that not the alternation of the idea, but the idea itself appears' (Hölderlin 2009, 318). As a play, the metaphor of the 'pure word' becomes its metamorphosis, and it is a curious aspect that as an unfinished play, the metaphor (as metamorphosis) keeps its being differentiated into a temporal actualization alive.

It is the *caesura* as 'interruption' of the straight line of time and semblance, where two theoretical positions paramount for this research meet the first time: Benjamin and Deleuze.

For Deleuze, the *caesura* is 'pure present' (this means he transports a marker of language, the 'pure word', into the transcendental field), the point 'from which the real which fills space and time will be produced, [...] empty intuition' (Deleuze 1978 ; 2004b, 110/111). It seems thus another facet of the crystals of *Aion* as introduced in the last chapter, the neutral and empty present of eternity from which past and future flee 'in both directions at once, towards the future and towards the past' (Deleuze 2004c, 73). It is *Aion/caesura*, 'pure present' that builds the surface on which intensities ('regime of passion') and potential problem solutions find an expression as *Kairos* or *event*.

For Walter Benjamin, 'the expressionless can be no more rigorously defined' than through Hölderlin's notes on the *caesura*, 'in which, along with harmony, every expression simultaneously comes to a standstill, in order to give free reign to an expressionless power inside all artistic media. [...] Perceptible in tragedy as the falling silent of the hero [...]' (Benjamin 1996, 341), the *caesura* ruins the towering self-assurance of representation, as much in literature as (we have seen this during the discussion of Grünewald's *Resurrection*) in painting (and, I would like to add, in film) when beautiful semblance is traversed by the 'sublime violence' of an arrest with the flash of pure present.

Deleuze's and Benjamin's positions show one great affinity: the *irruption of pure present* into a world established on moral, 'framed' and rigidified models of being, the sudden visualization of '[m]y absolute present, always present, obsessively present ...', how Henri Michaux puts it in a poem ('Future', in Caws 2004, 193).

Benjamin can claim that with the *caesura* 'truth' irrupts, 'sublime violence of the true' because from a messianic point of view language and art *must* be confronted with their fragmentary, contorted reality, being 'a fragment of the true world', a dispersed and heterogeneous exegesis as shown in Chapter 1.1. The 'expressionless' cuts with its a-subjective potential of justice into the surface/semblance in art, as much as into the flow of collective history that has been built on a destructive concept of 'progress'. The poetic image that presents metaphysical truth carries thus a potential 'to express a fragment of the divine in

“dissonance” [...] so that time’, as Eric Jacobson writes, ‘no longer appears as a lineal string of barbarism but rather as a table of events that are bound to redemption, the “temporal order of happiness”’ (Jacobson 2003, 33). A brief note in the *Arcade* project sums up a somewhat different, continuously broken and fragmented teleology: ‘[...] knowledge comes only in lightening flashes. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows’ (N1,1 in Benjamin 2002a, 456).

The latter quote could be also a very accurate description of art as research, of a movement toward conceptualization of what appears to emerge intuitively; however, Benjamin’s note must be understood as a moment of ‘translation’ back to the first language: ‘The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation’ (Benjamin 1996, 263)¹⁴⁰; he leaves Hölderlin’s *caesura* in the realm of language, but it becomes here the marker of Law.

It is obvious that the description of the ‘expressionless’ shares some characteristics of what I examine here as *aura* as an intense ‘event’ of the new, actualising a problem solution with its heterogeneity of differentiation, its openness or demand for ‘selection’, i.e. a fusion of contemplation and action.

With the discussion of Hölderlin’s *caesura*, it becomes clearer that Benjamin possibly juxtaposes the *aura* (with its element of internalized contemplation) with the ‘expressionless’ in order to isolate and critically target a specific ‘Western’ tradition of teleological progress that prepared the aestheticization of politics in fascism. The problem is in my view perfectly summarized in Michael Löwy’s study on Benjamin’s concept of history:

‘Qualitative time, studded with messianic splinters, stands radically opposed to the empty flow of the purely quantitative time of historicism and ‘progressism’. We are, here, in the rupture between messianic redemption and the ideology of progress, at the heart of the constellation formed by the conceptions of history of Benjamin, Scholem and Franz Rosenzweig, who draw on the Jewish religious tradition to contest the model of thought that is common to Christian theodicy, the Enlightenment and the Hegelian philosophy of history. By abandoning the Western theological model, we pass from a time of necessity to a time of possibilities, a random time, open at any moment to the unforeseeable irruption of the new. But, from the political standpoint, we are also on the central strategic axis of the reconstruction of Marxism attempted by Benjamin’ (Löwy 2005, 102).

For Benjamin, *aura* with its attachment to interiority cuts across the redemptive potential of the intervention of Truth in time, which in Judaism always is thought to ‘[take] place publicly, on the stage of history and within the community’ (Scholem 1971, 1). Thus, the political structure that derives from such a concept of

¹⁴⁰ I am aware that Benjamin’s commitment to the Scriptures as language of Truth is somewhat conditional, taken into account his remark ‘My thinking is related to theology as blotting pad is related to ink. It is saturated with it. Were one to go by the blotter, however, nothing of what is written would remain’ (N7a,7 in: Benjamin 2002a, 471).

aura appears as designed to pacify as a diagram of 'the false' the historically unredeemed dreams of real social bodies. The *caesura* as marker of the 'expressionless' becomes its counterpart. Benjamin's pharmacy, 'profane illumination', intervenes as an implementation of theological messianic categories into a world of fragments, to make 'the rags, the refuse [...] come to their own' (N1a,8 in Benjamin 2002a, 460).

However, Benjamin's move cements a division between 'interiority' and 'exteriority' and forecloses the opening of this division by constituting man's interiority as 'fallen' from Truth (Scripture, Law), i.e. irreparable. It displaces man's responsibility into an exterior and transcendent futurity; thus, personal input and its responsibility that could pass by this division and work co-creatively for a world of emergences gains in this repressive and dogmatic scenario of 'heaven and hell' the merit of a melancholically settled futility. What is problematic as a departure point here cannot be Benjamin's powerful and accurate response to the catastrophic failure of human spirit in Nazi Germany but his eschatological generalisation that contorts the potential of *aura*.

Such concealed and signifying totality is exactly what Deleuze sets out to avoid by putting 'difference' at the heart of repetition. For him, the *caesura*, like *Aion*, becomes the marker of 'pure present' in time.

However, whereas from *Aion* past and future flee 'in both directions at once, towards the future and towards the past' (Deleuze 2004c, 73), the *caesura* in *Difference and Repetition* is limited to the synthesis of future in the sense of the 'present of metamorphosis' (Deleuze 2004b, 112), the imminence of finding oneself not identical with oneself during change. As the fissure of a permanently repeating 'doubling of the self', the *caesura* becomes the image of the eternal return, and 'must be determined in the image of a unique and tremendous event, an act which is adequate to time as a whole.' Deleuze gives examples of how such a symbol of integral time could be expressed: 'to throw time out of joint, to make the sun explode, to throw oneself into the volcano, to kill God or the father' (Deleuze 2004b, 112).

Empedocles, who – following the legend and Hölderlin's plan for his play – throws himself into the volcano, is himself an image for the 'event', the *caesura*, the synthesis of futurity. When I use Hölderlin's *unfinished Empedocles*, I can make use of a freeze frame shot arresting the play just before the re/turn: Empedocles remains suspended, time expands, the crater of the mountain becomes a place of overview where the strands can be visualized that run between the fiery stream of elements, the edge of the crater, himself and the airy or 'ethereal' fire of Apollo, the 'knowledge' he shares with a 'god'.

The *unfinished Empedocles* grants a snapshot of the ‘wound’ with its always uncomplete, or as Jack Reynolds puts it (Reynolds 2007, 158), ‘scarifactory’ healing¹⁴¹. This wound emerges as a marker within *Becoming* (as differentiating repetitions), and what *becomes* is an asymmetrical differentiation, i.e. what actualizes will never be a copy of its virtual intensity but something that emerged out of it, by becoming-different. Thus, an *origin* or *ground* of the wound cannot be traced or determined and the unfolding of future as eternal return threatens the self with its fracture. The ‘wound that existed before me’ with its fracture of identity ripples forth to minor wounds around the construction of a personal shape, an ‘I’.

In Hölderlin’s essay *Ground for Empedocles*, in which he grounds his intentions theoretically, the determination of a ‘ground’ is made impossible. This incredibly modern text outlines the basis for his drama as well as a ground for the problematic unity of natural forces and thought (which coerces their organization). He does not deny, like Kant, the possibility of ‘intellectual intuition’ as being-One with the immediate but Kant’s claim that our faculties, understanding and imagination are able to organize the ‘anarchy of ideas’ and perceptions in an unambiguous way, the ‘unity of the manifold, an order of perceptions, was indeed possible, but *accidental*’ (Hölderlin 2009, 227, my italics), thus in no way binding as proposed by Kant. For Hölderlin, unity or primordial order can only be *reconstructed*, in retrospective and after a transgression that induces the *caesura*. In a Deleuzian sense, every differentiating repetition into the future becomes such a potential transgression. When Hölderlin writes in a letter: ‘The god and man *seems* one’ (appr. 1799 in Hölderlin and Schmidt 1992, 412, my italics), he abbreviates the main strand of *Ground for Empedocles*. What will remain from ‘unity’, from the immediate, is an ‘image of intimacy’ or ‘intensity’¹⁴² that ‘everywhere denies, and must deny, its ultimate ground’ (Hölderlin 2009, 259); the closer the intimacy with the forces of nature, the ‘aorgic’¹⁴³, is achieved the more the subjective faculties of representation will be extinguished. Gaining unity with the aorgic means for Empedocles – who was ‘in no way made for negations’ – to try

¹⁴¹ Reynolds describes this wounded healing in the following way: ‘it is the wound of time itself that is revalued [by Deleuze] in a transcendental move that tacitly *diminishes* the scar’ (Reynolds 2007, 158, my italics).

¹⁴² Krell chooses ‘intensity’ where the translators of the Penguin version (quoted in my text) use ‘intimacy’, which in might reflect better the German (unusual in today’s language) ‘Innigkeit’ and its allusions to Love and interiority (thus reflecting Empedocles’ view of the work of the elements workings as inner reality of changing life forms).

¹⁴³ The ‘aorgic’, a term originating from Southern German pietism known to Hölderlin, signifies here the ‘unconscious, speechless, imageless, dis-organising aspects of nature’ (Ritter et al. 1971, Vol. 6, 1330).

‘to become the master of the unknown, [...] to encompass the overpowering natural world, to understand it through and through, and to become conscious of it, as he could be conscious and certain of himself, [...] his spirit had to take on aorgic form in the highest sense, had to tear itself away from itself and its own centre, and always penetrate its object so excessively that he lost himself in it, [...] He was the universal, the unknown [...]’ (Hölderlin 2009, 267).

The closeness here to Deleuze and Guattari’s prompt to make oneself a *Body without Organs*, with its degree of intensities and a-subjective absence of signification, is striking. Hölderlin lays out how such a mutual approximation, between (one’s) *BwO* and signification in linear time could be described, could be put in scene, gain a temporary mask. The ‘aorgic’ could be non-linear time itself, as Hölderlin avoids a one-directional concept of time by interweaving its strands into future and past. The *caesura* that is here embodied encompasses the differentiation of intuition as Empedocles’ method of knowledge, the fire transmutes between the realms of gods and rhizomata. Could fire in this sense be the intensified splendour of *aura* and refer to its inherent method?

Fire, Empedocles’ ‘target’ of a-subjection, appears in Hölderlin’s scenario as ‘the violent element, the fire of the sky’. It enables the experience of ‘Apollo has struck me’ (Letter to Böhlendorff, Nov. 1802 in: Hölderlin 2009, 213),¹⁴⁴ ‘the highest fire, the pure spirit [that] pure intimacy [desires] in order to represent purity itself’ (Hölderlin 2009, 258), the excess of the immediate as ‘flight’ and ‘infinite speed’ of thought from which Hölderlin’s Empedocles distills concepts as ‘knowledge of the gods’ (his hubris); *and* it is the intensity of alchemy in the depth of the earth, where a *coniunctio oppositorum* between fire and water affirms the immanent presence of light (‘sky’) in ‘darkness’, the rhizomes that grow between the *prima materia* and the splendour of the sun.

3.1.4 Twombly, *Ferragosta III* (1961)

The Empedocles scenario can be discovered in Cy Twombly’s series of *Ferragosta*, especially *Ferragosta III*, which he painted in 1961 in Rome (Fig. 39), ‘in that room down there when I had to stay here in August. I was completely crazy, out of my mind with heat in this town’ (Twombly and Serota 2007).

¹⁴⁴ Hölderlin expresses a very particular classicism. Greece is for him not the realm of equilibrium but of ‘Fire’, complementary to German ‘soberness’; both qualities, in his thought, need to balance each other. Apollo is thus not, like in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, the god of dream, prophecy and calm; on the contrary, he ‘strucks’ identity and confronts with disintegration.

The painting follows a direction of forces from the lower left to the upper right; the borders of the canvas function as a chosen limitation of what to show of a flux of primal matter, which particles, singularities to zoom into the mark making of the immediate. The colour scheme of browns/reds/pinks/oranges evokes fire, blood and faeces on a neutral, airy ground. *Ferragosta*, the 15th of August, is a bank holiday in Italy, originally celebrating the *pax Romana* established by Emperor Augustus in 18 BCE (*feriae Augusti*). It is also, in the framework of the Catholic Church, the day of the assumption or physical ascension of the 'Virgin Mary' into heaven. Seen from this angle, the painting reflects the intensity of heat, but also an almost humorous comment on the denial of the intense body and desire that Mary, as a persona framed by religion, has to suffer. The ascension in *Ferragosta* is one of reclaiming the body she was never granted, a celebration of the flight of immanent affects and transmutations that loses all restraint of the movement from depth to height with Twombly's gestures in which 'every ascent is reversed and suspended,' so Agamben¹⁴⁵, 'almost a threshold or caesura between an action and a non-action: Falling Beauty' (in: Twombly et al. 2006, 13-15). The expressive and already slanted verticality expands into a horizon, throwing the forces in all directions, and gaining simultaneously stability and silence as a freeze frame of these dynamics.

The 'classical', balanced and the destructive, humorous elements of this image complement each other without a need for polarization; and when Nicholas Serota asks Twombly in an interview: 'So do you see yourself as Apollo or Dionysus?', Twombly answers (as casually as usual): 'In different times, different things. Every now and then one gets excited by nature' (Twombly and Serota 2007). Could this excitement by nature be another way of talking about a closeness to the immediate that gradually crystallizes as an aspect of *aura* in this research, of nature as *emerging* disordered/ordered, never representational¹⁴⁶ nature (*natura naturans*), which gives *Ferragosta* and many other of Twombly's works such an enormous presence? As such, the introduction of Twombly's image helps to amplify the forces Empedocles is positioned in.

¹⁴⁵ This quote refers to Twombly's sculptures but applies, I feel, also to a painting like *Ferragosta III*.

¹⁴⁶ In her paper *[Un]common Sense and Undisciplined Gestures*, Sheena Calvert looks at Twombly from a Deleuzian point of view. Here, his 'work is not founded on invariable symbolic elements, nor is it attempting to reconstruct or diagram something which lies beyond itself, in the sense of to 'point', propose, or designate. Its grammar is non-indicative; its form non-denotational. In its inhabitation of matter as meaning[full]-in-itself, and its refusal to hold the figural to its promise of an uncomplicated and distinct relation to the ground, Twombly's work acknowledges the potential in Deleuze's claim that representational thinking based on the identical, the similar, the analogous, and oppositional (this and not that) is too limited to provide a space for real difference to emerge' (Calvert 2009).



Fig. 39 – Cy Twombly, *Ferragosta III*. 1961 . Oil, crayon and pencil on canvas. 165 x 200 cm. © Cy Twombly Foundation

Although both complexes of ‘fire’ seem juxtaposed vertically in the Empedocles scenario, suggesting heights and depths, true opposites are never established as they differentiate each other; and what seems above/below is in reality the extension of Empedocles’ a-subjective body, affects and thought forms that create a horizon, a plane of composition, of colours, silences, velocities, a-subjective ‘individuating affective states of an anonymous force’ (Deleuze 1988b, 128) as much as an ‘I’ that needs to grasp and consolidate the ‘impersonal instant which is divided into still-future and already-past’ (Deleuze 2004c, 172).

Thus, Empedocles embraces the ‘fourth person singular’ and embodies potentially the ‘free man, who grasps the event, and does not allow it to be actualized as such, without enacting, the actor, its counter-actualization’ (Deleuze 2004c, 173). This is because the problematic doubling of the self that the wound of the *caesura* with its unfolding of future evokes appears in Hölderlin’s unfinished *Empedocles*, affirmed while not disowned. The obvious consequence of such an affirmation must be-- based on the recognition of a degree of freedom for the new – to take *action* or responsibility for emergence, the affirmation of affirmation: taking up the thread Nietzsche’s Ariadne offers to find a way through the labyrinth of the straight line of time. Then, the *caesura* links into *Becoming* as ‘processual direction’, as Guattari says, ‘in the existential sense of auto-affirmation’ (Guattari and Ettinger 2002: 244) which, rejecting *ressentiment* about the wound, extends also to art practice and research as field of forces.

As an image for an artist in the field of art practice/research, Empedocles is obviously positioned in the freeze frame shot *in-between*: neither fully identifying with the *Body without Organs* as rebellion against the wounds of words (Artaud’s schizophrenia), nor becoming ashes i.e. disembodying the intensities of the *Body without Organs* for the creative derivation of pure concepts¹⁴⁷. Is not his hubris – that he had been serving ‘as fire and water blindly serve’ and could ‘never lov[e] humanity in fitting human ways’ – connected to being over-identified with the pre-individual, i.e. sharing the knowledge of ‘gods’ (as disembodied velocities of ‘survey’)?

¹⁴⁷ Julie Kuhlken elucidates this point in her paper *Why is Deleuze an Artist-Philosopher?*: ‘As long as the BwO remains attached to the personal experience of an actual body, it cannot be a philosophical concept. Unlike art, whose percepts and affects touch directly on materiality, philosophical concepts – such as the BwO becomes in Deleuze and Guattari’s hands – “survey” states of affairs. Unlike artists properly speaking, their aim is not to create *works* with the BwO, but rather to free it as a “pure Event” that philosophically speaking, can be re-effectuated infinitely [...]’ (in: Holland et al. 2009, 211).

That he does not choose *becoming-ashes* with all its devastating political associations¹⁴⁸, allows Empedocles to be with, to follow, to detach from and to reflect the tension and fertility between explosion and silence, between the pre-individual and chaotic tendencies of intensity and their gaining 'consistency without losing anything of the infinite' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 42), to follow an axis of *Becoming* of art as much as its conceptualization.

The speech of the gender-shifting Tiresias that marks the *caesura* in *Oedipus Rex* and reverberates wordlessly in this scenario of suspension questions the traditional symbolism of Empedocles' environment: the cave of the mountain/volcano as signification of the womb/the mother, and the fire in the sky as logos/the father. Tiresias as the guardian of *caesura* releases the potential of futurity/Empedocles from the triadic structure of Oedipal subjectivity and positions it/him in a much wider, alchemical field of forces.

In-between and embracing the impersonal instant, Empedocles at Etna is the suspended echo of differentiation, *aura* traversed by the cuts of the *caesura* and simultaneously *grounded*; and his rejection of a self-sacrifice intensifies his being 'driven by the heavens to the sea, spit from the sea to the earth, spit out again toward the sun and thrown back by the sun to the heavens' (Blanchot 1993, 26; italics original).

Then, the mountain on which Empedocles is placed can become earth again, building a horizon. It is maybe no accident that Empedocles' last brief monologue in the third unfinished version starts with: 'From this green earth and her beneficence / My eye should not depart deprived of joy' (Hölderlin 2008, 187).

Here, affirmation points at *materiality* i.e., also the media involved in art practice and their specifics, especially digital technology with its problematic economy: they lose their neutrality as mediators as they are interwoven in an affirmed earthy futurity. Being part of the affirmed wound 'that existed before me' fuses them indissolubly to a practice that needs responsibly to reflect the involvement of their problematic.

¹⁴⁸ The aspect of Empedocles' self-purge as metaphor for a historical radical shift or a nation's renewal ('rising like Phoenix from the ashes') aligns with national-socialist hermeneutics that have been applied to Hölderlin. His work, so Karl-Heiz Schoeps in *Literature and film in the Third Reich* 'reaches its peak "in the proclamation of the coming days of the Germans"', misrepresenting Hölderlin 'one-sidedly as a promulgator of patriotic willingness to sacrifice' (Schoeps 2004, 61). Perhaps my repeated emphasis on a (precarious) balance between the forces of the *BwO* and concept might seem too cautious; yet, it results from considering such possibilities.

3.1.5 'Intuition' Folding Practice Element and Writing

How is it possible, in this scenario, to 'follow' *aura*, or staying with the conceptual persona, Empedocles' survey of the axis of *Becoming*? If there is a way of following the processuality of *Becoming* for Deleuze (who builds upon Bergson), it is 'intuition', a *method* that assumes an affective yet indifferent input on the side of the artist (researcher), a readiness to explore intensities (as they are the key to actualisation) and to extend awareness to the excess of the a-subjection, which is inherent in affects and percepts; to find (create) ways to conceptualize what is foremost a memory of the presence of 'making'; to work with sensations that are based on matter, intensity and thought; to follow the immanence of metamorphoses.

Intuition links the 'wound' (in its personal and impersonal sense) and *aura*; and following the differentiation inherent in *aura* triggers the elements that can be used (by active assistance of change) towards healing.

Hölderlin's differentiation along the set of the 'aorgic/organic' in *Empedocles* suggests a concept of 'intuition', as we have seen, which addresses its connections to representation of decentred emerging intensities, of layers of 'events'. Henri Bergson describes it as 'the representation of a multiplicity of "reciprocal penetration", quite different from numerical value – the representation of a heterogeneous, qualitative, creative duration': philosophical intuition 'captures the vital before its dispersal into images, whereas art is concerned with the images', 'with the living' (Letter to Harald Höffding, 15.3.1915, in: Bergson et al. 2001, 365). But the desire, the weight of excess that marks Hölderlin's project, is better characterized by Deleuze, when he states in an early text on Bergson: 'Intuition is the *jouissance* of difference'. This suggests an intention of coinciding with differentiation, of transgressing the simple pleasure of determining difference. *Jouissance* faces here a frustration of never arriving at a closure due to the 'plurality of acts, a plurality of efforts and directions' ('Bergson's Conception of Difference', in: Mullarkey 1999, 43) that arise with the heterogeneities in duration. Intuition at its zero point, which to arrive at would be probably the redemption of *jouissance*, is circumscribed already by Hölderlin as the point where nature (or the 'aorgic') is at its strongest, a point – so Deleuze paraphrases in his *Kant Seminar* – 'from which the real which fills space and time will be produced, and it's this intuition=0, this empty intuition which constitutes the caesura' (Deleuze 1978)¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁹ Hölderlin's text is '*The meaning of tragedies ...*' (Hölderlin 2009, 316). Deleuze, as so often, does not give a reference in his seminar; however, in my view, he most certainly refers to this short fragment that suggests the 0 value as loss of representation and thus as 'empty intuition'.

Following *aura* in art thus coincides with the emerging differentials of a piece of art that unfolds and posits itself as a 'new' response to the intensities triggered by problematic structures. The 'hubris' of wanting to merge with 'empty intuition', to flow at fastest velocity with the immediate on the one hand, and gain at best 'full' knowledge (thus also having encountered the *Body without Organs*) on the other hand, is infused with the power of machinic, differentiating desire: Empedocles' survey (as much as the artist's as the researcher's), the method of intuition is thus also the conflict of Love in its Strife to erase (fulfil) itself.

It must have become clear by now that intuition in this sense is and has been the method that pervades and folds this research consistently, which had begun with questions about a specific, intuitive sensation of a 'distance as close as it may be' typical for the process of making: challenging, seducing to continue making a piece of art and understanding what happens. It is probably right to say that what this research set out to elucidate has been from the start its own method, which intricately links to *aura* and needed, offering as a method an only half-heartedly clearly framed structure, to unveil itself as *Becoming*. This interdependence might reflect a more general aspect of practice-based art research as it has to deal at some point with a clash between language and visuals, between art practice and writing: intuition is what reveals its inherent virtual and connecting strands.

3.2. Hölderlin's Empedocles at Etna (Visuals)

The visual works reflecting the scenario of Hölderlin's *Empedocles* as developed above build together the series *Empedocles. Assemblage* (2011/12):

1. eight paintings, *Empedocles. Assemblage* (2011/12) that spread from one large canvas as an open wall-based assemblage, i.e. there is no definite hanging order;
2. the video *Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling* (5' 15". 2011) on a monitor;
3. the video *Deerfeathers* (2012) on a monitor or as wall projection.

http://www.mariusvonbrasch.co.uk/aura_research/painting.html

http://www.mariusvonbrasch.co.uk/aura_research/videos.html

The assemblage is in no way illustrating but using the conceptual persona I proposed in the previous section as a departure point. All three parts reflect from different angles the problematic of tracing the 'immediate', here in the dialogue between painting and the digital. The objective has been to approximate, to get

closer to what – as the emergence of *Becoming*, as convergence of time and ‘making’ in the ‘already-passed’ and ‘not-yet-arriving’ – seems already/still distant; to respond to qualities of *aura*, its vibrational field of closeness and distance in space and time and its potential futurity of further *Becoming*.

For painting, the main question arising with such an objective has been one reflecting the *method* of intuition: how to anchor, i.e. contextualize the immediate happening of difference/tiation, the cuts and shifts in duration that *make* a picture?

3.2.1 *Empedocles Assemblage* (Painting)

The eight paintings *Empedocles. Assemblage* started from the plan to work only on one 210 x 210 cm canvas, in shape neither vertical nor horizontal. A square would hold, ‘survey’ or work with strands of the research so far, selective but in the sense of a consolidation¹⁵⁰. From the drawings of *diversely streaming* I had learnt that a move towards mark making could support a quality of immediacy, which, of course, continues in the ideas around *Empedocles* and the *caesura*.

Twombly’s *Ferragosta* painting (Fig. 39) is clearly a bridge between drawing practice and painting, and the image encouraged me greatly to pursue an own way of breaking apart the borders between both mediums. I considered ‘tracing’ the picture digitally, as I had done it with the *Resurrection* before, but that seemed irrelevant: Twombly traces the invisible forces himself, makes them the visual, and it would be derivative to repeat this.

Making *You’re right. Secrets have to circulate* (Fig. 36) and *The Visit* had shown me the relevance of allowing ‘emotional’ input without the risk of necessarily ‘illustrating stories of my life’. Also Twombly’s painting encouraged approximating further the wordless intensity of the ‘fourth person, singular’.

In this sense, *Empedocles Assemblage 1* (Fig. 40) is autofiction, further developing an autofictional diagram in Guibert’s *Autoportrait au Papillon* (Fig. 35).

How to depart from the fragmented, yet cohesive field of the suspended *Empedocles*, without trying to make a closed statement, a ‘whole’ picture; allow blocks of intensity that could stay undetermined, did not need to make ‘sense’; develop a rhizome of heterogeneous elements that would not look like a cliché-rhizome (‘Illustrating-Deleuze’); use affective intensity without producing expressionism?

I decided to paint on top of temporary projections onto the canvas, as done previously, of digitally manipulated source images that amplified the subject and had

¹⁵⁰ A stage of this painting (testing zones with digital painting) is reproduced in the Appendix on p. 209 (Fig. 55).

been used before, especially from *Splendor Solis*: the motif of a butterfly with its connections metamorphoses and resurrection (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996, 140); a mountain being dug in by two men hoping to find the illumination of dark matter (gold), the 'chiascuro' inside. It seemed important avoiding (like in the drawings that take Grünewald's *Resurrection* as a departure point) to construct Empedocles' 'face'¹⁵¹ or gaze or to imitate clichés about Empedocles¹⁵²; but, in contrast, to capture a scenario and an 'in between' the folds of heterogeneous elements, an 'abstract Figure, or rather, since it has no form itself, the abstract Machine of which each concrete assemblage is a multiplicity, a becoming, a segment, a vibration. And the abstract machine is the intersection of them all' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 278).

The intuitive aspect, for this image, felt of greater interest than, for example, for *Paraphrases*. It meant acting closer to the immediacy of duration in a conceptually prepared field: a canvas without high/low, left/right preference; contextualizing but manipulated, digitalized projections; undisturbed environment; prepared range of colours; waiting longer for a heightened intensity and need to paint. It meant also to believe in the singularities involved and forget about the planned, possibly already administered future of this image and to follow the unfolding of strands and marks of the subject targeted. I would use interruptions (mood swings, sudden disinterest etc.) to start anew, thus build heterogeneous zones.

In between, the image would be consolidated, certain elements emphasized and markers or signposts introduced, like allusions to specific regions of the Empedocles scenario, its being situated in a frame that stabilizes and fragments it. A main focus of the paintings became – without any literalness – the mountain with its openings and levels – detaching clouds and flows of different speeds (rocks, lava) – its being Earth, a 'body without organs', as Deleuze/Guattari write, 'permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad and transitory particles' (2004, 45).

¹⁵¹ It is this literal approach that clogs up a creative response to the virtual intensities pursued throughout this research. Deleuze/Guattari write: '[...] when the face is effaced, when the faciality traits disappear, we can be sure that we have entered another regime, other zones infinitely muter and more imperceptible where subterranean becomings-animal occur, becomings-molecular, nocturnal deterritorializations over-spilling the limits of the signifying system' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 275).

¹⁵² A good one we can find in Aston Leigh's *The Story of Philosophy*. After quoting Empedocles' famous lines about the deathless 'mingling' of the elements, he adds: 'Lines whose spirit invests the shadowy, purple-robed figure with the piercing eyes and the flowing hair with such a halo that instinctively we bow before it ... and pass away from the great heathen philosopher, wondering' (Leigh 1881, 39). The *aura* is postmarked here in typically naïve fashion onto a figure whose actuality vanishes, with its visualization in academic style, in the gap separating us from a wondrous 'past'.

The mountain (volcano) as a classic symbol of the 'sublime' is fragmented on these images into associative snippet views, or floating partial objects that constitute the *BwO*. Empedocles approaches the volcano and its explosive *Becoming* as a framed image of potentiality: a book, a stage set, a painting in his head in order to make a survey of the extreme difference in durations of body, thought, affect and earth. And this breaking-away from earth in the *caesura* – and likewise in this written discursive part of the present thesis – is paradoxically compensated by a simple appreciation (or, in Empedocles' and Hölderlin's sense, by *Love*) of matter and its qualitative colour as *Becoming*: 'From this green earth and her beneficence / My eye should not depart deprived of joy' (Hölderlin 2008, 187).

These indications allowed the practice element a much stronger emphasis on letting the field *become*, the virtual, without forcing, infuse it by, repeating here Villani's formula (2010, 77) for a 'Deleuzian' complex act, *appropriating depropriation*. The actual process provided a sensation of great freedom, of supporting sudden unexpected figurations and cross-connections that developed outside of any preconceived ideas from the materials, thoughts and affects (durations) involved.

It soon became clear that the painting required 'cuttings' or 'off-shoots'. The other seven pictures emerged like zoomed zones of certain regions from the large first painting. I felt that the heterogeneity of the large canvas should reflect on the subsequent smaller ones, i.e. be of diverse sizes and styles. The whole work would ideally spread on wall space, departing from the first, as a de-centered, ex-centric configuration.



Fig. 40 – Marius von Brasch, *Empedocles Assemblage*. 2011. 210 x 210 cm. Oil on canvas



Fig. 41 – Marius von Brasch, *Butterflyzone (Empedocles Assemblage)*. 2011. 102 x 71 cm. Oil on canvas



Fig. 42– Marius von Brasch, *Greyzone (Empedocles Assemblage)*. 2011. 36 x 46 cm. Oil on canvas



Fig. 43 – Marius von Brasch, *Firezone 1 (Empedocles Assemblage)*. 2011. 36 x 46 cm. Oil on canvas



Fig. 44 –Marius von Brasch, *Mountainzone (Empedocles Assemblage)* 2011. 92 x 92 cm. Oil on canvas



Fig. 45 – Marius von Brasch, *Firezone 2 (Empedocles Assemblage)*. 2011. 80 x 80 cm. Oil on canvas



Fig. 46 – Marius von Brasch, *Firezone 3 (Empedocles Assemblage)*. 2011. 46 x 36 cm. Oil on

canvas



Fig. 47 – Marius von Brasch, *Greyzone 2 (Empedocles Assemblage)*. 2011. 36 x 46 cm. Oil on canvas

3.2.2 *Pages III - Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling (Video)*

Following the practice of fragmentation and tracing other flows, I prepared a word collage from the English translation of Hölderlin's third and shortest version, which summarizes the course of action of the other versions in a few lines and focuses, in longer monologues, on Empedocles' decision to take the sacrificial leap or not. The new, associative flux of the word collage I recorded. The voice track would build the audio part of the film, which I realized then, would be an independent but third part of the *Pages* videos (see Chapter 2.1). The first two videos had been engaged with the presence of writing or mark making as a process of unfolding in time, and I had planned to continue this line with language unfolding via voice. Initially triggered by Benjamin's writings about the unfolding of (God's) language as world and the paradox that with digital film making I can set up the conditions for a simulacrum of writing as something that 'happens now', without a hand, and – as digitally produced and available online on my webpage – inherently disseminated, always reproduction. These films touch on the questions *Who writes*, *who speaks*, on the reproducibility of what seems to be the most personal: handwriting and voice, the body as medium or instrument of the immediate.

The decision for the visuals and the text for *Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling* required considering the involvement of multiple reproductions: the real Empedocles, Hölderlin's sources and interpretations, my fragmentation and collage; images and language around the 'volcano', an archetypical trigger of the 'sublime'; the aspect of translation from image (volcano) to language (about a volcano) to image (a detached, filtered image); the aspect of using an English Hölderlin translation instead of the original, of reading out an English translation of Hölderlin with a German accent.

I decided to layer some of these elements, and to use – as to alienate the explosive associations with a volcano, following the reality that I gain knowledge about it via books – some of the somewhat sober and static drawings from George Rodwell's book *Etna. A history of the mountain and its eruptions* (Rodwell 1878) . The video starts and ends with a still of the book's classic academic library binding. One of the drawings became a top layer in an After Effects composition where it got torn and pixellated, revealing underneath closely zoomed and altered (in terms of colours) zones of Grünewald's *Resurrection*: an illumination of darkness and simultaneously a darkness illumined from.



Fig. 48 – Still from Marius von Brasch, *Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling*. Video. 5' 15". 2011

A connection arises between the alchemical *lumen naturae* located in the supposed darkness of matter and the digital image on screen: the darkness of the screen and its haptic materiality are the place where the unfolding of alchemical transmutation can become a moving image, or more precisely, a moving image of its framing. Empedocles' teachings of the continuously changing relationships between the elements (fire/water/air/earth) clearly underlie the basics of alchemical processes; however, applied to the digital image, they link also to Deleuze's take on the identity of screen and brain. John Mullarkey writes: 'There is an "eye" already "in things, in luminous images in themselves" [quoting here Deleuze (2011, 62)], for it is not consciousness that illumines (as phenomenology believes), but the images, or light, that already are a consciousness "immanent to matter"' ('Gilles Deleuze' in: Colman 2009, 180).

Towards the middle of the video, images of snow and fire conjoin, central to Empedocles' teachings as much as to alchemy, which provided the initial keys for this research. Then the manipulation of the drawing from Roswell's book turns retrograde; the film ends with the image of the book cover. I felt that this quite regular structure of A – B – C(A') responds to the fact that Empedocles, the subject, lives foremost between two book covers. The spoken text, simultaneously presented haptic close-ups of Hölderlin's language in translation, does not follow the A – B – C(A') pattern because it reflects an invisible book of language and memory that I open each time anew when I intend to refine the speechless affects, when I 'enter' language/thought and start to segment duration. Although a communicating voice,

communication in the sense of 'meaning' is perhaps reduced to the question 'Who speaks?', an orientation towards singularities.

One of the departure points of this video has been to approach the image of the volcano as metaphor of the 'sublime', breaking its represented 'face', which gives 'expression to notions of stability, changelessness and [...] purity' (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996, 680) down to heterogeneous strands of 'nonsignifying signs'¹⁵³; following thus Kant's description of the encounter with the sublime as 'the end of our judgment, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to do violence, as it were, to the imagination, and yet [...] judged all the more sublime on that account' (2007a, 76). At the same time, in a framework of *Becoming* (including *aura* as an indicator), the 'sublime' as a notion loses much of its power because *Becoming* as such challenges the conditions of rational understanding (and especially, following Deleuze, judgments) in minor movements, and it does not need a volcano or even a mountain to do so (see also Fig. 44).

Empedocles' 'sublime' volcano as used here emerges from texts, translations, images, suggesting questions like: how could the *Becoming* of Hölderlin's Empedocles be transposed? And if Hölderlin's project – to embody the 'immediate' as tragedy in a sequence of language – fails, is not then the text already porous, fragmented and nevertheless *auratic* as it unfolds along the event of the *caesura*?

In this film, voice *becomes* as a straight line in time that could provide narration but frustrates this expectation. The straight time line is permanently broken in terms of semantics but produces perhaps a new poetic field. The visuals reflect this element as disintegration in part A, or reintegration in C, without revealing (in A) or recovering (in C) anything definite apart from a depth that is not necessarily explosive. Tracing *aura* along the axis of *Becoming* (seen from the scenario of the unfinished *Empedocles*) does exactly *not* imply the literal illustration of a 'sublime' image or metaphor but rather to use the inherent question of every instant, the announcement of the *caesura* that breaks the continuity of an image of the sublime (the volcano, the mountain), lets it vanish, become obsolete as temporalized, as part of the duration of the video itself.

¹⁵³ Deleuze/Guattari juxtapose artistic practice based on archetypes with one of 'becoming-animal' (with regard to Kafka's various transformations or becomings). But this extends to the practice element of this research: '[...] to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a thresh-old, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of de-territorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 13).



Fig. 49 - Still from Marius von Brasch, *Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling*. Video. 5' 15". 2011

The materiality of the digital allows exposing the alchemy a digital image can undergo in a course of time, by 'tearing' it, revealing its state of pixellation; the supposed integrity of the drawing in Rodwell's book, from which already, with cartographic precision, any expressivity inherent to the metaphor of the 'volcano' and its surrounding (it depicts a basalt island near the volcano) had been erased, is destroyed. This process extends also to exposing the techniques of layering that produce depth with the images used.

A problem of this video, of course, might be that Hölderlin's text is not well known and *Empedocles: Falling/Not Falling* does not even make the attempt to follow the sparse action. On the contrary, language and image fall apart or have never really joined.

Danièle Huillet's and Jean-Marie Straub's adaptations of Hölderlin's *Empedocles* show a kind of structural parallel. Their films *Der Tod des Empedocles* (using Hölderlin's first version) and *Schwarze Sünde (Black Sin)* from 1989¹⁵⁴, which follows the third version, had left a strong impression on me when they were released 1987 and 1989. Both films emphasize the static set-up and the blurring effect of the 'rhythm of iambic pentameter' into which Hölderlin 'gradually [slips]' (Krell in: Hölderlin 2008, 37); the viewer is exposed to the paradox that the embodied text (actors in mannered robes visualizing Greece as a phantom, the somewhat

¹⁵⁴ The title *Black Sin* refers to the assessment of Empedocles' decision delivered from the limited view of a priest: 'Yet you should not / Abandon me and go down thoughtlessly, not as you are; / I have a word that you must ponder, my besotted friend! / For one alone in our time is it fitting; one being / Alone ennobles your black sin. / That one is greater than I am! ... ' (Hölderlin 2008, 184)

unconvincing robes moved only by the breeze of an authentic, Sicilian but somewhat ‘Olympian’ setting) had been always disembodied, that image and text build a ‘disjunction’, as Deleuze puts it in connection to Straub/ Huillet, ‘a dissociation of the visual and the sound [which] puts them all the more in a non-totalizable relation’ (Deleuze 2008a, 246)¹⁵⁵ but simultaneously empties the image frame for the text: ‘The visual image, in Straub, is the rock’ (Deleuze 2008a, 235) on which the text unfolds, as Guattari puts it, as a ‘speaking-singing’ (Dosse 2010, 432).



Fig. 50 –Danièle Huillet in Huillet’s and Jean-Marie Straub’s *Schwarze Sünde* (*Black Sin*), 1987

These films, for some viewers unbearably artificial, for others addictive because of the exposure of disjunctions that create cross-firing layers of associations around fissures, reflect a quality of Hölderlin’s language that works – despite its

¹⁵⁵ Is, questions Dominique Païni in her article *Straub, Hölderlin, Cézanne* (2006), this ‘abolish[ing] of feelings of intervals’ suggesting what Christian Metz calls ‘dry editing’?: ‘Some filmmakers intentionally suppress punctuation precisely when you expect it the most, and connect by a clear cut two sequences of an extremely different subject, tone, etc. It is no longer a question of a general “rhythm” but of a particular effect of brutal rupture. The clear cut, here, merits to be called dry montage (or “dry montage in operation”)’ (quoted in Païni 2006).

conception as a 'play' – directly against visualization. As shown, Hölderlin's continuous revisions of the play approximate it more and more to his ideal of tragedy as renunciation of accidentals, which would pervert a poetic solution embodying the problematic of the 'intellectual intuition', the being-One with the immediate. But this unity has no *direct* visual, and language, in its attempt to reconstruct it, relies on its layered reconstruction in time.

The 'proud renunciation of all accidentals present[ing] the ideal of a living whole as briefly and at the same time as completely and richly as possible ...' (Letter to C.L. Neuffer, 3.7.1799 in: Hölderlin 2009, 146) demands the transgression of the shifting impressions of subjectivity. For *The Death of Empedocles*, as we have seen, 'this ascesis leads to doubt', so Stanley Corngold in his essay *Disowning Contingencies in Hölderlin's 'Empedocles*, 'about the communicative possibilities of the *Bild* ("image", "metaphor"), an aporia that frustrates dramatic representation' (Corngold 1999, 215). The *caesura* as the marker of an impossibility to coincide with the immediate, as the rupture of a linear promise of beginning, action and end exposes the limitations of theatre. Thus it has been the idea to break this alleged continuity in the spoken part of the video, where communication is left in favour of poetic language.

In an exhibition, the three *Pages* videos ideally need to be shown as an installation, three TV monitors, juxtaposing three different, looped temporalities, which, as one installation embody a continuous process of differentiating repetition; a digital book of layers and words, handwriting, mark making and (stuttering) voice; an audio/visually unfolding, reading itself in a frame like all other Becomings, visible/audible in between becoming a face and the 'betrayal' of a line of flight that dissolves it.

3.2.3 *Deer Feathers* (Video)

The video *Deerfeathers* is an attempt to visualize, with the alienating possibilities of the digital materiality, the four main elements that Empedocles sees ceaselessly coagulating into 'world', through the dynamics of Love and Strife. It followed the very simple idea of using pixellation, tempi and rhythms in time to characterize fire, water, air and earth.

The title alludes to shamanic traditions of 'voyaging' through different durations of consciousness, of 'becoming-animal' (see footnote 153), that had been the work of shamans in order to reveal cooperative ways of working with earth. Bernard Stiegler, the French philosopher, speaks of 'transindividuation', meaning by

this the cross-firing influences of tradition (memory), technology, otherness onto individual individuation, and the acknowledgment that “‘technics’ are also processes of individuations’ (Stiegler and Rogoff 2010). Here, the role of the digital reveals its ambiguity: as a technological memory storage of humanity it has become paramount for the future on the one hand, on the other hand it houses ‘psychotechnologies at the service of behavioural control’ (‘Manifesto 2010’ in: *ArsIndustrialis* 2010): ‘This process constitutes the threads [*trames*] from which are woven the motifs of psychic and collective individuation, but such that these threads are overdetermined by the techniques and technologies of threading [*trames*]’ (Stiegler 2009).

Perhaps, the voyage of the shaman is not so far off from a mythologized, dramatized version of the much later introduced application of the method of intuition applied to this research. *Deer Feathers* attempts to make a (micro-)case for *care* and attention for the earth elements by showing how they simultaneously can be ‘portrayed’ with digital technology *and* exist merely as administered forms (digitalized, named files). The film transports the images of nature not as addenda to aesthetized selling-strategies but, emphasized by the absence of sound, in their state of being appropriated by technology and emerging with it.

This video needs in its current version (soundless) to be shown as part of an installation of the three drawings *diversely streaming* (Fig. 32, 33). Structurally, the pieces share the heterogeneity of elements, shards of time that a viewer either scans like a multi-directional script (drawings) or film (on the screen). Although the film ‘serves’ representations, these are taken out of context and build, chained to each other temporally, ‘crystals’ of time like the drawings as static tableaux. Representation, i.e., photographic elements that are ‘stretched’ in time in *Deer Feathers*, becomes thus a vector of its dissolution; a ‘shamanic’ flight that remains throughout the material response to fold as an artist with the echo of an *auratic* sensation while working on the pieces. As a transformation of the elements or Empedocleian ‘rhizomata’ along the axis between the *BwO* and actual form as much as on the axis between material colours and After Effects manipulations, the installation is an attempt to involve a viewer in the immediacy and heterogeneity of *Becoming*.

Conclusion

Aura and Experience

The practice element of this thesis has been engaging throughout the course of the research with experimentation around different ways of mapping intensities or lines of flight that lead away from fixed images of what *aura* could mean. This concerns on the one hand the sources, which directly visualize *aura*, yet hold a potential of deterritorialization of what they represent. On the other hand it concerns the continuous delay attached to the attempt to ‘catch’ the immediacy of *Becoming*, which relates through, so the thesis here argues, an *auratic* echo of virtual intensity (on the vector between emotion and affect) to ‘me’, a practitioner involved in ‘a field of experience taken as a real world no longer in relation to a self but to a simple “there is”’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 17). The key for research in this field - an involvement of one perspective, a particular practice (departing from intuitive mark making as introduced in chapter 1.2) with Deleuzian ontology - has been ‘*experience as experiment*’, a mutuality that Deleuze always assumes and that is a direct consequence of the transformations that the concept of the ‘subject’ undergoes when traversed by ‘difference’. Subjectivation or individuation as ‘production of a way of existing, [...] a mode of intensity, not a personal subject’ (Deleuze 1995, 98/9) can only become as ongoing *experience*, as experimental, always temporary dramatizations of *how* to respond in a transcendental field to the questions and problems that involve it with virtual forces and the pre-subjectivity of ‘A LIFE’. Practice then ‘becomes a veritable *theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations. A theatre where nothing is fixed, a labyrinth without a thread [...]. The work of art leaves the domain of representation in order to become “experience”, transcendental empiricism or science of the sensible’ (Deleuze 2004b, 68).

All of the outcomes of this research involve a crossing and layering of juxtaposed ‘old’ and ‘new’ media (drawing/painting and digital) as well as ways in which artists work (Renaissance and contemporary). They are results of an extension of experience and experiment into heterogeneous, not necessarily ‘bridged’ zones: the contrast between the explicitly secretive nature of alchemical discourse and the potential dissemination of any privacy provided with digital technologies mirrors the distances that *Becoming* traverses *and* the difficulties of pinning down the ontological status of art outcomes. ‘Uniqueness’ as (traditionally) *auratic* quality of a piece of art has faded in this research (with its weight on *aura* as a ‘chiaroscuro-

splendour' of immanent differentiation) in favour of its status as simulacrum or assemblage because it

'includes a difference within itself, such as (at least) two divergent series on which it plays, all resemblance abolished so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy. It is in this direction that we must look for the conditions, not of possible experience, but of real experience (selection, repetition, etc.). If it is true that representation has identity as its element and similarity as its unit of measure, then pure presence such as it appears in the simulacrum has the "disparate" as its unit of measure – in other words, always a difference of difference as its immediate element' (Deleuze 2004b, 82/3).

And yet, a simulacrum/assemblage in form of one painting/drawing could, without a doubt, be described as 'unique', existing only once (in contrast to a digital film); it is the fold of reflection (consciousness) that declares it, as its transcendent, to be so as an 'object'. This means that valuating an outcome of a process leading away from the subject-object division pulls it back into exactly this (temporary) transcendent division. Deleuze is very aware of this aspect, which in this research appears as the problematic of flux and fragment. However, the power of Deleuze's ontology lies in the constant breaking-up of a secured relationship between subject and object, between 'me' and the 'other'. Otherness is here foremost the constitution of self at the instant of 'future', face to face with a double and potential selections concerning *how* to select on the lines, disjunctions and fragmentations between 'A LIFE' and subjectivation. 'A LIFE' is thus always already the field of subjectivation and simultaneously, as Nathan Widder writes, 'consciousness's immanent Outside' (Widder 2012, 151). The 'Other' remains in Deleuze's ontology always immanent, and that reflects on *aura*, changes its pointing at a transcendent otherness to immanent and temporal *Becoming*, without losing in this research an inherent problematic concerning immediacy (which appears also for *aura* in a framework of transcendence but in form of a more static distance, *staged* within time). This is the reason why this thesis can speak only about 'following' *aura*, being 'guided' by *aura* as 'echo' etc., all indicating a striving for a coincidence of practice with the immediacy of differentiation.

Engaging with *aura* and profaning its numinous qualities into immanence allows experimentation as experiences 'with the opportunities [a stratum, here images, pictures of *aura*] offers, [...] find[ing] potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experienc[ing] them, [...]try[ing] out continuums of intensities segment by segment, hav[ing] a small plot of new land at all times' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 178); in brief, mapping *aura* provided conditions of productive experiences and production of the new with new technologies and within the transcendental field of immanence. A requirement is the willingness to feel the 'wounds' and affects as given in experience that stretch from

collective to personal intensity and, by being aware of those strands, to abstract from them. As being involved in the production of the *new*, a profaned *aura* would be a potential mediator of experiences beyond their loss in clichés.

Deleuze's critique of communication concerns a paramount strategy of how to put experience against the ways contemporary societies exert and establish control: through ceaseless, instant communication via computer and internet with the subsequent quest for "universals of communication" [that] ought to make us shudder' (Deleuze 1995, 175). Communication, thus, appears as corruption and sterilized by its functional aspect of representation, unable to constitute Ideas from 'the passage of life within language' (Deleuze 1998, 5), which could jolt its diagrammatic organisation. The prompt for the *Body without Organ* that leaps in-between the words and throws fragmentation into the crystallizations of a piece of visual art is a strategy to develop pragmatics for 'the new, remarkable, and interesting that replace the appearance of truth and are more demanding than it is. What is in the process of coming about is no more what ends than what begins' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 111): this is what 'experimentation' or experience circumscribes. For Deleuze thus, communication in its contemporary set-up has to be distinguished from creativity; '[t]he key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control' (Deleuze 1995, 175). These 'circuit breakers of noncommunication' can be the incisions of the *caesura* or 'wound' with its subjective/a-subjective strands that merge in a (strong) piece of art, when '[the] writer [and I extend this to visual arts] returns from what he has seen and heard with bloodshot eyes and pierced eardrums' (Deleuze 1998, 3)¹⁵⁶.

In fact, Deleuze's concern with developing strategies for complex acts i.e., experiences that reach into the unlivd potential of virtual problems and can resist the overwhelming presence of representation ('branding') in capitalist information and control societies, has parallels in Walter Benjamin's thinking.

This thesis began with a discussion of Benjamin's critique of *aura*, a difficult endeavour due to the theological and profane strands that paradoxically interlace the melancholy and simultaneous hope that arises with its 'decay' or erasure. The working thesis throughout this research has been that a desire for the *experience* (or the reflection of an *experience made*) of something numinous might be a reality to acknowledge, which concerns the pragmatics of individuation and subjectivation 'along the vanishing transversal line at the very limit of human experience' (Lovat and Semetsky 2009, 247). Such a desire for the numinous has not been resolved, as

¹⁵⁶ In terms of writing for a practice-based art research that acknowledges the pained input of what has been seen/heard, this model of 'noncommunication' suggests another precarious balance, to account for methods, decisions and ideas with a methodological 'rigour' fissured by the durations that enfold the emergence of what gains later validity as 'outcomes'.

envisaged by Benjamin, with the liberating aspects of mass media technologies. The projection of collective conflicts in a mode of play, the interpenetration of collective body and image seem foremost not to have become ‘bodily collective innervation, [nor its] revolutionary discharge’ (Benjamin 1999, 217/8). To a greater degree, the closeness in front of a distance framed by computer or TV screens confirms Benjamin’s prescient analysis of an ongoing loss of experience on a grand scale. What Benjamin observed when he wrote about world exhibitions, can be transposed to the isolated behavior in front of these screens: “Look at everything; touch nothing” (G16,6 in: Benjamin 2002a, 201) or to the immobile pilgrimages on settees witnessing the ‘enthronement of the commodity, with its lustre of distraction’ (Benjamin 2002a, 7).

Experience, which, according to Benjamin¹⁵⁷, in its oldest form relates to the storyteller (and what is a visual other than something a viewer will weave a kind of ‘story’ around), does not aim at information as such but ‘embeds the event in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It bears thus the trace of the storyteller, much the way an earthen vessel bears the trace of the potter’s hand’ (Benjamin 2003, 316). ‘Where there is experience’, Benjamin continues, ‘in the strict sense of the word [*erfahren* suggests a path explored, behind the one who has walked it], certain contents of the individual past combine in the memory with material from the collective past’ (Benjamin 2003, 316). Benjamin refers here to Bergson’s ‘durée’ and the sudden flashes of memory, which lift past events into the present as present, whereas intended memorising declares what rises into present to be past. Involuntary memory (Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*) bypasses a habit contributing to the ‘self-estrangement of human beings, whose past is inventoried as dead effects’ (Benjamin 2003, 183). Experience becomes experience where an individual can ‘forms an image of himself, whether he can take hold of his experience’ (Benjamin 2003, 315) strategies of capitalism deny experience exactly there where such ‘inner concerns’ become ‘private’ because the ‘likelihood decreases that one’s external concerns will be assimilated to one’s experience’ (Benjamin 2003, 315); what could link between ‘inner’ and collective memories, is obstructed by a focus on mere information, on ‘newness, brevity, clarity’ (Benjamin 2003, 316) that needs to be “understandable in itself”: ‘Every morning brings us news from across the globe, yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because nowadays no event comes to us without already being shot though with explanations’ (Benjamin 2002b, 147). Communication, shrivelled and polished into information ‘in fully developed capitalism’ (Benjamin 2002b, 147), has,

¹⁵⁷ With regard to the following paragraph, I am especially indebted to Thomas Weber’s concise article (with its collection of references) on Benjamin’s ‘Erfahrung’ [*Experience*] (in: Opitz and Wizisla 2000).

according already to Benjamin, created social conditions, which allow 'less and less hope that [experience] will come into being in a natural way' (Benjamin 2003, 315).

Aware of the present scope of this scenario, this research considers that a *profaned aura*, a mindfulness of the reality of creative processes and differentiations, of the 'surplus' coming with virtual intensities can instigate modes of experience which can sharpen an awareness of the demands to produce 'transparently' i.e., in ways which let viewers addressed as consumers bypass the effort of 'taking hold' of experience. Such a profaned aura could exactly counteract the entertainment industry's strategy of 'elevating the person to a level of the commodity, He surrenders to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation for himself and others' (Benjamin 2002a, 7).

Andy Warhol who became famous by aestheticizing the declining myth of the original, played consciously with this dilemma, its commercial aspects transposing *aura* from his work onto him. In his *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* he tells us: 'Some company recently was interested in buying my "aura." They didn't want my product. They kept saying, "We want your aura." [...] When you just see somebody on the street, they can really have an aura. But then when they open their mouth, there goes the aura. "Aura" must be until you open your mouth.' (Warhol 2007, 77) What he describes here with great self-irony (as it is also him who might start speaking when approached for his charisma), is how it feels to sit on the other end of passively substituting one's own differentiation for another's power. *Aura* in this sense seduces to succumb to a degree of a-subjectivity (no voice, no speech) that has (been) split from the efforts of becoming-singular and has found its languid territory in becoming-commodity.

The angle of the art practice presented here follows by purging *aura*, visualizing and following its potential for contemporary art of course another course (or selection) and suggests to work with an emotional aspect that for artists who focus on ridding their practice from such contingencies might be out of question. However, exactly this at times 'being uncomfortable' with affect and subjectivation, which links on the one hand to Bergson's notion of duration and on the other hand to an a-subjective intensity, *can be*, according to Deleuze and the results of this research, a vital strategy to counteract a consume-oriented hunger for supposed 'experiences' of 'subjectivity' when they have transformed into advertising strategies of contemporary culture; when they left 'interiorities' to become translucent commodities, a procession of quickly faltering and ever shifting variations of 'face', 'gaze' and 'body': this would be *jouissance*, in a framework of lack, at work. In such an ontological framework, *aura* must remain trapped in an anachronistic frame and operate as diagram of power and shadow of its religious antecedent, which has lost its religious function in contemporary society but haunts it with its oppressive core

of static separation and lack; it must become a ridiculed gloriole of commodity fetishism.

It is true what Stephen Zepke prompts in his recent paper *The Sublime Conditions of Contemporary Art*: “And” is not enough, what we need are explosions’ (2011, 81). He posits against an indifference of abundance, which could be mistaken for new Deleuzian practice, Deleuze’s association of the Kantian sublime with chaos that opens up and becomes available when the cohesion of the faculties of our perception dissolves with the experience of the sublime. The disentanglement of imagination from the transcendental conditions of possibilities leaves the ‘aesthetic comprehension [...] compromised, drowned in a chaos’. Painting, in this regard, is able to pick up rhythms, to reflect ‘[m]y whole structure of perception [...] in the process of exploding’ (Deleuze, quoted in: Zepke 2011, 78/79).

But isn’t here also a danger – by evoking the catchy image of ‘explosions’, which in reality concern the break-up and subversions of a comprehended self - of building images i.e., clichés of when intensities in art practice ‘are understood in the *right* way and not’: encouraging outcomes that *copy* intensities (while not experienced), as derivative but ‘Deleuzian’ explosions? One of the questions the practice element of this research works with has been, how the pre-individual can be reached, and this encompasses the question how intensities are sensed, how the field between pre-individual constellations and the conceptual re/flection on outcomes are ‘coloured’, intensified by them.

Despite his preference for Francis Bacon’s mutilating actualizations, Deleuze’s method of dramatization of intensities leaves it open, *how* to experiment *and* experience the ‘new’; *and* thus, there is also another valuable layer of the ‘new’: ‘[u]nderneath the large noisy events lie the small events of silence, just as underneath the natural light there are the little glimmers of the Idea’ (Deleuze 2004b, 202). This quote builds a folding of differentiating silences and explosions, which, rather than feeding a *ressentiment* against subtlety (untypical for Deleuze) invites also the ecstasy of silence into the explosion (and vice versa) into practice¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁸ This angle on the ‘new’ presents itself also in Chinese classic thought with its, as Deleuze/Guattari admit, ‘[...] disturbing affinities appear[ing] on what seems to be common plane of immanence’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 91). French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien sums it up as ‘silent transformations’ challenging the affirmation of ‘communication’ or ‘organisation’. The ‘silent transformations’ relate to ‘emptiness’ and emerge where “what one sees but does not perceive” or with “what one listens to but does not hear”: that state where the perceptible breaks up and loses its specificity, disqualifies itself, “loses its taste”, without for all that lapsing into the invisible of metaphysics’ (Jullien 2011, 33). Because time in Chinese language is not segmented in past/present/future but in a polarity of “going away: past” and “present: coming here” (Jullien 2011, 104), the ‘event’ is always prepared and thus *not* an irruption as it is ‘simply produced from a disturbance, which starts very subtly until as it develops it suddenly one day crosses a threshold and becomes apparent. The brutality of the ‘event’ then amazes us, because we have not known how to distinguish the silent transformation which has

It might depend on a pluralist network of differing art practices to develop pragmatics which support unexpected interventions of differentiations, ‘a people to come’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 218) in the sense of traversing differentiation ‘not [as] the fulfilment of an idea but the production or becoming of future ideas’ (Colebrook 2002, 89). The practice presented here cannot be more or less than an attempt to experiment with and experience *one unfolding perspective* (practice as ‘base’) engaging with *aura* as an echo of its *Becoming* (as visual outcomes and writing): on an axis traversing old media of ‘uniqueness’ and forgotten techniques of transformation (alchemy), and the digital as a medium of ambivalent fluidity, deceptive abundance and new visual materiality.

The perspective of the practice element of this research is mediated by an understanding of Deleuze’s framework as depending on action ‘which is complex in so far’, as Villani writes,

‘as it harbours what is effectively the counterpoint of the situation, marries itself to the fluctuation of things themselves, and respecting the ‘way of things’ by furnishing their image in negative, permits not only the unscathed exit from a potentially deadly impasse, but even gives us the perfect example of a true ‘act of knowledge’ (Villani 2007, 59).

Following up intuitive awareness of *aura* meant throughout this project following the unpredictable differentiations of *Becoming* and responding to ‘tendencies’ (‘counterpoints’), to the eternal return of opportunities of selecting conditions, ‘not of possible experience, but of real experience’ (Deleuze 2004b, 83) and to ‘face [one’s] own responsibility’ (Agamben 1999b, 114) of actualization of potentiality and of intensities of a ‘subtle’ body (*BwO*). The research found intuitive awareness of *aura* leading to outcomes as simulacra (assemblages), which reunite ‘the theory of forms of experience and that of the work of art as experimentation’ (Deleuze 2004b, 356)¹⁵⁹.

A profanation of *aura* in this sense delivers an access to both: *experience* that can touch the new and its reflection in the folds of subjectivation (central for both Benjamin and Deleuze). It can support a practice that understands itself as acting micropolitically, touching on the alchemy of the ‘chiaroscuro’ traversing the pre-

imperceptibly led to it’ (Jullien 2011, 129). This would indicate that ‘explosion’ and ‘silence’ mutually interrelate, ideally as a punctuated, dynamic equilibrium.

¹⁵⁹ Joshua Ramey describes this dependence of intuitive art practice on the complex act reaching to the pre-individual as follows: ‘Belief in the world searches for that subtle or alchemical body that would be a collective yet to realized, yet already uncannily present in our times. What matters will be the immanent adequacy of our diagrams, and the directions those diagrams map – the configurations they produce, the vitality and variations they enable, the uncanny joy and transgression of limitations they involve’ (Ramey 2012, 218).

individual and subjectivation, possibly with a chance of 'crossing the line of force, going beyond power' (Deleuze 1995, 98). Here, it means especially going beyond the dispositifs of *aura* that foreclose its immanent potential and leave, even turned negatively, the 'sacred' as the 'excluded' untouched, which still underlies, as Agamben shows, the determination of rules of 'community'. The research sets out, in practice and its refolding in writing, to experiment at the diagrammatic line, the 'cutting edges of deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 63) that *aura's* dispositif holds as its deframing power. The *aura* relates to the 'fold that echoes itself, arching from the two sides to a different order. It expresses [...] the transformation of the cosmos into a "mundus"' (Deleuze 2006b, 33).

The dynamics of intuition as practice and method, here affecting/affected by *aura* in immanence, merge with the potentiality of the 'new' at the fold of reflexive practice: as silent-explosive, explosive-silent differentiations, as the rhythms of systoles and diastoles emerging with painting in the expanded field of technologies, when it is 'not a matter of reproducing forms, but of capturing forces' (Deleuze 2005, 40).

Appendix

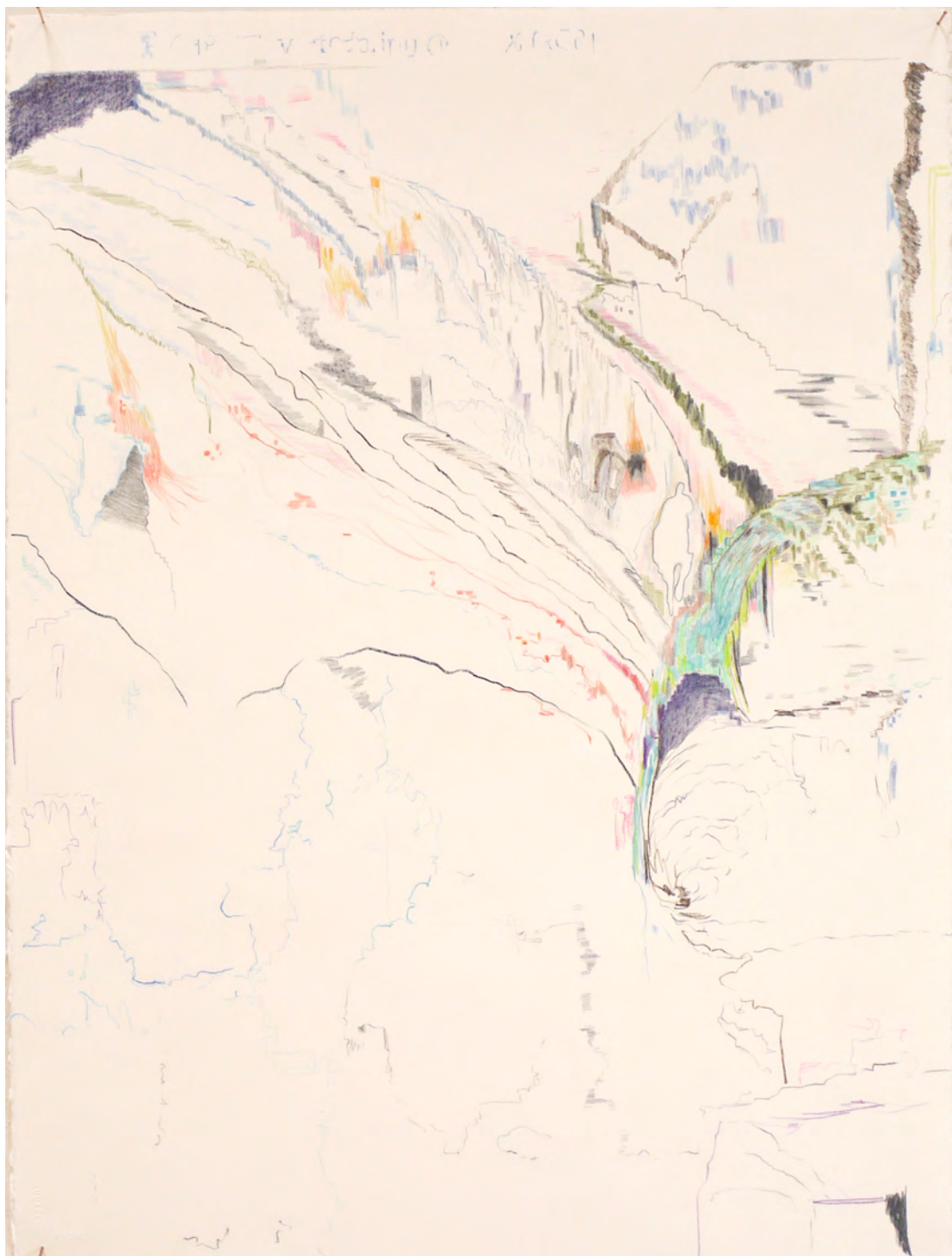


Fig. 51- Marius von Brasch, *Study after Grunewald*, coloured pencils on paper 56 x 75 cm, 2010



Fig. 52– Marius von Brasch, *Study after Grunewald*, coloured pencils on paper 56 x 75 cm, 2010



Fig. 53- Marius von Brasch, *Study after Splendor Solis*, coloured pencils on paper 56 x 75 cm, 2010



Fig. 54- Marius von Brasch, *Paraphrase O..* Oil on linen. 36 x 48 cm, 2010



Fig. 55- Marius von Brasch, Study for *Empedocles Assemblage 1*. Digital file. 2011

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