

Bodies within Affect

On Practicing Contaminating Matters through Bioart

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Abstract

Our view of the body as passive biological matter has been tested in the face of gene editing, stem cell research and tissue engineering. Now biotechnological research tells us that bodies may be dead and alive; they may be human and non-human; multiple and yet one; or they may host a person's entire biological information and yet still regarded as an object of commodification. The way we think about bodies, and the way we practice them, marks a particular tension in the way biotechnology treats our bodies. This book explores the conditions of thinking and practicing bodies within affect. The main presupposition of this research is that bodies are constituted by mutating and growing transformations that we are confronted with as a result of, in particular, body manipulations by the life sciences.

The contemporary biotechnological practices that manipulate the body have exposed the challenge of accepting and implementing the reciprocal relationship between the thought and practice of living bodies. In order to grasp the continuity of thought and practice of bodies, I focus on the concept of affect at work in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, in particular, in his reading of Baruch Spinoza and Jakob von Uexküll. The notion of affect is used to understand the relational, contaminating materialities of our bodies, and the term "affect" confronts us with the actual implications of its practicing. I argue that affect, as a transformative relationality, is induced by bioartists and biodesigners who work with living bodies as an artistic medium. Therefore, looking closely at how artists use the relational capacities of bodies in their work, I search for the conditions for practicing bodies within affect. This book argues that practicing affect demands a different thinking logic that addresses material implications for the way we not only understand the body today, but also, and specifically, how we practice corporeal and incorporeal bodies within a wide socio-political and ethical sphere.

In order to change our way of thinking about bodies, the notion of *contamination* is employed as a way of studying and analysing relations between multiple fields and points of view. Contamination, rather than being in opposition to the idea of purity, is used as an affirmation of relations of transformation. The book is structured according to two main trajectories: 1) the study of bioart's practice of "conditioning contaminations," which allows us to map ways of practicing bodies within affect; and 2) an incarnation of this mapping within New Materialism and its selected topics, which are crucial in the search for the conditions for practicing bodies within affect; that is to say, a need for a human and non-human egalitarian reciprocity; an openness to the non-linguistic forms of meaning generation; the notion of agency and subjectivity outside the human dominion; the responsibility resulting from a "material contamination" that shapes thought and practice. Both trajectories of this book combine philosophical analysis, art encounters and reflection on life science practices. At the same time, they are disrupted and complemented by contaminants.

Contaminants disrupt each chapter and constitute a driving force in terms of what is important in our encounter with the transformative relations of bodies. Through disruption, contaminants are the stories of risky transformations that traverse not only bodies, but also disciplines and perspectives about bodies. Yet, each story grows unsettlingly close, becoming urgent and important for the fabulation of our mutual multibodies, leaving the reader not only with a contaminating way of thinking, but also with an understanding of the necessity of this relational thinking for the practice of bodies within affect.