



Mikko Snellman

FRONTIERS OF ECOLOGY OF SUBJECTIVITY

There are three fields in my visual essay: research space/ art making space /pedagogical space.

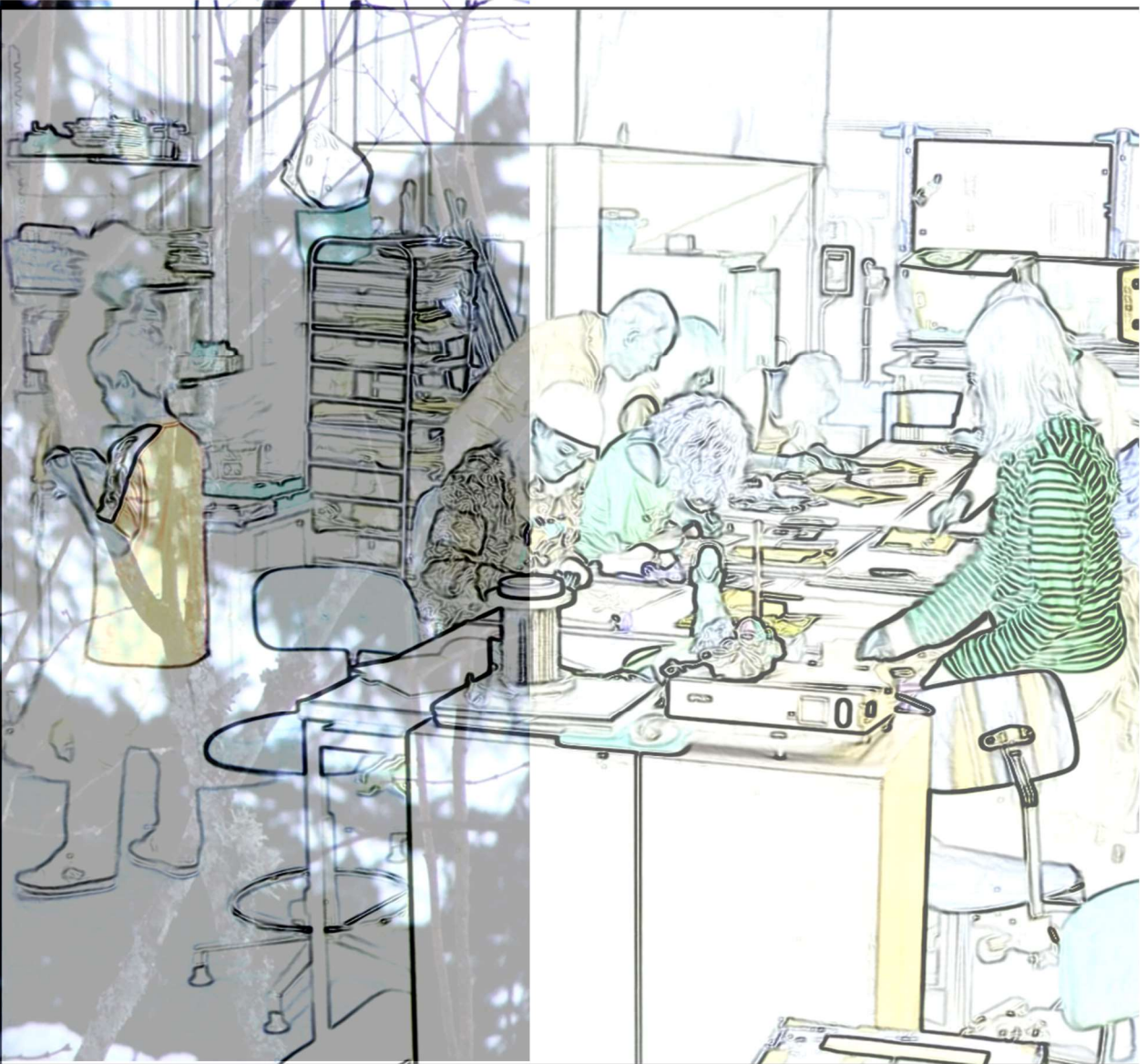
Emphasis here is the participation in practice in the material production of one's own subjectivity. Ecology of subjectivity becomes the leading theme but also materiality and affectivity of becoming-other, of becoming-minority. This means thinking subjectivity in a larger scale, both social, mental and ecological. It is a complex process, a kind of existential territory (O'Sullivan, S. 2010, 89-91). It also means thinking peripheries. The small art school for children and young people in the remote village in South Ostrobothnia in Finland and contemporary art workshop and in this very workshop the performance art experimentation will all form peripheries of art and education. It means stuttering instead of well-articulated official language. I will look at questions of subjectivity and

ecology through the case of performance in the workshop. There is a strong tendency in the workshop towards the post-anthropocentric and the planetary immanent materialism.

The spaces (research, art making, pedagogy) are different but all deal with so called *striated* and *smooth* space: The former with perspective and measuring, visibility and power center, and the latter with affect, haptic and fluid space. It is a question of nomadic research. [My explorations are based on my dissertation (Snellman, M. 2018. *Echoes from the dark forest – affect in learning contemporary art and (in) ecology of subjectivity* but further re-worked.] Alongside all this, the one intriguing question lies also in the composition of research process/ artistic process/ pedagogy. Movement in-between these three sectors and without solidifying any center in them, is essential. A movement, a flow from theory and philosophy to artistic production and materiality as well as virtuality to the pedagogical space where learning and collaborative process is changing the direction of research. How can a classroom/workshop be transformed into a installation-performance art?

The participation in practice in the material production of one's own subjectivity is the key issue. It is not the same as common identity formation, a narrative. Quite the opposite, contemporary art engages in the production of new subjectivity, which identifies with the minority whereas e.g. mass media produces the subjectivity of the majority (Guattari 2010, 26 ; O'Sullivan, S. 2010). Subjectivity may also be approached from the perspective of ecology which precisely refers to the surrounding material-discursive reality of the temporary engagements. Rosi Braidotti talks about vitalist, self-organizing materiality (Braidotti 2013, 82). When intensive encounters are based on instincts, one's consciousness does not necessarily have time to engage in controlling the events. In these cases subjectivity is shaped by affective encounters for which I have searched from my research material. In my research I tried to follow these kind of material-affective flows which are transformational even on molecular level.





My argument is that, again, this change of perspective is rich in alternatives for a renewal of subjectivity.

What would a geo-centred subject look like?

Rosi Braidotti, 2013

In the research workshop on contemporary art in an art school for children and young people in Kauhajoki, (South Ostrobothnia area in Finland) in spring 2012, we started the workshop by visiting the little forest area near the art school during a cold winter night. We were standing there in the cold, dark forest and in total silence. We just opened ourselves to the forest and its very material and real forces: coldness, darkness, snow, branches of trees, smells, silence (no talking), stars from the sky... These affective compounds were resonating and vibrating within the bodies and spaces when we encountered them and even later discussed with them in the warmth of the classroom.

This was already a kind of a performance, an action, and it started the production in the workshop. Although it was not specified or titled as “performance”. Afterwards in the warm and familiar art classroom we continued by writing down and drawing sketches of the sensations, ideas, feelings in the forest. Then we proceeded with sketching paintings for the exhibition in the dark and cold forest. We actually constructed the exhibition in the dark cold forest with only some head lamps giving us some guidance reflecting from snow. After the indoor installations we continued to perform with an open event. Participants did short individual performances as well as group performances on the streets of Kauhajoki and at a local night club.

Finally we did performance art together and started it with an open-ended experimentation, *Perfo-Diving*, as a happening with different materials, costumes, masks, music, drawing, writing on over-head projector and body painting. The idea came from a piece by David Overend *A work on Progress*, which he did in Glasgow Art Festival 2010 (Overend, D. 2010). Everything was open, no specific task was ordered, only advise was to experiment with these materials which were available or to invent new ones. There were also some white masks among the other materials.

In the beginning of this open “diving” into the world of performance was not easy for the participants. The concept was not really explained first, only vaguely. But after a while almost everybody did find some material and started to work with that one. After one hour the working was interrupted and the

group was asked to change their outfit somehow. After this the group was introduced to the other location, the future venue of the collective performance, the night club of the local hotel. A lot of hesitation was in the air once we went to this location and started to discuss the possibilities to do the collective performance there. The place was kind of strange to the students (which is quite natural since they are minor, aged between 13 to 17 years).

After a week we continued from this. The white masks were offered as a specific material for the collective performance as a tool you use in what so ever way. Two students used different mask (one bird one and the other a golden one). All the other had similar, uniform white mask. Once to planning of the group performance was over the group decided to visit the nearby library with the masks. And other plan was to do “waving the heads in line”, that is, to turn the heads in a continuous movement, one by one.



Unfortunately the library was closed. We had to figure out something else and we were already on the move with the masks when these decisions were rapidly made. Then we decided to move to the local night club. As mentioned, this location was introduced to the group earlier. The moving with the masks was silent but in a strange way very firm or focused. Breathing and seeing was little bit difficult but some how the masks made us move in a certain way. The participants were aware of the performative of the action but we did not actually have any plan for it. All becomes improvised by the masks. And quite rapidly in a matter of fact. No leader of the group is chosen. I tried to suggest somebody but the group didn't listen to me. Or they didn't want any leader. The masks moves with an energy of their own. It is an affective one.



The forming in a line and the act of doing something before planned, as organized task can be considered a sign of the striated space. It is space of segmentation, gravitation, perspective and rule. It is also space of order and power (Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 2005, 425-427). Once the group has to get little bit confused due to the fact that what was planned, is not possible. There opens up an other space, quickly into this rigid perspective. We move to the night club.....

After we start moving, walking, nobody knows what will happen, what the outcome will be like, why we are doing this or what it is we are doing. But we know we are moving. Now the white masks are driving us to next space (or we are already in another space, smooth one).

Once we walk into the hotel lobby and continue to the down stairs night club, it gets dark again since there is no disco light on, nor is there music. The space of the night club is not habitual disco club. In stead it is dark open space with some mirrors on the wall, strange benches and other elements here and there. We gather by some reason in a circle just like we did when we visited the dark forest for the first time. Then someone starts dancing and quickly the others follow the gesture. Then step by step starts happening different individual gestures, mimics, expressions of the body, here and their. Some participants form assemblages, as moving statues. I have a video camera but I suddenly crawl on the floor like an animal. The bird-woman runs around. The golden masked boy hides in the stairs. The smooth space has been opened up in the night club.



Affectivity here does not imply emotions or feelings even though it is an embodied thing. Affect means exactly a non-human becoming of man. It is a transformative relationship to the world we live in. It breaks the power relations and signifying registers of representations. It is material vitality and intensity. It is a subject of its own. Kind of a ghost if you will.

Also experimentalism and experientialism offer deeper and rejuvenating affective forces to which one is affirmed by the contemporary art as an open space and ethico-aesthetic methods. What else may one still become? In my dissertation the most essential concept of 'becoming other' challenges traditional learning by offering new and odd sensations and experiences in oneself, others and the environment. The "method" of silence is also an opposite force to the society's need for control and to the global threats. There is no need to explain yourself all the time to others, to narrate yourself, but rest in the "vacuole of silence". Performance art and other fields of contemporary art requires the ability to throw oneself towards the unknown. There the smooth space, lines of flight, affective and material-sensual forces can take you elsewhere, transform you to other kind. It is also possible to overcome norms and habitual way of thinking and doing (repeating the same). If the subject changes, everything else must change as well (St. Pierre, E. 2004).

The contrary to smooth space is the striated space which tends to put everything into "objective" consideration, into perspective which focuses to the one power point, center and gravitational force. It is also the space of the State apparatus, which means it is connected to institutional power structures. It is the official language, normativity and science. The smooth space works with the affective-material forces (Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 2005, 528-546). Of course smooth space does not suffice to save us but it a possibility for a new encounterings.

Here we can talk about Control Societies already mentioned in the early 1990s by Deleuze and Foucault (Deleuze, G. 1995, 177-182). Control Society wants to control us, even the innermost parts of us. Not with threats or punishments, or public humiliation, but through assessments, inner control. The line between public and private space has dissolved. Everything is very public today.

Art offers something different in this respect. With the term Ethico-aesthetics it has been indicated an alternative way to approach to art and world. Instead of asking what art means we can ask how does it work? What does art do? In this way art is not in the register of language but intensive encounters with material-affective forces, sensations. Blocs of sensations. Art has always the strong bridge to the material contexts, environments, spaces around us. And

even more: we are in the deep continuum of materiality-mentality-sociality with art. This forms also our subjectivity. Even much before identity. Identity is meaning making afterwards, when affective-material forces and intensities have already been at work. Environments, spaces, situations formulate us. They produces us as constructions which pass by. This is also ecology of subjectivity, as Félix Guattari has explained (Guattari, F. 2000). This kind of ecology



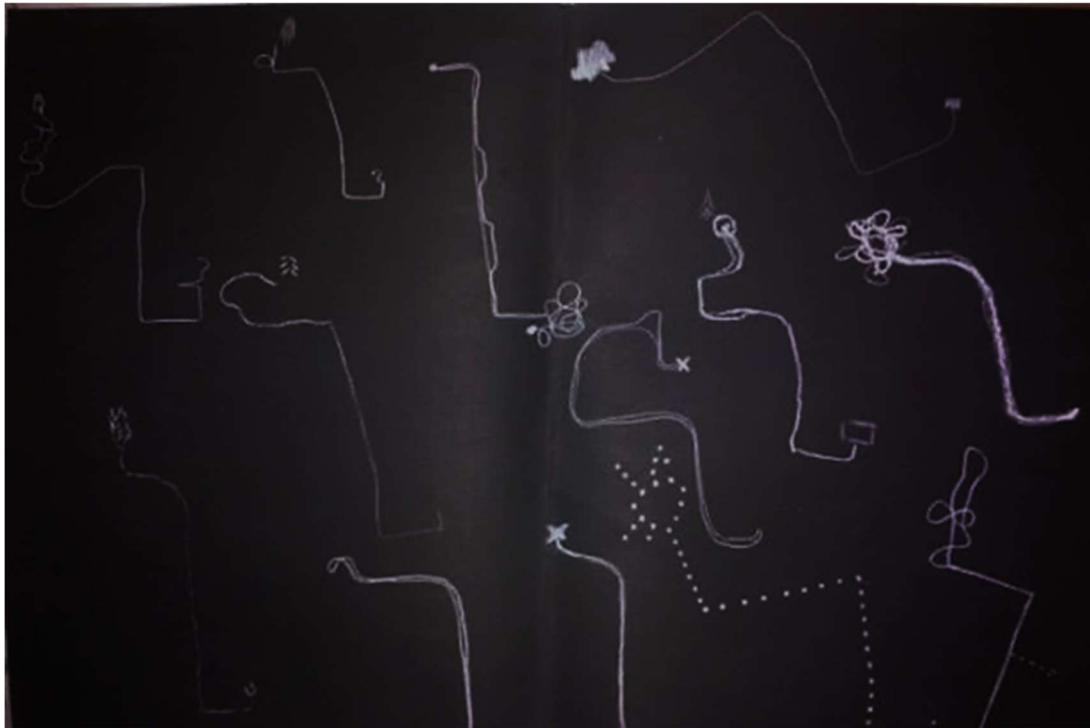
includes also technologically produced subjectivities, digital prothesis and technological tools which already deeply form our relationship to the world today. And tomorrow for sure even more!

Our world today has also been described through Posthuman condition as crises in Humanities. The human-centered world has become a dead end in many ways. In the age of so called Anthropocene our planet is moving towards the human-affected planetary position: human actions on the planet affect already all ecosystems and violate natural balance and biosphere. All the more important is to look at the nonhuman. The Earth. Human-nonhuman-relationships. Ecology of the environment, social and mental. This is not ecology of the rare specialists or eco-minded green parties, but concerning each one of us.

Combining us. In this kind of ecosophical thinking our human mind does not control so much, it dissolves to the background and the forces of the nonhuman world activate (Guattari, F. 2010, 131-145). This is a becoming with the world.

Art offers ways for us to reinvent ourselves in new subjectivities which can be surprising, uncontrollable and yet-unknown to us. Not to close our story to identity narration. Fixed position. How to experiment with our body. How to find new ways of being or in fact becoming and learning. Resingularize our connection to the world. This leads also to new ethics, or to the ethics of affect. Actualizing possibilities of life! Material vitality! It leads also to new assemblages of people and ideas and activism. Collective experimentation.

Dark ecology means A Life approaching world-for-itself without human. This is the ethico-political – or if you will an ethico-aesthetic one -- stance that must be taken into consideration in artistic research (Jagodzinski, J. & Wallin, J. 2013). It's a planetary consciousness as a dynamism of matter. Anthropocene means the age of our planet as controlled by humans – also up to its total annihilation. Considering affects in this scene opens up the non-human world and its' forces as equal as human consciousness and action.



Not-human-centered vision. It's question of the future of the Earth. Who does s/he think s/he is? Stygian monochrome? A Dystopia?

References:

jagodzinski, j. & Wallin, J. (2013) . Arts-based research: A critique and a proposal. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense publishers.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2004) . A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Transl. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press.

Deleuze, G. (1995) . Negotiations: 1972-1990. Transl. M. Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press.

Guattari, F. (2000) . Three ecologies. London: Athlone Press.

Overend, D. (2010) . A Work on Progress. Arches Arts Center, Glasgow 16.- 17.4. 2010. JAR 2011, 1. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/12388/12389>.

O'Sullivan, S. (2010) . From Aesthetics to Abstract Machine: Deleuze, Guattari and Contemporary Art Practice. In O'Sullivan, S. & Zepke, S. (Eds.), *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*. (pp. 189-207). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Snellman, M. (2018) . Echoes from the Dark Forest: Affect in leaning of contemporary art and (in) the ecology of subjectivity. Helsinki : Aalto ARTS Books.

St. Pierre, E. (2005) . Deleuzian Concepts for Education. The Subject undone. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, (pp. 283-296) Vol. 36, No. 3.