

New media poetics as a strategy for political subversion

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Statement of originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dousos', enclosed within a hand-drawn oval border.**Foivos Dousos**

Abstract

This dissertation examines different instances of resistance to dominant socio-cultural regimes through new media. In order to showcase this, I focused on three case studies: the first one was the work of Amalia Ulman, a new media artist who uses selfies in order critically engage with the representations of femininity on Instagram. Ulman's work was then linked to the feminist bibliography around what Amelia Jones defined as 'radical narcissism'. Following that, I engage with a discussion of Grindr, a popular gay dating application. I was particularly interested in how Grindr disrupts heteronormative constructions of the public sphere. Finally, I discuss Pokémon GO, a location-based smartphone application that gained the attention of the public in 2016. Pokémon GO, similarly to Grindr, disrupts normative understandings of space by introducing an augmented reality narrative in physical locations. I expand on this idea by developing my own location-based application that inserted poems rather than Pokémon, in different places within the city. My analytical framework is informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, with a particular focus on understanding selfhood in the context of the emergence and normalisation of new media technologies. By understanding selfhood as an inherently psycho-social construction I was able to identify the political significance of subjectivity and its relation to technological advancements.

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Introduction

New communication technologies such as mobile phones and the internet have changed the way we think and how we interact with each other. In this research project I explore the relation between subjectivity and technology. Focusing on mobile technologies, I suggest that these challenge traditional understandings of psychic structures and processes, requiring us to interrogate the concept of selfhood. I theorise the mobile phone not only as portable computational device, but also as a prosthetic element attached to our bodies, as a window into the world, as a source of anxiety and as tool for creative expression. This allows me to identify instances where mobile technologies, facilitate processes which disrupt normative regimes and I think of the mobile phone as a mirror helping us to construct an open-ended image of ourselves, a tool in the search for sexual pleasure, and a facilitator of creativity.

In all my case studies I examine the relation between communication technologies and selfhood. This question of the self informs my engagement with the concepts of narcissism and ego formation and develops into what I introduce as the 'poetics of self'. My analysis of mobile media is informed by psychoanalytic theories, which offer a complex and suggestive vocabulary with which to examine questions relating to the idea of the self. In the following literature review I present psychoanalytic sources that are central for my theoretical framework. My theoretical interlocutors, writers such as, Laura Mulvey, Joan Copjec, Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič and Julia Kristeva, mainly draw upon Lacanian psychoanalysis, though we can suggest that they go on to fashion their own unique approaches to psychoanalysis. In addition to this, I also include a discussion of psychoanalytically informed consumer research and I reflect on the potential ways of bringing together consumer research and psychoanalytic theory.

Besides employing psychoanalysis, this research project also aspires at putting forward a new mixed methodological framework that incorporates creative practices, especially poetry. The research project is grounded through qualitative methodological tools such as cultural analysis, case studies, and ethnography. The more original methodological aspect of this dissertation comes in the fifth chapter where I employ creative methodologies, poetry as research and locative media technologies in order to

investigate contemporary media phenomena. The epistemological questions posed by are addressed in my chapter on methodology, where I suggest that creative methodologies and psychoanalysis could enrich consumer studies by offering embodied and multi-sensorial data, and a psycho-social perspective. My approach could be described as creative geography, autocartography or simply as artistic practice-based research. It has allowed me to construct a complex investigation of mobile media and to reflect on the relation between media, space and psychic structures.

The first section of my narcissism chapter focuses on the different conceptions of narcissism in Freudian psychoanalysis. Narcissism was initially discussed by Freud as a psychopathology that completely separates the subject from society (Freud, 1911) but as the years passed Freud changed his opinion, presenting narcissism as a normal function, essential for the ego formation (Freud, 1923). I go on to examine this theoretical position in relation to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's description of the 'mirror phase' (Lacan, 1966). Lacan, following Freud, considers the mirror phase essential for the birth of the ego and his analysis of the mirror is essential in my analysis of new media phenomena such as the selfie. In order to better understand the mirror phase argument, I examine the ontological repercussions of the Lacanian domains of psychic reality, namely the imaginary, real and symbolic orders.

My discussion of the mirror phase allows me to consider the screen of mobile media. Following Laura Mulvey's (1999) argument I examine the screen as another kind of mirror which can shape our subjectivity and perpetuate social norms. Then I draw upon Joan Copjec's (2015a) critique of Mulvey's argument in order to produce a non-deterministic understanding of the mobile screen which allows me to re-approach self-portraits (and selfies) as a feminist strategy. In order to better substantiate this claim, I turn to Amelia Jones' theory of 'radical narcissism'. According to Jones (2007), narcissism can be used strategically to disrupt patriarchal representations of the female body. Jones supports her argument by showcasing examples of 70s feminist body art. These examples revolve around the idea of self-portrait as a means of self-expression and we can easily apply Jones' political conclusion in our theorisation of selfies as a cultural phenomenon.

The main case study in this dissertation which illustrates the above arguments is Amalia Ulman's artwork *Excellences & Perfections*. This piece was a durational Instagram

performance during which Ulman presented a series of selfies portraying a persona that embodied different clichés of new media femininities. The project attracted attention as it effectively thematised gender performativity in new media contexts and due to the large number of followers Ulman attracted in the course of her performance. In my discussion of Ulman's work, I engaged with multiple criticisms that deemed her approach as narcissistic. In order to refute these accusations I employed the notion of 'radical narcissism' as described earlier and the concept of over-identification as developed by Slavoj Žižek in his discussion of Slovenian rock group Laibach. According to Žižek (2014), the best way to criticise the existing socio-cultural regime is by taking it more seriously that it takes itself. In that sense I framed Ulman's project as an over-identification gesture that highlights an oppressive regime by exaggerating its effects. My arguments present a marked contrast to critical new media studies approaches that focus on centralised and corporate infrastructures, and the ways in which new media re-affirms power inequalities in contemporary bio-politics. My political critique is instead concerned with identifying the moments of discontent, disjuncture and disorganisation of current power regimes, rather than promoting an alternative project that might allow individual or communal political emancipation.

In Freud's writing, homosexuality is also considered a form of narcissism (Freud, 1911, 1910). In Chapter Three, 'Gay Spatialisation: Towards a Real Imaginary', I attempt a queer theoretical re-appropriation of this psychoanalytic claim, a project that is in conversation with Leo Bersani's reading of the Freudian corpus. By expanding on the notion of 'radical narcissism', in the first section of this chapter I discuss a provocative self-portrait by Robert Mapplethorpe. In this sexually-explicit image Mapplethorpe poses with a whip half-inserted into his anus. This image allows me to reflect on the specificities of homosexual narcissism and also initiates a conversation around the (ir)representability of sexuality in discursive regimes. This leads to a discussion of the 'drive', one of the fundamental psychoanalytic concepts that links sexuality with psychoanalytic concept of the *Trieb*, translated variously as 'instinct' or 'drive'.

This discussion of the drive is then linked to the main case study of the chapter which is the gay dating application, Grindr. In order to theorise Grindr I follow Bersani's (Bersani, 2002) argument around what he calls sociability, a feeling of co-existence 'un-

contaminated by desire'. In order to better understand the concept of sociability and its relation to homosexuality, Bersani presents excerpts from Freud's 'Group psychology and the analysis of the ego' and 'Leonardo da Vinci, a memory of his childhood'. The first text suggests that homosexual subjectivity is somehow related to the formation of social bonds and the second provides a potential explanation of why that happens. In order to better understand the theorisation of subjectivity in 'Leonardo', I briefly present the Freudian theorisation of the Oedipus complex. This is crucial as Oedipus (and most importantly post-Oedipal theories) play an important role in both this and the following chapter. In 'Leonardo', Freud presents us an account of a 'failed' Oedipus complex which leads to Leonardo's homosexual position. Bersani suggests that this failure should not be assessed as a negative result as it allows for a different intersubjective mode of relationality. Traditional Oedipalization creates heterosexual subjects that can only conceptualise the Other as a radical alterity while the psychoanalytic homosexual identifies with his mother's desire and thus ends up looking for himself into the world. Bersani's homosexual renders the world into a familiar yet dispersed and incomplete version of himself and according to Bersani, this process is exemplified in the case of cruising.

I examine Grindr as a networked version of cruising. In order to see the similarities and differences, while taking in account the medium's specificity, I follow Tom Roach's analysis of Grindr (2015a). Roach, inspired by Bersani, expands on the notion of sociability and creates his own concept of 'shared estrangement' in order to better describe the new media specificity of the phenomenon. For Roach, the key to understanding Grindr's facilitation of shared estrangement comes by analysing the language of the medium. In fragmented Grindr chat expressions, Roach identifies a break of identity and a disruption in the meaning making process. This argument leads us to an analysis of the *sinthome*, a concept introduced by Jacques Lacan in 1975. In his seminar on the *sinthome* (2016), Lacan theorised the diminishing importance of the symbolic order in the articulation of reality. This, according to Lacan, is related to the diminishing centrality of the paternal law and the expansion of the role images play in the meaning making process in the rise of new communication technologies.

In the *sinthome* seminar, Lacan focuses on James Joyce's writing, as he considers the

Irish writer an archetypal example of a new mode of relationality to the symbolic order. Joyce, according to Lacan, used his poetic language to make up for the absence of the paternal metaphor from his psychic structure (Lacan substantiates this claim by combining biographical information from Joyce's life history and by reading Joyce's texts). Joyce proposed a new understanding of language that goes beyond meaning, focusing instead on the materiality and resonance of the signifiers, the sound of the words rather than what they mean. This new understanding of language re-frames the signifier outside the ontological assumptions that defined it so far, and most importantly it allows us to conceptualise the signifier outside the operational framework of castration and the paternal law. The *sinthome* is proposed as a new self-made articulation of the three domains of reality (imaginary-real-symbolic).

This theorisation of the signifier reduces the importance of the symbolic order as the domain that grounds all meaning. This thesis argues that the imaginary – the domain of images and sensorial stimuli – seems to better represent contemporary psychic phenomena. This new understanding of the imaginary is essential in our discussion of mobile media as the smartphone screen becomes an essential element of the subjectification process. In the last section of this chapter, I further discuss the ways images disrupt linguistic systems by focusing on emoji. Emojis are ideogrammatic characters, inserted in text messages in order to animate them. Emojis appeared for the first time in Japan, a country that already had a writing system that combined phonetic and ideogrammatic elements.

According to Lacan ("Preface to the Japanese Edition of the *Écrits*," n.d.), it is this quality of the Japanese writing system that renders psychoanalysis – which was developed in the west – inefficient/unsuitable for Japanese people. Lacan claims that psychoanalytic treatment relies on the metonymic function of the signifiers, whereas ideogrammatic characters acquire their meaning through the metaphoric function. By expanding this argument to discuss emoji, I come to the conclusion that logocentric psychoanalytic models need to be updated and opened up to multi-media and artistic tools if they aspire to capture and properly analyse psychic phenomena of our times. Following this conclusion, in my last chapter, I develop a creative methodology that utilises a locative media platform to produce a series of site-specific textual interventions. Mobile media are

the starting point of my theorisation, as they blur the lines between private and public sphere and allow media consumption anywhere in the city.

My theorisation of mobile media starts with the Walkman and expands to consider recent examples of locative media projects that create site-specific narratives. Central to my understanding of virtual – and in the case of mobile media, augmented reality environments – is the figure of the cyborg, as theorised by feminist philosopher Donna Haraway (1999). Cyborgs are assemblages of biological and mechanical components and exemplify our era of hybridity as they combine virtual and physical elements. Following my earlier analyses of the *sinthome*, I theorise cyborgs as sinthomatic attempts to create an ontology that goes beyond the paternal metaphor. My methodology is informed by theories of translatability, as multimedia applications rely on the translation of information/affect from one medium to another. I then engage with media theorist Scott Wilson's discussion (2010) of the hikikomori phenomenon, which can be understood as a manifestation of the *sinthome* era. The *hikikomori* is a psychiatric epidemic/social phenomenon that emerged in Japan in recent years, where children of middle class Japanese families reject social life and become digital hermits – never leaving their rooms and compulsively playing video games. Using the *hikikomori*, Wilson develops a different conception of the unconscious that goes beyond the signifier and incorporates sounds and images. For me, Wilson's analysis is crucial as it opens space for thinking of the *sinthome* in relation to networked realities of our times. In this context, I introduce an analysis of Pokémon, a cultural product that links many discussion threads I presented so far.

Pokémon, like the hikikomori, exemplifies the era of the *sinthome*, where the paternal metaphor has declined and new post-symbolic forms of communication and creativity have emerged. Pokémon GO is an augmented reality mobile game that combines traditional Pokémon game objectives (to collect and train as many Pokémon as possible) with location-aware technologies. Interestingly, according to Japanese psychiatrist, Masaru Tateno (2016), the locative multiplayer game Pokémon GO had a positive influence among the *hikikomori* patients he was treating during the time the game gained its popularity in the summer of 2016. In my analysis of Pokémon GO, presented in Chapter Four, 'The Psyche is the Map: Locative Interpretations of the Symptom', I show

how it might connect the real and virtual world environments opening new possibilities for sinthomatic endeavours. The implication of urban space in the gameplay allowed me to rethink the concepts of 'sociability' and 'shared estrangement' as presented in the previous chapter.

In order to investigate the potential interaction between the intimate psychic and the mediated real world, I set up a small experiment/game. I invited ten poets/writers to reflect on Pokémon GO by writing their poems about Pokémon and placing them in specific spots on the map. The resulting project, 'Pokémon Poetry Go', is built on the previously developed 'Pokémon Poetry' series developed by me. For the making of Pokémon Poetry Go, I used *Echoes*, a platform specifically designed to host locative creative projects. I contextualise the process of making this project by including ethnographic notes around its development. The final section of this chapter presents a series of poems that are discussed in relation to their placement in the city and the Pokémon character they represent/accompany. The discussion of the poems takes into account the phenomenological aspect of consuming a creative locative project in the city of Athens, a discussion of the project in relation to the psychoanalytic points I made in the earlier chapters, and a literary analysis that takes in account the theorisation of poetic discourse by Julia Kristeva in her seminal *Revolution in Poetic Language* (2016).

My use of Echoes is part of my more general interest in location-based services, which links to my earlier theorisation of the spatiality of desire as it takes place in the case of Grindr. In my 'Pokémon Poetry Go' project, I expand on a group of media technologies defined as 'locative media': media specifically delivered upon the user's geolocation. I consider location-based services, or more specifically locative media, an opportunity to discuss a series of psychic, technological and socio-spatial phenomena along with their political implications. I aspire to build a psycho-social understanding of locative media, as locative media affect not only the ways we understand, access and communicate within social spaces, but could potentially shape social spaces as such. My analysis emerges in the intersection between subjectivity, technology and space, or better defined: where subjectivity becomes spatialised through technology.

Methodological issues

As discussed, my research project is based on the investigation of three different mobile media applications. I approach each of them in different ways in order to open theoretical discussions. In 'Beyond the Selfie Principle' I engage with Amalia Ulman's 'Excellences and Perfections'. My analysis of this work is informed by cultural theory and cultural analysis. In the discussion of this case study I attempt a three-fold analysis. First, I focus on the cultural context of the work, the pre-conditions for its emergence and its effects on the social field. I include a contextualisation of the work within art history by drawing similarities between Ulman's work and feminist body art from the 70s. Second, I attempt an understanding of the medium Ulman uses. The medium-specificity of the work and the form it takes are in themselves rich in information with regards to its political implications. Third I discuss the work in relation to psychoanalytic theory. Following the Freudian and Lacanian approaches I do not aim at explaining the work through psychoanalytic theories but rather attempt to use the work in order to broaden the horizons of psychoanalytic thinking.

My next chapter 'Gay spatialisation – towards a real imaginary' takes as its main case study the gay dating application Grindr. While I retain a cultural analytical point of view, I also focus on the functionality of the application. The technical characteristic of the application alongside the phenomenology of technological experiences such as the experiencing of the smartphone's touchscreen play a central role in the development of my argument. My Grindr chapter is also informed by auto-ethnographic observations with regards to the language of the medium. My analysis of language in this chapter goes beyond more conventional discourse analysis which focuses on the contextual understanding of discourse. Rather I focus on structural functions of language as such, in particular the difference between metaphor and metonymy as theorised by Lacan, in order to showcase how language of Grindr poses a departure from traditional forms of written communication.

In 'The psyche is the map, locative interpretations of the symptom' I propose a new methodological gesture towards multimedia presentation of data. By drawing inspiration from existing (and emerging) creative communities related to the development of locative

projects, I set up a collaborative poetic project called 'Pokémon poetry go'. The resulting project was created by using the smartphone application Echoes, developed by Josh Kopeček a sound artist and programmer based in the UK. One of Kopeček's main ambitions was to create a free tool for artists, activists and academics who are interested in developing site-specific, sound-based interventions. Echoes allows the creation of augmented reality environments by delivering specific media depending on the location of the user. Echoes is part of group of media applications that are often described in bibliography as locative media. One of the innovations of locative media comes from the mixing of real world and virtual elements. The possibilities offered by the application vary widely with projects that involve narratives, interviews, music or sound art. The different locations become contested spaces for memory and poetry, antagonistic voices and sounds: polyphonic spaces of disputed origins.

In the following section I reflect on my research methods by investigating both their epistemological genealogies and their methodological tools. While the methodology of this research project can be called eclectic there are particular principles that organise both my thought and praxis. My insistence on the different strategies to disrupt normative regimes, for example, is informed by my strong belief that theory cannot be separated from taking a political stance. In that sense, I do not aim at making pure theoretical arguments but rather produce knowledge that is somehow linked to the possibility of political action and social change.

Research objectives

The main aim of my research is to explore the interrelation between new media cultures and subjectivity. I focus on moments where new technologies allow or facilitate the disruption of normative regimes of power. My three case studies operate as different responses to the initial question. I take a paradoxical stance as I look for moments of disruption and resistance within the framework of commercial enterprises and applications. Nevertheless my theoretical reflections allow me to re-think of the possibility of resistance even within the limitations of that context. What I define as normative regimes here are the different modalities of oppression as identified by intersectional feminist and anti-authoritarian thought and activism. In the case of 'Beyond the selfie principle' I discuss the work of Amalia Ulman's as a feminist response to the male gaze in

new media. In 'Gay Spatialisation' I investigate the ways that cruising and dating applications disrupt the heteronormativity of public space. In 'Psyche is the Map' I expand the discussion on space by proposing a new poetics of self that blurs the boundaries between the private and the public.

The starting point for my explorations is the investigation of selfhood. In my analysis both selfhood and narcissism are concepts that acquire a different definition than their common-sense usage. Central in my theorisation is the expansion of notions of self in order to better capture the fundamental intersubjectivity that I see as inherent in these notions. In that sense, selfhood is not approached as a closed and fixed identity but rather as an open-ended schema, always oriented and organised by the Other. In order to substantiate this, I combine theoretical reflections coming from psychoanalytic theory with the data I draw from my case studies.

An important focus point throughout my work is the exploration of a psychoanalytically informed qualitative methodology. There have been numerous attempts to establish a meaningful connection between psychoanalytic epistemology and empirical research and I aspire to build on that practice by bringing psychoanalytic theoretical concepts and observations from the field into a creative dialogue. Psychoanalytic ethos will inform both the ways I structure my research questions and research plan and also will help me when formulating my conclusions and theoretical analyses.

Furthermore, I aim to establish a methodological understanding of poetic discourse and the potential use of creative means as research. In order to achieve that I aspire to utilise a series of creative practices including writing, performance and recording of spoken word poetry in conjunction with using a locative media application in order to geo-locate words in space. I consider poetic discourse as a useful tool when attempting to capture the affective, emotional and extra-discursive elements of everyday experiences. My work is explicitly and intentionally hybridic. I mix methods and theoretical approaches, self-observations and ethnography, qualitative means and creativity. I consider the phenomena I investigate nascent and under-researched and I am confident that in order to understand and represent them I need multi-media, trans-disciplinary and potentially explorative methodological leaps.

Epistemological questions

Writing on method for digital humanities presents a series of epistemological questions (Gold and Klein, 2016). What kinds of knowledge can one produce in the context of emerging technologies? What is tangible and/or measurable in this new environment? It seems that the object of observation is often neither fully configured nor specific. In this case we can only establish a playful exploration; a creative experimentation. How can we then define an epistemology of this playful experimentation? Thinking of scientific methods, we usually derive definitions from 'hard sciences' developed within the realm of positivist ontologies. Positivist science has a specific understanding of knowledge, forming a framework that informs the quantitative paradigm in social sciences. On a different track we have qualitative approaches that attempt a different way of producing knowledge following an inductive methodology (Ritchie, 2014). Starting with ethnography, qualitative methodologies focus on the observation of the subjects in their 'natural setting' (tracing back to the anthropological observation of the colonised other and expanding the methodology to the urbanized subject of sociology). Following a long string of internal criticism we reach to a point where certain theoretical bodies of work such as feminism, queer and post-colonial theories and generally post-structuralism have called for the dismantling of certain positivist dualisms such as that between the subject and object of observation, rational and emotional analysis, concrete and abstract approaches (Sprague and Zimmerman, 2004). Digital humanities emerge at this exact moment of the dismantling of existing epistemological presumptions.

Philosophy of science has engaged in long discussions on the problems of establishing a methodology in social sciences that can provide a reasonably consistent quality of results. Paul Feyerabend, in his seminal *Against Method* (2010) offers a stellar critique of the idea of methodology as such. For him there is no way to construct a proper method, as all methodological rules always derive from cosmological assumptions in order to justify their founding assumptions. Methodology for Feyerabend does not offer a magic wand that can solve problems, even before his book, systematically processing data as part of a study had been a dramatic problem for quite some time. Feyerabend adds to the equation the usual failure of science to produce actual solutions. And if things can get epistemologically foggy in hard science, social sciences offer a series of new challenges

perplexing the methodological process even more fundamentally.

Charles Mills attempts a positive (but not positivist) definition of a sociologically meaningful research. In his *Sociological Imagination* (2001) it is the 'capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from the examination of a single family to a comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishments; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry' (Mills, 2001, p. 7). It is exactly this creative potential of humanity that gives a methodological hope: the possibility of understanding through transcription, empathy and the power of metaphor. The 'sociological imagination' requires the ability to pull oneself from a position and think of another, acquiring different points of view and being able to understand the mechanisms that allow that process. At its core sociological imagination requires a deep understanding of the social fabric as a constantly shifting force that defines our lives and the same time is changes into different iterations of itself. In a way this exact imagination is what makes the social fabric change as we collectively imagine it into something else.

With a similar emphasis on social change, Charles Taylor (1983) builds his argument around social theory as practice. He thinks social theory can make invisible social structures and practices as well as everyday common sense into explicit theoretical frameworks. The motivation behind theory production, according to Taylor, is not just to identify these social structures and practices but to critique, extend and challenge them. The ways we theorise structures affects our dealing with them, shape the policies we produce and the social relations we can envision. Theory defines our practice and shapes our self-understanding. Current positivist approaches resist the idea of a theory that can change its object of observation. For Taylor, it is only action and practice that can measure the validity of a theory; you can only fashion a theory by engaging with its material implications. A pragmatist epistemology would elevate objects of knowledge on the level of active operations. If we define knowledge as an operating modality, the question of practice versus theory becomes obsolete. There is no primacy of theory over action and we need to rethink theory as an active field of practices. Knowledge becomes something that arises out of human action.

Taking into account the importance of imagination and practice as theory, I would also

like to discuss a third element, namely creativity. In the context of my research, use of locative media technologies produces meaning and enables social encounters but at the same time operates on an aesthetic level. In this context, drawing upon creative intuition allows for multiple understandings without the restrictive mediation of theoretical discourse. Affective elements are included in the discourse, strengthening the experiential aspect of the project. As Patricia Leavy writes: 'art-based researchers are not 'discovering new research tools, they are carving them' (Leavy, 2015, p. 1). By introducing those tools to a wider community of people they share a new methodological insight that can shift research cultures and theoretical contexts. Instead of hiding our emotional relationship to our work, we expose it, all the while aspiring for the production of knowledge based on resonance and empathy; instead of trying to fix problems with our points of view, we pose the questions in ways that incorporate this problematic in their articulation. This expanded comprehension of experience and how we pursue it may be more helpful than simply stating our position in an attempt to be self-reflexive. As with strict scientific methods the validity of the findings of a creative approach is ultimately determined by the community of 'believers' 'who experience first-hand what creativity can do to further human understanding' (McNiff, 2013).

Research methods

As described earlier, in my research design I attempt a combination of different methods. I wanted to create a hybridic horizon where combined data from ethnographic observations, case-study examinations, interviews and creative cartography co-exist bringing together a fleshed-out overview of new media cultures. I aspire to offer not just an aggregation of different data sets but rather have each methodological input inform and transform the others; different approaches working together, co-producing meaning. It is important that the data extracted by different processes allows for a multifaceted understanding of a specific phenomenon. Research questions can very often operate on different levels, as we see in this extract by Axinn and Pearce:

[M]ixed methods are particularly useful when a research problem calls for more than one of the key attributes characterising individual methods. When a problem calls for the combination of questioning and observation by an interviewer, mixed methods are particularly appropriate (Axinn and Pearce, 2012, p. 24)

Cultural analysis

My research operates within a cultural analytical framework. In this context, all case-studies are considered as assemblages of 'cultural objects' and are analysed as parts of larger cultural contexts. It is hard to define the specific tools of the cultural analytical methodological framework, but as sociologist Jim McGuigan suggests, cultural analysis is an approach to culture informed by social and cultural anthropology, sociology, and literary studies. In terms of theoretical references cultural analysis is mainly influenced by British cultural studies and European critical theory (McGuigan, 2010). Cultural analysis tries to transgress traditional disciplinary limitations and comes from a European philosophical tradition that critiques positivism in social sciences.

Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal in her *Practice of Cultural Analysis* (2006) offers some methodological insights with regards to cultural analysis. According to Bal 'the distance between the object of analysis and a statement about it is that makes culture possible and at the same time makes cultural analysis a self-reflexive process' (Bal, 2006, p. 6). Between the object and the statement that describes it, Bal tells us, there exists an irreconcilable discrepancy that can only be bridged by a process of narrativization, a mythology as meaning making process. This narrativization connects the objects and their signs into a semiotic field. In order to better understand this semiotic field, we utilise a series of discursive tools but the reality of the immediate experience still maintains a unique explanatory field itself. By resisting the absolute distinction between those two fields Bal invites us into rethinking the analytical possibilities that emerge in the dialectic between them.

In order to explore this possible merger between the aural the visual and the linguistic, Bal deploys the category of space/place. She identifies this territory by bringing forward a bodily understanding: an embodied consciousness in relation to an object. This embodiment far from being reduced to an 'innate' or even biological nature, it is a psychoanalytically defined spatiality where drives and the unconscious intersect with a symbolically defined world. It is sensorial territory that can never be stripped from meaning but also presents some meaning that is inaccessible, hidden, affective. In that sense Mieke Bal moves away from an archaeology of the object and brings the encounter with the object into the potent present. It is this present, the present of the

bodily materiality, that will allow an analysis that claims to provide a history of the contemporary. In this movement between the strict semiotics of social representation and absolute materiality the opportunity to politicise the aesthetic and grasp the affect in language opens up before us.

In order to proceed with this investigation, cultural analysis deploys the methodological triangle of object, concept and research question. In this articulation the concept becomes a lens through which the researcher is gazing upon the object. The research question operates as a compass that organises the process and theory emerges through the shift between the different positions of this triangular schema. Theory is developed in a specific cultural context and remains grounded. The position of the researcher is not assumed to be neutral but is called constantly into question. This process can only get going through a rigorous self-reflection and understanding of the different possibilities as they emerge in the analytical process.

Case study research

Case study in the context of my research refers to the ‘investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context’ (Yin, 2015, p. 13). Case studies are suitable for the exploratory aspect of a research planning as they offer the opportunity to investigate a specific phenomenon in depth. Yin suggests that case study design is preferable when discussing contemporary or emerging issues. As described earlier, that is a key problem in the design of this research as locative media, do not present many mainstream applications.

For the needs of this research I examined a series of mobile media phenomena as case studies. My three main case studies are: Amalia Ulman’s project ‘Excellences and Perfections’, the gay dating application Grindr and the augmented reality game Pokémon GO. I attempted investigating them within their context and reflecting on their potential uses and functions. My experimentations with the mobile applications become central in my understanding of their interface and how it relates to my research questions. This is not just an auto-ethnography of me using the application but it also includes a methodical examination of their contextual performance within space and time. This will allow for a better understanding of the accounts of other users and will allow for a better theorisation

of the results.

Creative Analytical Practice (CAP) ethnography

Ethnographic research in the rise of post-structuralist critique had to respond to certain epistemological questions raised from feminist, post-colonial and queer theories.

Richardson and Pierre name this shift towards a narrativised and self-reflexive research: Creative Analytical Practice (CAP) Ethnography (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2018). What distinguishes those ethnographic approaches is that they combine the creative and the analytical aspect. Richardson and St. Pierre group under this term a series of creative practices including poetry, autobiography, performance and visual art. These different forms of expression allow for different types of reflection on ethnographic observation; they capture different affective elements and they reflect on different aspects of the issue. In this methodological approach, initial observation, analysing and creative reflection on the issue become intertwined as they inform and shape each other. Drawing from the 'sociological imagination' as described earlier, CAP ethnographers challenge their audiences by providing them with diverse metaphors, different ways of understanding and different ways of accessing social theoretical knowledge. Openness of form and inclusion of creative expression in the research, allow for a certain shift from the centrality of objective validity and a questioning of authorship. But if validity is not a quality to be valued in the CAP ethnographic projects, how can we really assess the quality of the resulted work? Richardson and St. Pierre present in their conceptualisation four alternative criteria:

1. Substantive Contribution. This is always the first question when it comes to social research: how can research further extend social understanding. Grounded contribution takes events and situations from everyday life and provides an explanatory field of meaning that tackles certain aspects of the problem.
2. Aesthetic Merit. Unlike more classical ethnographic work in the case of creative ethnography the aesthetics play a central and defining role as the message is pretty much defined through the particularity of the medium. The specifics of a medium are full of content and convey a series of extra discursive elements.
3. Reflexivity. An important element of effective CAP ethnography is the element of self-reflectivity. It is crucial that the final result shows the development, giving an

overview of the conceptual framework and the positionality of the researcher within the process.

4. Impact. A piece that is though provoking and brings up emotions is a piece that achieved produced some resonance, it generated questions it provoked further discussion. A creative practice with an impact activated new prospects for further methodological explorations and showcased an alternative way of producing knowledge.

Locative interventions

In chapter three I argue that the emergence of augmented reality gaming – in the form of Pokémon Go – presents an opportunity to re-assess poetic engagement with the city and the potential transformation of public space through mobile media.

Conventional cultural geographies emphasize the phenomenology of ‘place’ – the lived experience of a particular environment. While valid, this approach struggles to account for the specificities of augmented reality applications insofar as these introduce something that is in a place, but not *of* the place. While drawing on phenomenological and psychogeographical principles, I wanted to find a way to move beyond these, to engage with the nascent realities created through new media cultures. My work thus centralises *practice*, particularly the practice of creating and exploring the augmented city. To achieve this, I appropriated the experience of playing Pokémon Go – of wandering the city and encountering it and its inhabitants, both virtual and real. Using the Echoes application, I created a site-specific poetry project in which contributors were asked to write a poem and to nominate a site for its consumption; tagged on a map, these constitute a new way of exploring and cohabiting the city.

This approach finds its origins in the work of the local art group Akoo-o collective, a network of sound artists, musicians, anthropologists and urban theorists whose work explores new ways to experience the city. In their workshops, I learnt how to use Echoes an application that is explicitly developed to create site-specific mobile media experiences. During one of their interventions in Athens, Akoo-o produced a virtually enhanced walk around Monastiraki square, a central location in downtown Athens. One could experience that soundwalk by downloading it from their blog and experience an

unusual mixture of sounds from different cities on top of the typical sounds of the busy square. This inspired me to investigate further how this creative community has incorporated the location-based function into their creative, anthropological and self-reflexive work. Following Akoo-o's example I organised workshops where I educated people on how to use Echoes leading to the creations of Pokémon Poetry Go, an open platform for site-specific poetry.

The final project includes autobiographical elements, free associations, poetic attempts and spoken word recordings besides images of Pokémon characters. In a sense I invited the participants to think along me, work with me, and self-reflect in order to identify new possibilities around locative auto-topographical technologies. It could be described as an invitation to a community of people to help me process, analyse and rethink the main research questions of this project. I then examined, the collectively produced material as cultural object, by analysing the texts and their relation to space. In order to better understand the final result I invited a participant to walk along me and visit all the different poems in the city. By inviting this participant and by observing her reaction to the final result, I was able to reflect on embodied experience of the project. My ethnographic observations throughout the development of the locative project also play central role in the theorisation of the project.

The methodological intervention of my research is the introduction of the 'auto-topographical' process as an active component of the research itself. Auto-topography is the process of a person relating to space using auto-biographical narratives. For the purpose of this research this was achieved with the mediation of relative software and smartphones with GPS capacities. The main application I intend to deploy is as mentioned earlier 'Echoes'. Echoes allows its users to attach sound files, images and text onto specific locations on the map. Then, either the same user or another can navigate in the area and listen stream these media on their phones. This creates a three-dimensional experiential field for expression. The memories and creative expressions are being exteriorised and projected onto space.

Pokémon Poetry Go is the final result of this research project and is publicly available for download through the Echoes online platform. Most of the poems that one can find in the PPG are autobiographical. The poets produced personal stories that relate to the

locations that these memories are exhibited/attached. The second category is more focused on the site-specificity and the participants produce poems in response to particular locations without necessarily unveiling much about their inner selves and memories. These responses are often more abstract or descriptive (historical events, fictional narratives, descriptions of the area etc.). The combination of the two different narratives creates emotional and poetic maps that reflect specific memories and associations of the participants. We co-created a series of augmented environments that haunt public spaces and then invited the audience to visit the public space and see it through the poetic lens of PPG.

Stuart Moulthrop (2005) proposes the idea of setting up an “intervention” in order to study emerging phenomena in media studies. According to Moulthrop, emerging media phenomena tend to be difficult to grasp in other methodological domains as larger audiences are not aware of their characteristics and niche audiences are too involved in their production. So, in order to create an in vivo experimentation with them he suggests setting up a hybridic design where people are introduced to a simulated media phenomenon in a setting that resembles real world interaction and is facilitated by the researcher. He described that as ‘a practical contribution to a media system’. The characteristics of an intervention according to Moulthrop are:

1. It should belong somewhere in the domain of cybertext, constituted as an interface to a database and including a feedback structure and generative logic to accommodate active engagement.
2. It should be a work of production crafted with commonly available media and tools.
3. It should depart discernibly from previous practice and be informed by some overt critical stance, satirical impulse, or polemical commitment, possibly laid out in an argument or manifesto.
4. It should have provocative, pedagogic, or exemplary value, and be freely or widely distributed through some channel that maximizes this value, such as the Creative Commons or open source licensing. Ideally, the infrastructure of the work should either be available to the receiver or documented in sufficient detail to permit

productive imitation. (Moulthrop, 2005, pp. 5–6)

By these four standards, I believe that Pokémon Poetry Go can be seen as an intervention, in Moulthrop's sense. First, the poems are themselves a cybertext, existing silently and virtually until the reader (the walker) encounters them. Second, the DIY aesthetic of the project can be considered a form of 'craft', a bricolage of widely-available and freely accessible tools. Third, in blurring the boundaries between public, private and subjective spheres, the project takes a critical stance to these divisions; further in its hijacking of Pokémon Go it plays with, even parodies, its model. Finally, as I argue in this thesis, the process of creating and following the urban geography of Pokémon Poetry Go exemplifies something of the radical possibilities of augmented reality and its consumption.

Creative geographies (auto-cartography)

One methodological innovation is the adoption of a series of creative cartographic methods noted by Deirdre Heddon as autotopography (2008). Autotopography is a spatialised examination of one's personal history. It is essentially an emotional cartography of subjectivity. Heddon focuses on performances and art projects that combine personal narratives with walking in space, those autobiographical explorations of space are produced through the interaction of subjectivity and physical space and hence are relevant to this research's main objective. If autotopography signifies an expansion of one's memories into space, then through them we can make more tangible the dialectic between personal identity and geography. While Heddon concentrates on the biographical aspect of one's reflection, the poetics and free associations, in addition to the interaction with a potential audience, open up the possibilities for more complex articulations of one's relation to space. Experience and memory are often a starting point but the potentiality for something new emerges through the intersection of a multifactor cluster of stimuli and means of expression. In a way, as Heddon points out, autotopography is writing space through self, and at the same time, writing self through space; it is a cartography of oneself.

In a similar way I aspire to open up the process and explore not only the results but also the function of autotopography in relation to creativity and self-expression. What I would

like to see is the process of autotopography, writing oneself on a specific place through new media technologies. This autotopography through new technological means suggest a new relation to the city where personal stories, narratives and reflection acquire new material traces and they occupy a semi-public sphere; a space created in-between real commonly apprehended as public and intimate, thinly separated personal spaces.

Stitching sounds on the map is an embodied gesture towards a new material relation to space. A new possibility for *détournement* of dominant normative narratives that define urban environments. The hybridic experiences that come out of this can only be explored through a playful experimentation with the medium itself. Creative methods in cultural geographical studies have been instrumentalised lately due to discipline's on-going interest in embodiment. The embodied turn of geography focuses on the sensory experience of space, the emotions, and the affective elements (Longhurst, 1997). For Harriet Hawkins, engagement with creative methods offers a grasp of the messy, always unfinished and contingent spatial imaginaries (Hawkins, 2015). Besides that, creativity offers a different relation to geographical knowledge for a non-specialist audience, allowing the researchers to explore participatory and communicative potential by generating collaborative communities. Art practices, specifically, are valued for their interventionary possibilities. Most of the cases analysed by Hawkins did not aim to produce some creative output but rather evolved as collaborative practices between artists and her.

In a way, the aesthetic element has been always potent in the history of geographical research as image making and writing practices has always been present in geographical representation. Tension between mimetic representations and more expressive, impressionist and generally creative ones defined the history of cartography and we can trace the history of this tension both in the pre-enlightenment and enlightenment concern with visual sources of information about place. Today mimesis of reality is no longer a driving force in our understanding of place with alternative approaches that include subjective understanding and encompass visual art methods defining our understanding of space (Hawkins, 2015).

Following that logic, I aspire to encompass new forms of representation of space that

deal with the sensorial, embodied and poetic understanding of spatial realities. I intend to break methodologically into new territory in terms of producing, gathering and assessing qualitative data. The poetics of space are captured and represented in their material actuality as part of the subjective narrative. The discursive walks are representing a potentiality for a dialectic analysis between embodied movement and language. This process does not aim to offer a more objective account of space, on the contrary, it is inviting both the researcher and the spectator/reader into a phenomenological enactment where multiplicity is endemic, discourse goes back into movement and getting contextualised in immersive space turns into its raw poetic, idiosyncratic and temporary dimension.

Poetry and qualitative research

The poetic function as identified by Julia Kristeva (2006) offers a point of conjunction between psychic structures and a spatialised understanding of the unconscious. The idea of poetry and poetics organises many of my theoretical arguments as it draws together concepts such as the unconscious and creativity along with the idea of an embodied form of expression. Schouten and Sherry argue that poetry could and should have an active role in qualitative consumer research. They argue that poetry is re-emerging as a literary genre mainly because it offers a different relation to discourse. Poetry in their analysis offers a linguistic way of capturing what always slips discourse. This happens as poetic language is physiognomic and synthetic, is a language structured like a dream, it is formed by pre-words and non-words (Sherry and Schouten, 2002).

The emotional truths that can be communicated through poetic discourse shake the foundation of what kinds of truth language can convey. Following a post-structuralist critique, Sherry and Schouten identify a potential space for new forms of knowledge produced out of new linguistic articulations; articulations that will allow for affective explorations of language. They want to move away from a realist view of ethnographic writing that due to its obsessive pre-occupation with listing observable facts moves away from actually capturing emotional realities of everyday phenomena. They focus on the ways consumer experiences tend to be reduced into one-dimensional phenomena even when the aspiration of the researches is strongly aligned with qualitative methodology.

Similarly, Robin Canniford (2012) suggests that poetic discourse can represent the complexity in terms of emotions and multisensory experiences that other modes of ethnographic representation fail to capture.

It could be argued, for instance, that intense experiences of pleasure, pain, desire, joy or fear require spaces for expression and inquiry beyond regular modes of representation. Depth interview transcripts in particular, tend to elicit highly reflexive and self-conscious accounts of consumers' identity and meaning-making procedures. Poetry, on the other hand, offers a means to present emotional experiences in a more emotive manner. (Canniford, 2012, p. 393)

For Canniford, poetic discourse could be use not only in the presentation of results of a research project but rather as an intrinsic part the research. He suggests a methodology of poetic field notes and poetic transcription of interviews in attempt to capture in language extra-linguistic elements. Poetry is an attempt to deal with intuition, introspection, and through its aesthetic form to induce emotional resonance to the reader. Poetic discourse can be figurative and imagistic destabilising the meaning making process through its polyvocality.

Data analysis

People are able to produce meaning out of arbitrary situations. It seems as if patterns emerge even in the most chaotic circumstances. Small repetitions, bold contradictions or subtle similarities seem to define the ways we navigate through a disorderly world of countless stimuli. Social scientific methods that focus on qualitative data seem to take on this human capacity with the aspiration of providing results that will not only indicate emerging patterns but will also be able to produce theory, insight into the reasons, and predictions for the future (Miles and Huberman, 2014).

Patterns tend to appear in different articulations, like 'gestalts' that entail different elements, they cannot always properly be broken down into their components. Qualitative research bibliography provides us with techniques that can ease the process of identifying 'useful' patterns or at least identifying patterns that allow for a certain kind of contemplation on the research topic. Clustering and categorising data is always the first step towards understanding potential connections (Miles and Huberman, 2014).

Clustering requires a rigorous abstraction from rich narratives to defined topics and themes. In a sense this process allows for an easily accessible volume of data; it is a rough indexing that comes out of an initial selection. Although this process requires a fair amount of critical overviewing it is more oriented towards organising data rather than understanding their connections. On a second level comparisons and contrasts can allow for more comprehensive conclusions regarding the research questions. Tensions and differences between answers can draw attention on the complexities of one issue. Miles and Huberman draw attention on another element of thematic analysis that has to do with metaphor. The centrality of metaphors in the social theorising has been stressed on the epistemological segment of this chapter and it is a topic that keeps re-emerging as it comes hand in hand with my pre-occupation with psychoanalytic thought and the unconscious. But even on purely methodological level, metaphor's importance cannot be downplayed.

Metaphors offer an analytic tool that unifies different experiences and phenomena. Metaphor can make visible structures of analogy and similarity in ways that plain factual logic fails to capture. Important for the rigor of the research is to have a self-reflective understanding of the limitations of metaphor as method (namely its lack of restraint or consistency). Nevertheless, as Miles and Huberman note (2014), metaphors are very useful as they allow us to produce theory out of observations. New words, new categories, new nodal points organise clusters of data and allow the exploration of certain intuitive assumptions. It is important as noted before to remember that our concepts are in the very literal sense intricate metaphors as they organise meaning according to their own metaphysics. This knowledge should not cripple our scientific imagination, on the contrary it should inspire us to find the suitable metaphors and utilise them in order to produce meaningful results. After all, as Jacques Lacan suggests, metaphors open up to the possibility of misunderstanding, the foundation of all communication.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

In order to examine the patterns emerging from the thematic assortment I intend to use a series of interpretative approaches. Firstly, I draw from phenomenological traditions as processed by Smith et al. in their constitution of Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA) (2013). In their formulation of qualitative methodology they examine the ways people make sense of their life experiences. Phenomenology tends to examine the different ways people experience the world and more specifically the ways they reflect and shape an understanding of those ways. To put it simply, phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that focuses on understanding human experience.

Phenomenology to its very essence is an inquiry of what experience is, and how it comes into being. Philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have contributed a series of philosophical concepts that explicate on the nature of human experience (Smith et al., 2013).

In IPA the research participant is the one that is assumed to makes sense of what is happening and the researcher attempts to get some access to that information. For phenomenology people are meaning making creatures and in that sense the researcher is trying to make sense of how the participant makes sense of the world. We have here a double hermeneutic, the researcher occupies a double role as they are expected to produce their own personal meaning and at the same time engage with the meaning production of the research participant. The participant always has to grant the access to those experiences. IPA studies are usually conducted on small sample sizes, as the importance of those accounts is valued for their internal explanatory power. IPA focuses on the particular and brings forward 'detailed and nuanced analysis of particular instances of lived experiences' (Smith et al., 2013). In a way, the researcher tries to find their way from the particular into the bigger over-arching themes and form a connective thread that does not reduce different experiences into each other. This process values all experiential claims and operates first and most importantly on the individual level.

Psychoanalysis and qualitative research

One of the most challenging aspects of this research project comes from my desire to bridge abstract psychoanalytic concepts and qualitative research; my ambition to develop a psychoanalytically informed, research project that would be playful yet engaging with core questions around subjectivity.

One of my first reference points in this pursuit was Claudia Lapping's index of social scientific projects that manage to incorporate psychoanalytic concepts in their analyses

(Lapping, 2011). Lapping advocates for some kind of reconciliation between psychoanalysis and social research as she recognises there is mutual suspicion and tension between those two bodies of theory and practice. She suggests that such reconciliation might offer new insights towards the understanding of social reality and the subjectification processes. In the research projects that Lapping presents, the main methodological framework includes both qualitative interviews and the development of certain psychoanalytic concepts. In this methodological articulation the theorists draw parallel lines between psychoanalytic ideas and their correspondence to social phenomena.

Another reference point that helped me to develop my initial interview plan came from Jefferson and Hollway's account of the free association narrative interview (Hollway and Jefferson, 2011). I decided to present my informants' narratives in their dialectic openness rather than reducing them into examples of my theoretical framework. Qualitative research lives in the tension between, on the one hand, a deconstructionist framework in which the human subject is understood as positioned in and through competing discourses and, on the other, a humanistic framework in which the integrity of the subject is taken to be both a starting- and end-point of analysis (Frosh, 2007).

Psychoanalysis can offer some relief from this tension as it offers a new understanding of subjectivity: The subject is still in the centre but this time her unconscious is also taken into consideration; the socio-symbolic conditions are questioned without omitting the entangled embodied experience. Producing narratives have in the psychoanalytic context two side effects: One is the slippages, disruptions and discontinuities, moments when unconscious thoughts emerge. The other is the function of the transference facilitated by the presence of the interviewer; the one who sets the expectation and *promises* a potential interpretation. As Peter Brooks puts it, '[someone listening] drags the narrator into the special semiotic and interpretive space of transference' (Brooks, 1997). Therefore, a narrative is not just something waiting to be discovered but it is shaped in this inter-subjective process. The interview becomes a space of meaning and resistance, repression and creativity.

Ethical considerations

There are three axes that organise my ethical considerations regarding this research plan. Firstly, I suggest the overall concern to avoid causing harm. That includes providing a safe environment for all participants, explaining extensively the purpose and general direction of research and at the same time respecting their boundaries at all time. In avoidance of harm I could add avoiding certain emotionally difficult topics and physical precautions when the project requires strolling around the city.

The second axis has to do with anonymity. As I will assure all participants that their names (or personal details that could give away their identities) will at no point be used in my dissertation or any publication that might come out of it. In order to assure total confidentiality I will code ethnographic notes and recordings with pseudonyms and make sure that are encrypted for further security.

Finally I will make sure that the resulting locative artworks will only be used in the context of this research and will not have any commercial or publicised exposure. In order to make sure I communicate those principles to all participants I will provide a written overview of the project along with those ethical considerations to each of them.

Literature Review

Locative media

The starting point for my research project is my interest in the relationship between space, subjectivity and technology. Applications which allow consumption of media in specific geographical locations are often called 'locative media'. Following a stream of research that identifies consumption as immersion into new experiences –a multi-sensory and embodied phenomenon – I have tried interpreting locative media as a field of new consumer experiences. Sherry and Joy (2003) discuss marketing's 'experiential turn' focusing on the materiality of consumer's body. Instead of pursuing a purely discursive analysis of people's opinions, they analyze sensorial data stemming from what is ostensibly material: the body. In their account, it is not the conscious understanding of one's identity and body image that are central in the process of embodiment but rather unconscious impulses, tensions and even contradictions. They use Merleau-Ponty's definition of embodied experience to critically engage with the consumption of art within museum space. In their analysis paintings are not considered as objects presented in empty space; they rather examine the ways spatial, architectural and other environmental stimuli affect the consumption of art and define aesthetic experience as such. Moving away from a purely formalist analysis of art they attempt a relational analysis where art objects activate spaces, facilitate relations and produce meaning. Sherry and Joy pay attention to museums' auditory environments focusing on how audio-guides dictate the experience and activate the *mise-en-scène* of the museum. Visitors experience a certain narrative; pace their view and understanding, get immersed into a parallel temporality.

But what if museum audio guides were more self-reflexive and claimed an independency from their utilitarian modality? What if an audio-guide was ambitious enough to compete with the paintings in artistry, timelessness and affective impact? Artist Janet Cardiff entertains this possibility in her seminal piece *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*. This artwork starts as a conventional historical audio-guide of Whitechapel Library. Soon, the listener understands that the voice descriptions follow a bizarre trajectory. At a certain point the voice suggests that the listener should leave the space of the library: 'Try to follow the sound of my footsteps, she says, so that we can stay together'. Then, she

takes the listener to a 40 minutes tour around east London. During the walk she describes a crime scene and slowly gives hints constructing a mysterious narrative (Pinder, 2007). The narrative forms a complex emotional map of the surrounding space. The art-piece in this case only becomes an art piece through the body of the listener moving through space. The listener has to combine information coming from the environment, a recorded narrative and their personal experience of space. Different memories of the city can activate different aspects of the narrative, familiar streets become strange, and new places are introduced into memory through an interactive story. David Pinder (2007) connects *The Missing Voice* with earlier experiential drifts facilitated by the commercial success of the Sony Walkman, connecting it to Iain Chambers' (2005) analysis of the aural walk. Chambers discusses the phenomenon of urban soundscaping and the new temporalities and spatialities introduced by the widespread use of Walkman music players. The Walkman fills empty times with sensorial stimuli; when waiting for someone, or standing in public transport, it creates a private listening space everywhere.

The listener curates a soundscape, an extra layer of meaning upon every day urban experiences. Chambers is looking at this development as intertwined with late capitalist realities: new need for personalisation of time and at the same time expanded urban landscapes. It is the figure of the nomad: the ones who spend their lives in movement and re-establish loose histories through a series of poetically connected floating signifiers (Chambers, 2005). A nomad's traces are never actually tracing back to their starting point, the traces have only one function: providing a genealogy of nomads' desire to move forward. From the immediacy of physical sounds, or somehow existing environmental sounds (urban noise) we move to an everyday reality of personally curated sounds. From the transparency of sound and voice in public space to the semi-private, virtual auditory chamber that accompanies the listener. Mizuko Ito develops a similar argument regarding listening devices of today (namely smartphones, iPods and other portable mp3 players). Ito theorises the way listening devices create what she calls *perceptive coocons*: micro-spaces that separate us from the others within public space. The phenomenology of space is in this example shaped by the introduction of a mediating layer. Headphones are building an in-between, which has certain temporal

features. For Ito, that space is intrinsically connected with time as it emerges in the presumed as 'dead' time in transitional spaces and/or in public transport (Ito, 2007). The idea of a cocoon, an imaginary spatial separation from the external world, will come back later in the discussion of screen in relation to narcissism. What is persistent in those analyses is the idea of fragmentation. What seems to be obvious is that those smaller handheld devices introduce a different relation to media consumption. It is not a big screen and a pair of loud speakers that organise space and time. The way you are supposed to consume media, the directorial intention loses its strong imperative and gets personalised to the maximum.

Hito Steyerl (2012) in her poetic account of *The Wretched Screen* describes this shift with a focus on new approaches to the cinematic image. Her analysis focuses on video art and the shift from a big central screen to video installations with multiple and bizarre screen surfaces, which prioritise embodied relationality to art-works. Instead of just sitting in a silent dark screening room you wander around, you experience the artwork from different perspectives, you deal with the rest of the walking audience around you. The directorial position is according to Steyerl much more centralised in the instance of cinema screen in which the viewer is almost assumed to act as a form of disembodied gaze. In this new era, multiple relations to the screen are introduced. Cinema, Steyerl tells us, has exploded and the fragments are everywhere, you can access them from different entry points and different points of view and you can never see the whole picture. Fragments are always hiding behind other fragments. Taking this metaphor further we can see how screen-based media has moved from certain spaces to everywhere. It is not only the cinematic screen that has exploded. Television and computer screens have had similar fates. Those little mirrors, those little fragments are everywhere: activated, potent and demanding. Steyerl talks about a gaze that is no longer collective but it is still common, a common image, a common map, a moment of parallel multiplicity of meaning that manages to activate subjective desires. What is missing for Steyerl is the screen as exit, the end of the video projection, a real exit that allows the subject to take a critical distance. The end credits never come, the map turns into a dynamic relationality, scrolling down never reaches bottom. Even when one small screen crashes, another appears in the horizon. This fragmented media environment

gets entangled in the construction of selfhood. Our image, similarly to the fragmented mirrors that allow us to comprehend it, becomes dispersed within time and space. Ourselves become traces on the map, spatialised memories.

Locative media is both the starting point and the culmination of this research methodology. The space around us is not a big atlas with well-defined edges and certain authorship; it is on the contrary the myriad moments of mapping, the relentless cartography of our quotidian lives. Locative media colonise this territory, they offer an audio guide for a not yet become space; a soundscape, images and fictional narratives that show up in order to fill in the gaps of a fractured cartography. In the case of locative media a product of artistic intention mediates our experience. Mediation is yet again *the message*.

In order to create a genealogy of locative media we need to bring together a series of different stories. First of all, we need to investigate the emergence of smartphones with GPS capabilities. According to Adriana de Souza e Silva and Jordan Frith (2010) location aware technologies have changed the function of mobile phones turning them from devices to connect to each other to form what she theorises as 'locative mobile social networks'. That is a significant point of departure as this has indeed changed once more the way we embody space and the way we consume space. Our relation to the Other has increasingly incorporated geographic information. Inclusion of GPS capacities in commercial phones enabled a series of every-day use of location aware applications. According to Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin (2017) 'location-based services comprise the fastest growing sector in web technology businesses'. This shift seems to start happening around 2005, with de Souza e Silva and Sutko (2009) identifying two main factors responsible. Firstly, Google's adoption of geolocation services as central to their package of services. Google Maps launched in 2005 made a highly sophisticated map interface available for every user to access. Secondly the launch of affordable smartphones that incorporated location-based applications with most prominent example the extremely popular first iPhone.

Farman (2012) attempted a historical overview on the emergency of locative media that went far beyond GPS and iPhone. He traced the history of several gadgets through history, which defined how humanity understands time and space. Starting from written

inscriptions and discussing the impact of pocket watches, Farman concludes with an extensive analysis of the function of telephones (initially as landline-bound machines and more recently as handheld mobile devices). He insists that 'the way we represent space has to do with how we embody space' and in this representation there are certain technologies, which play defining role. The body cycles, sleep and waking up, understanding where each member of your body lies, finding our way. And this is an element of locative media that keeps defining the experience of their consumption (Farman, 2012).

For Wilken (2010), mobile media could facilitate an encounter with the Other, the stranger. It is a new possibility among the media production, an extra effective element. Space becomes more open to the possibilities of encounter and the potential impermanent communities are generating new socio-cultural geographies. Wilken is building a post-structuralist argument in order to describe a new type of community, which becomes possible through technology; a community which escape traditional limitations of group dynamics and allows the possibility of difference and fluidity. For Salmond (2010) this discussion could include the potential formation of political communities. In his argument, aspects of locative media could allow the organisation of momentary communities of resistance. Using the example of flash mob he is speculating on a potential reclaim of the public space through location aware technology. For Dodge et al. (2009) new social spaces are governed by different attributes as they are produced in radically different ways. Pervasive internet shapes the experience of space, or more accurately produces space in new ways that allow for the interaction between software, people and their environments.

Space can be transformed into an assemblage of material and virtual elements, which interact and co-create each other. Critical software studies have discussed the relationship between phenomenology of space and augmented reality (Manovich, 2006). Augmented reality unlike older iterations of virtual environments (where the distinction between the virtual and the actual is easily distinguishable) becomes more prevalent in the instance of mobile media. Handheld devices with geolocating capacities enable the production of new environments where virtual objects co-exist with real world ones. Once again, our perception of space is changing, and our experiences within virtual spaces

shape our understanding of *conventional* environments (Liao and Humphreys, 2015).

Lapenta (2011) discusses the intersection of location and image, in a world saturated by digital images that circulate and create complex semiotic networks. I aspire to build on that analysis and investigate the function of those semiotic networks in relation to the process of subjectification. I am interested in analysing how the subject navigates those semiotic networks and how they are affected by this navigation. In order to answer those questions I have to reframe the discussions within a psychosocial context where social and psychic phenomena co-exist in an intricate dialogue. In order to ground this discussion I aspire to focus on the intersection between narrative and space. I am interested not only in the idea of historical narratives but moreover personal and subjective narratives, narratives that bind autobiographical associations with understanding of one's location.

Locative narratives

Before I go into specifics of my understanding of 'spatial narrative' I would like to present some locative projects deal with more socio-historical *narrativization* of space. In 2003, a project named *Murmur*, introduced this idea of oral history by placing a series of site-specific installations, in Toronto. *Murmur* has expanded since then to eight more cities around the world. The central idea remains the same: placing recordings of local people's histories in certain locations in the city. In that way, the murmur team attempts suturing certain oral histories literally onto the urban fabric (Wilken, 2012). They promote a localised understanding of history that does not only focus on a centralised refined historicity but is rather interested in the fragmented and personal, in what is essential native. Unlike an online oral history archive in the murmur project the audience has a chance to interact with the actual environment of the story. Interestingly, the geolocated data are not affected by the changes on site; a regeneration plan, a natural catastrophe, or even the natural decay coming with time affect the environment but those stories remain the same haunting a GPS position, a specific location that might be completely stripped from all other characteristics that gave birth to the original narrative–.

The ghostly effect of this immaterial form of geo-tagged information has allowed for some artworks to comment on that exact phenomenon. Stories of those displaced while cities

has changed, stories that one could not access or even imagine while walking in restructured environments could also find a way to re-emerge through locative media. Such is the case of *Memoryscape Audiowalks* by Toby Butler. In those sound walks recording of stories of people that used to live by Thames River offer a glimpse into the narratives of those displaced. One can listen to the recording while walking by the river getting a different perspective of space (Butler, 2006). *Murmur* and *Memoryscape Audiowalks* are locative arts project that do not use GPS technologies but follow a more conventional combination of a map and an audio file. In that sense they precede thematically similar attempts that utilise smartphones as their main platform and demonstrate the potentiality of developing site-specific work without relying on certain geo-location services. That is an important note as part of the critique of locative projects is targeting their seemingly inevitable entanglement with certain centralised technologies. For the needs of this discussion I assume that the development of easy to access geo-locating technologies allows for a popularisation of locative narratives; once this new medium is established as a possibility in order to retain a critical stand I might then reconsider the ways that those practices could be practiced outside what we might understand as a potentially problematic context.

In many cases of locative applications we see a combination of historical narratives and real navigation with a focus on the augmentation of perception in space. They bring an older or lost version of the city into being; they bring up all the images sounds and voices of what is effectively silenced, destroyed or decayed. The 'Women in Map' project, for example utilises the Google Field Trip platform in order to notify users every time they pass by a location where a 'woman made history'. The project focuses on prominent women that achieved recognition and attempts a feminist re-inscription of history with an empowering aspiration for the users. What history-focused locative projects fail to capture though is the potential interaction of the user with space and the inevitably idiosyncratic element of strolling down the city centre. Although parallelism between contemporary city and memories from the past offer an interesting canvas for exploring tensions, discontinuities and contradictions it still does not allow for a true self-reflective and creative encounter with the city as it ascribes yet another prescribed narrative.

Taking a distance from that model and offering the potentiality of contingency in the

narrativization of space Jason Farman (2015) examines this exact possibility in an almost literal sense as in his analysis space is always narrativised one way or another.

According to Farman, there are certain narratives that are silencing others and certain histories that define space. Those narratives are determined by certain power dynamics. But how can you manipulate the narratives of a location? In order to answer that question Farman distances himself from early studies of digital media that proclaimed the end of materiality. He identifies, on the contrary, a re-emergence of what is undeniably material and he claims new digital reality to be firmly geo-located and embodied.

Mobile media are less about producing digital simulations that replace the material world and are instead more interested in producing ways that the virtual and the material interact in meaningful, embodied ways. (Farman 2015)

The potential political use of those new technologies emerges again. Who can really inscribe place with meaning? Who can control the narrative that seems to be embedded on physical spaces? How do antagonistic voices paint their views on the streets, walls and representations of the city? From graffiti artists to oral historians, from state interventions to new media applications, the answers to those questions seem to entail a complex network of possibilities. Farman developed an application called '*approach*' as part of his research. With '*approach*' he aspires to bring forward counter-narratives and narratives of marginalised groups. '*Approach*' offers the opportunity to its users to develop audio-walks with their personal stories. Farman gives the example of a wheelchair user who gives an audio walk around a largely inaccessible campus. You listen to their voice as you walk around; you follow their struggle and get an embodied experience of their point of view. In this example invisible structures become observable.

Textopia is a project that follows closely the intentions of *approach*. *Textopia* utilises a smartphone application in order to "attach" poems in specific locations. Anders Sundnes Løvlie (2009) gives us an account of an experiment, where a literary workshop produces works of fiction with the intention to attach them in specific areas. Løvlie used the application in order to develop a series of interventions inviting participants to develop their own site-specific poems. This is the closest methodological example to the research plan I intend to develop and therefore it offers useful methodological and theoretical input. Løvlie classified the resulted interventions in three sub-categories:

1. *Placetexts*: Poetic place descriptions, or stories that are placed in certain city locations, but which do not otherwise seem to engage with the specific qualities of the system and could apparently have been written without a locative system in mind.

2. *Voice sculptures*: Poetic texts which usually address the reader directly in the second person, and in which the poetic voice/narrator appears to be aware that it is speaking as a recording to a reader/user present in the same location, but at a later time, and uses this situation as a poetic or rhetorical tool.

3. *Stray voices*: Series of texts which form stories that move from place to place, requiring the user to physically traverse the landscape of the story in order to traverse the text of the story (though not necessarily in linear sequence). (Løvlie, 2009)

Psychogeography

Many of the projects presented here (like *Approach* and *Textopia*) belong to a generation of smartphone applications whose genealogies trace back to the psychogeographic tradition. Psychogeography is a central concept in my research as it brings together political critique, urban exploration, and creative practice. Psychogeography, as Coverley puts it, is a term that resists definition. Deriving from a political movement but also developed as an art practice, Psychogeography combines the early twentieth century's perceptions of urban space, political aspiration to resist capitalism and a sense of artistic avant-garde. Psychogeography can be a practice, a literary expression, a political strategy even a new set of metaphysical beliefs (Coverley, 2010). The origins of psychogeography trace back to the 1950s group, the Lettrists, precursors of Situationist International. According to one of the most prominent members of the group, Guy Debord, psychogeography was a practical attempt into "transforming urban life". Debord, held that psychogeography could be an effective study of geographical environments in relation to the emotions and/or behaviour of individuals: 'The secrets of the city are, at a certain level decipherable, but the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable.' (Debord, 1967)

The Situationist International attempted a critique of contemporary urban environment

presenting it as space of social control. Their analysis of cities take in account the psychic impact of architectural structures and urban planning and the emotional imprints of material infrastructure. The political and the psychic become interwoven as the city turns into a metaphor for the turbulent mental life of the subject. Situationist practices include getting lost in the city; exploring space becomes an art practice, and thus maps and territories turn into a synesthetic terrain for introspection and political action. Inspired by that, a series of Locative art projects focus on producing alternative mappings, creative cartographies of personal stories, open-ended explorations, and distracted navigation. The city remains the scenery for the artwork and the 'spectator' activates or even produces the artwork through a series of interactive practices.

Central in the Psychogeographic oeuvre is the figure of the *flâneur*, the romantic figure of an urban explorer, a connoisseur of the streets. The figure of the *flâneur* comes from Walter Benjamin's take on Baudelaire's poetry, and is the image of a modern man walking around the city, finding himself in the reflections of the streets and the openness of possibilities coming from the developments in the emerging metropolises (Coverley, 2010).

The *flâneur* is an individual stroller who gets lost and explores the city by himself. The figure of the *flâneur* does not only play a role in understanding the city but becomes himself a part of the modern city, he becomes a figure that represents urban life. Drawing parallels with that figure, a contemporary urban figure would stroll around clutching a mobile device that can mediate their navigation. Getting lost might be an impossibility until battery dies.

Another key concept in psychogeographic practice is that of the *dérive*: the idea of an unplanned journey. A *dérive* take place while you let your unconscious guide you, when you find a way to navigate space using an unconscious stream of thoughts and desires (Coverley, 2010). It is essentially a disruption of the late capitalism's everyday routines and an exploration of a potentially creative encounter with one's urban environment. Bringing new technologies in that equation changes the parameters of the discussion. As we saw before, getting lost is a tough business when you carry GPS enabled smartphone. Certain smartphone applications play with the prospect of a guided *dérive*, a technologically enhanced psychogeographic exploration. As contradictory as it sounds,

Serendipitor is an application that aspires opening up the possibility of getting lost within a specific area by providing a randomised walk between two points on the map. The user has to enter beginning and ending points and then a random route is generated. The application boasts that 'it helps you find something by looking for something else'. A more developed concept and more straightforwardly influenced by psychogeography is the *Dérive* app. According to the developer's description of the project:

The active engagement of communities in their urban spaces unleashes in them new understanding of their urban surroundings, to open up channels of dialogue between individuals and groups through a device that makes the unpacking of urban space part of a game.

Dérive app offers a series of 'decks', packages with cards suggesting specific actions that users have to follow. The suggestions vary from physical actions to moments of introspection, suggested interactions with the environment or the people around you. The game extends to different locations and the developers invite its users to develop their own decks that reflect on specific conditions of specific places. The experiences generated by those applications allow us to rethink the potentiality of new media in enabling creative understandings of urban environments.

Locative games

As we have seen, psychogeographic projects incorporate the city in a creative interactive exchange. Wondering in the city acquires the status of an art practice and the material city becomes an active element for a series of explorative games. When it comes to smartphone applications, not surprisingly, the most developed areas of Locative Media have to do with gaming. Location-aware games are usually mixed reality games where elements from the real world are combined with augmented reality narratives mixing virtual and physical space.

Drakopoulou (2010) examines how location-based games change the way the world is being materialized. She reviews a series of locative games that have been developed the past decade. Some of those projects have managed to introduce recreational locative technologies into bigger audiences. Drakopoulou focuses on games developed by Blast Theory, a group of artists working on interactive media, based in Brighton. One of the first

attempts by Blast Theory into developing locative games was 'Can you see me now?', a virtual hide and seek where two groups of people were competing. In this game two cities were layered one upon each other. On one level it was the map of the actual physical city, on a second level the map of a virtual city. Online players could 'wonder around' in the virtual city using their keyboard and they would lose if they got close to one of the 'runners' who were running in the actual city. A concept simple yet confusing to describe allowed for a questioning of space and embodiment. The co-existence of a virtual and a real space, the thrill of 'hunting' someone who is far away in front of a computer screen and the encounter of real city places and scenes you would not normally see in your everyday life allowed for a rich reflection upon the ways we understand and experience space. Blast Theory has since produced a series of applications that utilise GPS as part of their gameplay such as '*Uncle Roy Is All around you*' and '*I Like Frank in Adelaide*' (Drakopoulou, 2010).

Blast Theory has operated as a locative avant-garde in Europe but there are certain examples of locative projects that got more mainstream attention. One of those cases is Mogi, a Japanese popular Locative Game that had commercial success and was played throughout Japan from 2003 to 2006. In their analysis of the phenomenon Licoppe and Inada (2009) examine the ways this location-based game created a 'location-sensitive' culture with certain shifts in collective behaviour. In their virtual ethnography they managed to identify a series of issues primarily focusing on the danger of stalking, a negative side effect of virtual cultures. They use specific case studies that manifest location sensitivity spilling into real life. Web cultures offer a sense of safe distance (although we have seen cases of cyber stalking and bullying) with a certain level of anonymity and relative ease of disengagement. In the context of collective locative gaming the aspect of anonymity remains but takes a different turn as the possibility of a real, material encounter appears. Merging the 'real' with the 'virtual' brings forward new questions regarding privacy.

Last May, Harvard's student Aran Khanna launched an application that took advantage of Facebook messenger's security flaw. His application used the geo-location feature that is activated by default on Facebook messenger in order to track other users' positions. By installing this extension to your browser you could see on a map the location of all the

people you have ever talked on Facebook. The security issue was later fixed and the application was withdrawn but the fact that a programmer could easily have access to users' personal data was indicative of new media's problems when it comes to privacy and control of personal information. Khannas project was an application that played with locative data. The map becomes here a metaphor for privacy, being able to trace the movement of fellow Facebook users has an unsettling effect as you realise what location tracing actually looks like. Those lines on the map (usually) uncovering no more than the usual banality of everyday routines once publicly available bring forward the uncanny effect of the ubiquitous surveillance of our era.

Contrary to those examples of locative games, *Ingress* is an application that has managed to gain large mainstream attention: Google developed *Ingress* and it is essentially an augmented reality massively multiplayer game for smartphones. All previous examples have more or less of a niche target audience but *Ingress* has managed to create a global community of loyal players. According to *Ingress's* main storyline the world around us has been invaded by an unknown substance named exotic matter. As a response to this discovery two large fractions have been formed: One fights for the total spread of the exotic matter, and one fights against the spread. The innovative aspect of *Ingress* though is not the storyline but indeed the gameplay.

The map of the game coincides with the real map; the energy portals are actual physical locations and in order for a user to interact with them they have to really go near them. The game uses GPS technology in order to make sure the payers are interacting with space and quite often the portals are placed near existing urban landmarks such as monuments, churches, parks etc. *Ingress* has been praised for its unique interactivity and has gathered a community of players who extended the main narrative and formed relationships that go beyond the game. The popularity of the game is due to both its innovative gameplay and because Google has backed it up with resources and a successful marketing campaign. What is also noted though is that 'Ingress is one of the most seductive and prolific data-mining tools to be introduced in the last decade' (Hulsey and Reeves, 2014). Hulsey and Reeves in their critical account of *Ingress* present a series of concerns regarding the new hybridic spaces that emerge in augmented reality games such as *Ingress*. According to their analyses those games rely on the close

interconnectivity between users' personal information such as his/her location in order to progress into the game's narrative.

Ingress thrive on the surveillance and redirection of player mobility through targeted commercial and non-commercial spaces. Through its embedded game mechanics, Ingress encourages players to actively participate in a surveillance community while also normalizing data mining and surveillance as a valid exchange for the privilege of play.

(Hulsey and Reeves, 2014)

Similarly, Ingress was deemed a 'gold mine for augmented reality' games by media theorist Hal Hodson (2012), who claims that the location-based game allows for the production of richer data for both Niantic and Google. Ingress was able to mobilise a large audience that was able to form communities, who could meet and interact in the public space. But more importantly the users would feed to the game information with regards to certain landmarks from the perspective of the locals. This information was later used in the development of Pokemon GO.

And the importance of Ingress is explicitly underlined by its successor game Pokemon GO. Pokemon GO is important in my theorisation as I use it as a case study in my final chapter. Pokemon GO is location-based augmented reality game. The main imperative of the game is for the user to collect as many different Pokémon as possible. The innovation of Pokemon GO comes from the fact that the Pokémon are spread within the actual city rather than in a virtual world of the video-game. The player, accesses this augmented map through their mobile phone and they experience a narrativised version of the city. Most of the theoretical reflections on Pokemon GO focus on the aspect of physical activity (Althoff et al., 2016; Serino et al., 2016). These theorists, coming from medical and public health perspectives are comparing the bad influence 'traditional' video-games have on children exercise patterns and see an indisputable change. On the other hand, research projects such as that by LeBlanc et al. (2017) focus on the danger of injuries coming from players walking in the public place while focusing on their screens. Despite the fact that the most bibliography on Pokemon GO focuses on the socio-medical aspect of the phenomenon, my analysis take a more explicitly political angle.

The Politics of mediation

The example of Pokemon GO opens up the discussion to include locative media examples that went beyond fringe framework of artistic practices and entered the mainstream. My approach to locative media and my overall methodology focuses on the possibility of political disruption of normative regimes of power. Nevertheless I have to acknowledge the many critical voices coming from media studies. It is important not to forget, that even when virtual potentials allow for new forms of resistance, there are material bedrocks that keep in place certain power structures. When grounding the discussion of locative media into their specific historical context we face certain realities we need to note. Tracing for example the history of Global Positioning System (GPS), one of the main pre-conditions for most cases in locative art, we see that it started as American military project. GPS was developed and is sustained as part of the military industrial complex and this still influences its current uses.

Despite the potential locative media have in creating site-specific experiences, facilitating the formation of location-based communities and changing the experience of space, a series of theorists have expressed certain concerns considering the political repercussions of the latent mainstreamisation of those applications. Andreas Broeckmann accused locative media artists for being the avant-garde of society of control (Tuters and Varnelis, 2006). For Broeckmann it seems that locative media can only signify the appropriation of technologies of surveillance and control and this should be explicitly addressed and dealt by all locative art practitioners. He is also stressing that GPS technologies could not exist outside the military industrial complex and thus any idea of 'connectedness' or 'locative community' would be inevitably mediated on an infrastructural level by military technology. Bleecker and Knowlton (2006) also express their concern regarding the military entanglement with GPS technologies. They comment on the fact that locative media could not exist without the military research and the 400 million dollars annual cost to maintain the Global Positioning System. They also present connections in terms of funding and material support between specific locative arts projects and military expenditures (Bleecker & Knowlton 2006). It is worth mentioning, that the Internet was also a US military project that was further developed and acquired an autonomous status. However, the discussion of infrastructure is still crucial as very

often, digital cultures are promoting a form of 'invisible' design obfuscating the material preconditions for digital technologies to exist (Arnall, n.d.). Timo Arnall suggests that designers, software developers and engineers should insist on making infrastructure visible, thematise who builds those infrastructures and essentially who controls them.

Pinder discusses how locating oneself through technology creates a technological unconscious as the invisible infrastructure that allows for the process is being disavowed. The mechanisms remain unseen and thus it becomes naturalised (Pinder, 2007).

Galloway (2010) avoids making yet another prediction about the future of locative media and mobile media in general and instead, she presents a sociology of already existing predictions, showing the potential political implications of prediction making. She ends up with a series of questions, articulating a critique regarding who has the power to offer predictions for the future, what kind of narratives are silenced when locative media are assumed to be the next big thing and how does predicting the future in a specific way, allows or forecloses possibilities of political alliances and strategies in the presence.

Another thought-provoking critique of locative media comes from Mary Flanagan who warns that blurring into physical can cause a form of "entertainment colonization", in which the players unwillingly commoditise unaware bystanders (Farman, 2014). The world is turning into a hybridic spectacle; a dirty alley becomes the scenery for a horror story and passers-by become a spectacle of an audioguide documentary regarding the violent dispossession of urban re-generation. Entertainment expands in public space but can be accessed only by those who have the cultural capital. The rest remain actors that involuntary play the role of the 'real world'; their presence has been augmented but they have no idea.

Pinder as I mentioned earlier, wonders how we can rethink locative media in the rise of surveillance and constant obsession with being 'located', a constant sense of being on the map, of always being geo-centred (Pinder, 2013). He argues for new dis-locative projects that will allow us to critically posit ourselves within the sea of geo-specific functions. For Pinder, many artists engage with GPS without dealing with the political problems that stem from the medium. He nevertheless identifies certain practitioners who reflect critically on their GPS enabled work. Paula Levine developed one of the pieces he discusses, titled *Shadows from Another Place*. For this piece Levine overlaid two

different maps, of San Francisco and of Bagdad. She identified several points where bombs have been dropped in Bagdad and then noted those points on the San Francisco map. With the help of a GPS navigator located those spots on the actual city of San Francisco and hid a series of capsules containing information about the Bagdad areas that were bombed. Different layers of geographic information allowed for an embodied unsettling of space. An arbitrary distribution of points that were produced when placing a map over another map (a practice echoing Situationist ethos) opens up the possibility for a different understanding of social reality. As Pinder (2013) notices, Levine blurs the lines between the domestic and the foreign, what is deemed outside returns to haunt familiar temporalities.

Representing location, mapping realities and locating oneself on the map are central in every discussion around locative media. The map becomes fundamental part of everyday lives, changing local environments (and the sense of locality). Discussing the politics of mediation opens up space to also reflect on the process of cartography as such. History provides us of countless examples on how mapping is not only an objective representation of geographic realities but it is rather influenced if not determined by certain systems of power and knowledge (Harvey, 1976). It becomes obvious that maps and navigation instruments shape our perception of our world. The devices and technologies we use are creating a double image of our body in space and our position in a cartographic simulation. As we saw earlier military institutions and we largely control GPS technology as users have little knowledge or control in relation to this system.

Certain theorists and practitioners have suggested we should extend our critiques and form alternative infrastructures that would, if not antagonise GPS, at least de-naturalise it. One example is the Open Positioning System (OPS) by German artist Philipp Ronnenberg, an alternative positioning system that works by triangulating seismic frequencies produced by generators in power plants, water turbines, pumping stations, or large machines in factories. If the sensor, held in contact with a wall or the ground, can detect seismic frequencies from three known sources, its location can be established. Ronnenber attempts to show that we can think of location outside the narrow GPS-centric model and avoid becoming part of a highly centralised and regulated technology (Pinder, 2013).

At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that through the mass use of GPS-enabled devices, maps have increasingly become much more accessible and open to user-generated interventions. In order to discuss this development, Gazzard (2011) examines the Foursquare community along with augmented reality services such as Layer. The opening of maps to idiosyncratic and subjective alterations from users is an issue that links to the psychogeographic methods I presented earlier and at the same time opens up space for a discussion regarding the presence and future of mapping as an open ended subjective process. In that sense the boundaries between corporate and grassroots, normative and disruptive, and critical and market oriented are once again blurred and disputed.

Subjectivity in the post-human era

At that point a theoretical question emerges: can we critically reflect on mobile media without reducing them into their constitutive preconditions? Without losing an eye on the political implications we need to extend our arguments by also exploring the potential moments of rupture and the potentiality for social change. Donna Haraway in her seminal cyborg manifesto (1999) attempted to engage with questions of technological progress without subscribing to an inevitable techno-utopian future. In her account of the cyborg she is describing a new type of subjectivity that emerges in the intersection between technology and the body. Unlike the science-fiction cyborgian representations, Haraway's cyborg is not only a hybridic creation that combines synthetic and biological parts; it is also an assemblage of narratives, information, virtual elements; its body, its own flesh has been inscribed with multiple genealogies and has been open to processes of re-signification becoming able to depart from the preconditions of its creation. This is the cyborgian figure that continues to inspire us to think outside the logic of the techno-capitalism in the postmodern context because cyborgs are the children of capitalist production and patriarchal economy, but nevertheless, they are capable of starting a new era without carrying their ancestral sins. The strategy to achieve that might appear vague or idealistic but it offers a model that can organise our theoretical arguments; it allows us to not give up on the idea that a cyborgian body, an augmented body, a post-human body can still be the locus of resistance. In order to identify those issues, we need to first give an account of this specific body; the body that is marked by signifying systems,

social apparatuses and psychic drives; the material body. This might seem a paradoxical starting point when thinking of a digital media project, however this is how I ground my main arguments: the body becomes actualised through mediation and the only meaningful comment on mediation comes through a certain reflection on the process of embodiment.

We should not limit our discussion of extended digital self into structural elements that allow for this new form of subjectivity into being. In addition to that we should give space for what appears as the direct experience, the affective and phenomenological understanding of technological phenomena. Technological mediation is essentially a productive condition for everyday experiences and technology shapes experience as such. As mentioned earlier locative media can elucidate this exact function. Their experiential output is bound to the users' embodiment. Vanderbeeken (2011) discusses the phenomenology of technology by focusing on the multiple functions of screens. He argues that screens are not to be understood as 'windows' to a world of pre-given data but rather as an in-between that can be a mediator and generator of reality at the same time. On a similar note, Van Den Eede (2011) extends the discussion to new transparent technological designs where mediation is being obscured by the structural 'invisibility' of pervasive technologies. He objects this development as he connects it to a new form of governmentality where power structures remain invisible and further naturalised. Van Den Eede manages to convey his phenomenological argument into a political critique that echoes ideas of mediation and infrastructures I discussed earlier.

But how can those immaterial forms of mediation affect the core of us? How are we changing within the realm of possibility opened up by new gadgets and applications? Critical software studies have studied in length the new perception opened up by virtual and augmented realities (Manovich, 2006). On the domain of consumption following Belk's conceptualisation of the 'extended self', we are talking for a 'self' that is actualised through a series of consumer choices, but we enter a new era where the notion of extended self becomes increasingly performative and immaterial rather than referring to specific material, acquired objects. Materiality seems contested as it only emerges through the performative enactment of the consumer. The limits of identity formation are exponentially expanded to include unreal impossibilities. Bodies and cognitive functions

shift and even get outsourced to commercialised institutions. Memory, for example, gets digitalised on the cloud exporting the process of recollection. Navigation through space is almost completely coupled with mobile devices and increasingly so is navigation through social relations too.

In this context, the discussion linking new technologies with subjectivity employs concepts such as that of the post-human. The post-human consumer is not confined within her body's capacities but she is rather a cyborgian entity whose identity, body and brain are all bound to certain technological developments. The idea of the post-human will keep re-emerging throughout my research as it signifies a breaking point in the ways we theorise humanity, technology and politics. My preoccupation with 'post-humanist' discourses focuses on the idea of enhanced humanity and on the potentialities of new technologies that shift our perception affecting our embodied consciousness. Preester (2011) offers in her work a fascinating account of such an entanglement between subjectivity and technology. She does not only showcase the current shift in the ways we understand our world through certain cognitive mechanisms but most importantly she describes the shift in subjectivity as such. Subjectivity here refers to notions of consciousness, agency and truth rather than placing a computer-like cognitive model in the centre of analysis. The idea of a changing consciousness allows us to reflect on the ways technology impacts the intimate psychic elements.

A significant tension in the post-human discourses since their early conceptualisation lies in the different political alliances within the discipline. On one hand there was a dominant techno-futurist tendency that saw technological developments as necessarily helpful for humankind. On the other hand a more critical tension aspired to deconstruct certain humanist ideals and maintain a critical distance from an metaphysical obsession with progress. This exact debate presented by Broderick (2013) is captured in the distinction between trans-humanism and post-humanism. In the first grouping he includes examples of optimistic futurism that focuses on the technical potential of enhanced bodies and in the second category the more critical and philosophical texts that focus on the domain of subjectification. Fliieger (2010) articulates the distinction between trans-humanism and post-humanism in accordance to the four Lacanian discourses and aligns the trans-humanist utopian tendency with the Discourse of the University while the critical

post-humanist with the discourse of the Analyst.

Flieger and a number of other theorists have worked on the idea of bridging of psychoanalysis and post-humanist theories, aiming to the building of a hybridic discourse. The two discourses share similarities as they both insisted on the incompleteness as fundamental for what we conceptualise as human condition. On one hand post-humanism insists on what is added, and on the other, psychoanalysis emphasises what is cut, hidden or disavowed. Veronique Voruz (2010) insists on identifying post-human discourse as a symptom of our time, opening up the discussion towards what she theorises as the 'radical outside' that organises our actions. In order to develop her argument, she draws from Lacan's Seminar 17 and the idea of *lathouses* presented there, to describe the complex relationship between scientific knowledge, technology and subjective truth. In this seminar, Lacan focuses on the concept of 'alethosphere', a concept that will play a central role in my analysis of media cultures, as it offers an analysis of what we perceive as real, how we access it and how that shapes our understanding of ourselves. In this seminar Lacan also introduces the metaphor of 'gadgets' that plug into desire. Lacan borrows the English word 'gadget' as it offers a suitable metaphor for the modality and artificiality of desiring process. Playing with the double connotation of these gadgets, I will attempt to draw parallels between the Lacanian gadgets and the actual technological gadgets of our times and discuss the potential correspondences. Tomšič (2012) drawing from the same Lacanian seminar– discusses the concept of *lathouses*, which is deployed in order to describe the function of jouissance and the relation of the later to technology. Both inquiries informed my understanding of technology as a process in relation to the process of subjectification opening up the possibility of theorising the radical negativity of the Lacanian Real within the realm of technology studies. On the same strand Bryant (2012) presents an argument of post-human technologies within the psychoanalytic ontological framework. This particular segment comes with a heavy load of psychoanalytic jargon. Before I attempt to justify the use, define the content and contextualise those concepts I need to attest that psychoanalysis will provide my main analytical scope throughout this project. In the next segment I will attempt mapping my psychoanalytic readings and focus on specific set of ideas and concepts that organise my thought.

Psychoanalytic theory

As stated earlier, psychoanalysis is a discipline that informs most of my theoretical readings and plays a central role in the way I organise my analyses. Concepts such as the unconscious, drive, fantasy, jouissance, repression and disavowal, along with their contextual meanings, will keep on returning throughout my work. Before I get into specific theoretical issues I would like to present my basic bibliographical starting points in relation to psychoanalytic discourse.

My attempt to map a psychoanalytic bibliography faces certain dangers and limitations. Psychoanalysis is an ambiguous if not controversial subject with a long and contradictory history. Inevitably, every attempt to use 'psychoanalysis' in the context of social sciences evokes a certain fear. Is the researcher trying to 'psychoanalyse' society? Can social issues be reduced into psychic phenomena; can a *clinical* discourse give an adequate account of society? So, before we discuss the epistemological qualities and political implications of psychoanalysis we are facing an even more fundamental methodological issue regarding the suitability of psychoanalysis in studies of the social.

Historically speaking, Freud himself was not indifferent to analysing cultural and social phenomena. Early on in his writings he raised philosophical questions regarding the nature of society drawing from his newfound psychic structures (REF Freud 1913, 1921, 1930). In those works, Freud contemplates issues of group psychology, kinship, interpersonal relations, religion and others. What makes those works important though is that they break away from a strict sociology and link psychological phenomena with social realities without reducing neither of the two into the other.

However, psychoanalysis is primarily a field of knowledge developed to function on clinical level. Stavrakakis discusses the tension between psychoanalytic clinical discourse and psychoanalytically informed political analysis in his work *Lacan and the Political* (2005). He identifies a long tradition of psychoanalytic literature that builds on the Freudian legacy, treating society as a patient and theorisations of social problems as some sort of psychopathology. Stavrakakis suggests a more nuanced psycho-social approach which focuses on the perplexed interconnections between the social and psychic field instead of simply psychologising the social.

Concepts such as the unconscious, narcissism, defence mechanisms of the ego, life and death drives and structures of the psychic organ have indeed a long presence within the domains of critical theory (from Frankfurt School to post-structuralism) sometimes diverging from the original Freudian conceptualisation but retaining an inevitable referentiality. Psychoanalytic concepts surface throughout my work with their definitions mainly informed by the Freudian texts themselves (REF Freud 1895, 1889, 1999, 1920, 1923). Taking in account that this work aspires to be read by an audience that is not necessarily accustomed to the psychoanalytic jargon, I intend to provide definitions to all psychoanalytic concepts and I will attempt contextualising said concepts within their historical and epistemic framework. In certain cases, French psychoanalytic tradition and the work of Jacques Lacan explicitly informs my understanding of those concepts. Lacan attempted a radical reading of Freud influenced by contemporary theoretical tendencies such as phenomenology and structuralism offering new perspectives on psychoanalytic epistemology (Rabaté, 2010). Two essential resources that function as a compass in my journey within psychoanalytic theories are the works of Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) and Dylan Evans (1996), which catalogue Freudian and Lacanian terms with conceptual definitions and references within the original texts.

The particular reading of Freud by Lacan has been influential in social theoretical circles for the past decades with major theorists such as Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler and others appropriating certain aspects of Lacanian theory in order to advance their arguments. One of the most notorious members of the heterogeneous group, Slavoj Žižek has contributed in the theorisation of ideology in the context of late capitalism and offers an 'orthodox Lacanian' reading of cultural representations and contemporary political phenomena. For my work I draw from his analysis of ideological phenomena and his focus on jouissance (Žižek, 2004, 1989).

Central in my understanding of psychoanalytic discourse is the eclectic appropriation of Lacan's work from feminist and queer theory scholars. Psychoanalysis has a long history of gender/sexuality related controversies. Starting from the Freudian 'penis envy' and the patriarchal focus on the 'lacking' women and reaching psychiatric pathologisation of 'deviant' sexualities, psychoanalysis has been used to substantiate a series of reactionary gender and sexuality related discourses. Feminist scholars, however, were

able to define those moments where the Freudian project was more subversive than the people who partake in it and re-appropriate some of its core concepts in order to develop an antagonistic feminist ontology. Juliet Mitchell (2001) is one of the first feminist theories to engage with psychoanalytic theory, identifying in those theories the potential to subvert gender essentialism. Her readings of Lacan along with those of Jacqueline Rose (2001), Jane Gallop (1996) and Elizabeth Grosz (1990) have shaped the way I read and approach Lacanian theory. In the same political tradition, a series of queer theorists have used in their work psychoanalytic accounts of the relationship between embodiment, sexual difference and discourse (Bersani, 1995; Dean, 2000; Edelman, 2007). Judith Butler's idea of performativity, for example, examines this relationship critically engaging with feminist Lacanian discourses (Butler, 1993, 1990).

In addition to those another major influence on my analysis of smartphone screens comes from psychoanalytically informed cinema studies. Laura Mulvey's work, drawing from a diverse body of sources including Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, problematizes the gaze of the Other and politicises the visual field denaturalising the phenomenology of visual perception (Mulvey, 1999). Another important figure from feminist film studies with an exceptional position in my writing is Joan Copjec (Copjec, 2015b, 2004), whose critique of biopolitics have informed my current political analysis of surveillance. Closing this brief mapping of psychoanalytic references, I should include Zupančič's work on ethics. In her book *Ethics of the Real* (2012) she poses a series of questions regarding the relation between ethics and the Lacanian Real that has inspired me to attempt an exploration of what I call 'geographies of the real'.

In order to formulate an argument that unites poetics and psychoanalytic conceptions such as the symbolic order and the unconscious, I follow Julia Kristeva's theorisation of the 'Semiotic Chora' as presented in the *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva, 2006). Kristeva argues that what is missing in the Lacanian theory of signification (according to which the subject completely gives up on the boundless pre-linguistic enjoyment in order to acquire the paternal law) is a whole new field of affective processes: what she calls the 'semiotic'. The semiotic is, according to Kristeva, a prerequisite for the acquisition of language and it encompasses in its realm all the bodily tensions, fluctuations and

circulations of psychic energy, which allow the infant's pre-linguistic relations to the world. Kristeva insists that the semiotic, after its repression and subsequent incorporation into the unconscious, could become a destabilising force as it re-emerges through the poetic function. Without committing to Kristeva's political stratification with modernist avant-garde writing, I would like to retain the analytical rigour of her argument in order to advance my understanding of contemporary modes of signification and their subversive potential. Kristeva's work is extremely important as it links poetics and the aesthetic understanding of creativity with discourse analysis and semiotics. In a way, she offers a bridge between a more creative approach and theory. Kristeva offers a combination of semiotics and psychoanalysis using Mikhail Bakhtin's formalism, a theoretical intervention that allowed for the analysis of intertextuality as part of symbolic social structures. In her analysis the word is essentially spatialised as its mediating function incorporates three dimensions (subject-addressee-context). She offers an analysis of the drives, theorised as charges, as well as psychical marks that organise the Semiotic Chora; a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases. The Semiotic Chora cannot be represented and you can only access it through poetic discourse and creative methodologies. Chora comes into being through a process of displacement and condensation and relates to different zones of the fragmented body to each of the external objects (Kristeva, 2006).

Narcissism

Central in my work is the psychoanalytic understanding of selfhood and subjectivity. In order to approach this thematic in relation to media I often employ theorisations of narcissism. In the past decade, especially in the rise of mobile media and social networks, narcissism has re-emerged as concern in the social sphere. These critiques of narcissistic modernity echo Christopher Lasch's claims made in his seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism* (Lasch, 1991). Lasch focuses on the US which he considers the paradigmatic example of modern narcissist culture. Heavily influenced by psychoanalytic discourses of his time, Lasch makes a conservative argument according to which the best response to narcissist culture is a return to traditional family structures.

Elizabeth Lunbeck (2014) revisits Lasch's argument in the era of social media in order to further develop her critique of narcissistic American culture. In her analysis she examines

psychological accounts of narcissistic personality disorder. Otto Kernberg was one of the pioneers in the study of narcissism as a pathology and his work was heavily influenced by psychoanalytic theories of his time (2004). Most relevant bibliography in consumer culture studies relies on similar accounts of narcissistic personality as pathology (Andreassen et al., 2017; Cagle, 1994; Lambert and Desmond, 2013). Marketing research around narcissism has certainly increased in the era of social media (Cisek et al., 2014; Halpern et al., 2016; Sheldon and Bryant, 2016). John Desmond in his book *Psychoanalytic Accounts of Consuming Desire: Hearts of Darkness* (2013) is the theorist from consumer studies that engages with the theoretical implications of psychoanalytic theory.

Following his example I expand my readings and theoretical arguments further from a model of psychological pathologisation. Following the work of writers who subscribe to a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework I had the opportunity to re-approach narcissism not as a pathological condition but rather as a precondition of for the emergence of the ego. Crucial in this reading was the theorisations of narcissism developed by psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche (2013) who expands on Lacanian theorisations of the subject and the work by Raul Moncayo (2008) who focuses on the Lacanian conceptualisation of narcissism and its relation to the ego formation. Following a similar theoretical approach, art theorist Amelia Jones developed her account of radical narcissism which plays a central role in my analysis of selfie culture. Jones coined the term radical narcissism in order to describe feminist body art from the seventies. The artworks Jones discusses centralise the image of the artists who made them. Women avant-garde artists in the seventies intentionally portrayed their own bodies in their work in an attempt to disrupt the normative circulation of female images used as models in artworks made by male artists (Jones, 2007; Jones and Stephenson, 2005). Joan Copjec attempts an analysis of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, a series of stylised self-portraits. For Copjec, narcissism is function that heavily relies on the Other and as such is imbued by love (Copjec, 2004).

While the feminist critique of the seventies had an undeniably emancipatory aim, the case studies I examine vis-à-vis narcissism do not necessarily serve an emancipatory political project but in their own ways disrupt certain political normative regimes. In order

to trace the possibility of non-emancipatory and non-humanist political strategies I embraced the theorisation of 'over-identification' a political strategy in art coming from Slavoj Žižek's (2014) analysis of Slovenian rock band/avant garde collective, Laibach. The art duo BAVO has written a lot on over-identification in art, taking the work of Žižek as a starting point and focusing on certain examples of what they describe as anti-humanist art.

My psychoanalytic readings of narcissism also include certain queer readings of Freud's theory of homosexuality. Leo Bersani, in his close reading of the Freudian theory, re-claims the accusation according to which male homosexuals are trapped in their narcissistic desire in order to substantiate a new ontology. According to Bersani, homosexual desire is not constructed around identity but around sameness which opens up the possibility of a social co-existence that does not require the extermination of difference (Bersani, 2002). Following Bersani's argument on cruising and Tom Roach's adaptation of the argument in order to discuss gay dating applications, I develop an account of Grindr in relation to psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity (Roach, 2015a).

Roach's analysis links Grindr and other gay dating applications to certain Lacanian theories that go beyond the traditional oedipal narratives. The concept of the *Sinthome* as developed by Jacques Lacan in his twenty-third seminar (1976) is central in my arguments around human subjectivity. *Sinthome* comes after Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher, and Félix Guattari, a French psychiatrist co-authored their book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) which presented a fierce critique against psychoanalysis. Deleuze and Guattari criticised psychoanalysis for claiming that the only way to exist is by being submitted to the law of castration. I discuss the problematic of castration and the post-oedipal theories in the fourth chapter. *Sinthome* was a term used by Lacan to signify a new way of constructing subjectivity that goes beyond castration. Lacan in his theorisation of the *sinthome* combines ideas of topology and his reading of James Joyce. For Lacan, Joyce is the archetypal sinthomatic subject which constructed his own relation to the symbolic order. In order to understand and use the argument of the *sinthome* I followed relevant readings by Bristow (2017), Harari (2002) and Moncayo (2017). In order to better understand the connections between the work of James Joyce and the new relationality to language that Lacan describes, I followed the theorisation of

Thurston (2010) and MacCannell (2008).

Psychoanalysis and space

Cultural geographical readings of Freud have allowed for a new understanding of social space as both material and phenomenological. Space is where psyche operates, and psyche is analysed through spatial metaphors. The borders between metaphor and materiality blur as we encounter new schemata of internalised spaces and fantasies projected onto material environments.

Kingsbury and Pile in the collective volume *Psychoanalytic Geographies* (2014) suggest a series of new possibilities opened up by the adoption of psychoanalytic notions in geographic enquiries. Kingsbury in his earlier account of psychoanalysis as a 'gay spatial science' (2003) suggested we should include fantasy and desire in analyses of social space; fantasy and desire should not be confined within the domain of the individual but should be radically understood as both internal and open-ended structures. Kingsbury suggests a new articulation of the body, space and subjectivity, concepts that as I mentioned earlier are central to my theoretical reflections. In an attempt to bridge Lefebvre's theories of space with Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kingsbury produces new conceptions of space where identity, fantasy and desire are implicated in the production of both meaning and space. Kingsbury's work, drawing from the long tradition of psychoanalytic spatial metaphors, focuses on the idea of 'extimacy' which he claims to be an interesting instance where geography could borrow psychoanalytic spatial metaphors in order to describe certain attributes of material space. He focuses on the concept of 'extimacy' (a translation of the French *éxtimité*), a concept that Lacan developed in order to describe the paradoxical structure of the human psyche where the 'deepest' internal function is shaped by the external world; an impossible, in conventional geometry, structure, where the inside becomes external and vice versa (Kingsbury, 2007)

Pile, in his monograph *The Body and the City* (2006), attempts an extensive explication of psychoanalysis and cultural geography. His focus on the body as the locus of signification and the contested territory between internal psychic life and external reality opens the discussion on the potentiality and limitations of psychoanalytic theory in cultural geography. Pile is also interested in the ways Freud theorises geography of

dreams and attempts to show how such a creative account can be useful in understanding the real-world human geographies (Pile, 2006). Similarly, Grosz and Eisenman combine psychoanalytic ideas with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to describe the body as a Mobius strip where interior shifts into exterior and vice versa (Grosz and Eisenman, 2001).

Psychoanalysis in consumer culture

Management and marketing studies have themselves a long and turbulent relationship with psychoanalysis with a history tracing back to the beginning of marketing as a discipline. This historical overview could start with the work of Austrian-American psychologist and marketer, Ernest Dichter. Lately, there has been a revived interest on his work and legacy in marketing scholarship (Cluley and Desmond, 2015). Dichter is a figure that epitomises the negative representations of marketing, creating needs *ex nihilo*, manipulating consumer desires and generally operating in dark and mysterious ways. Contemporary marketing scholarship has resisted this image, pursuing scientific evidence-based research and trying to distance itself from the idea of a manipulative metaphysical enterprise. Dichter, and as a result psychoanalytic theories in marketing, has been deemed unscientific, metaphysical and ethically questionable (Holbrook, 2015).

But if we give up on the idea that psychoanalysis can offer an easy way in consumer manipulation what could be the role of psychoanalytic theories in contemporary consumer research? Contemporary consumer research scholars, especially those who are interested in understanding the cultural context of consumption could benefit from an analytic framework that does not just aim to manipulate consumer's desire but rather understand the structures which allow the emergence of desire. In order to better locate my work within the field of psychoanalytic marketing scholarship, I will present here a number of theorists that have already attempted such an endeavour. John Desmond in his book *Hearts of Darkness* introduces psychoanalytic conceptions of the unconscious, mourning and narcissism in relation to consumer behaviours (Desmond, 2013). In a similar way Dunne and Cluley (Cluley and Dunne, 2012) introduce a Marxist-Freudian reading of consumption processes .

Oswald (2010) draws from Lacan in order to define the voyeuristic male gaze in

consumption culture. The Lacanian concept of the gaze allows us a novice understanding of visual cultures in relation to ideology and politics. In Oswald's work, psychoanalytic framework offers a complex articulation of consumption, gender relations and desire. The centrality of visibility and desire in consumption makes the Lacanian conceptualisation of the Other's gaze very relevant to the interest of consumer culture theory. Reyes et al. (2015) also incorporate into their analysis the Lacanian idea of the Other's gaze in order to speak about smartphones. Their work re-positions current discussion around the sociability of mobile phones and the complex ways the Other defines the experience of electronic devices. In their article they attempt an intriguing combination of empirical research and psychoanalytic theory that influenced my methodological approach. Due to the proximity to my subject, I will come back more attentively to this article later on in my discussion of the smartphone screen and how technological innovations could potentially facilitate ontological shifts.

At this point I would like to mention those readings that are not parts of marketing and consumption bibliography, but they still operate within the locus of the business school. Cederström and Hoedemakers (2010) introduce Lacanian theory to organisational studies, aspiring to bring new critical reflections on the ways psychic phenomena affect and intersect with organizational structures, processes, and practices. In their introductory chapter, they insist that the appropriation of psychoanalytic theoretical tools in their discipline should go hand in hand with a political and ethical understanding that takes into account psychic and cultural parameters but most importantly aspires to facilitate social change. They, furthermore, insist that Lacan could be used for the cultivation of more effective organisations and more productive capitalist enterprises, but that would strip psychoanalysis from a certain ethics. Hoedemaekers suggests that we, critical scholars within business schools, should acquire the Lacanian position of the hysteric patient: the one that always questions the master's knowledge and position of power, the one that is embedded in certain positionality but who nevertheless, never stops questioning the process of interpellation into a certain subject position. This is a premise I would identify with. Hysterizing, upsetting and unsettling discourses of productivity and success, blurring certainties and ruining naturalised truths that would be a truly ethical psychoanalytic position within marketing scholarship.

Beyond the selfie principle

At the beginning of this chapter we review the different conceptions of narcissism within the Freudian corpus. This brief overview of the Freudian theorisation of narcissism will help us organise the coming chapters. Following the narcissism-as-function argument as appearing in Freud's work, we will discuss the ego in relation to the mobile screen, addressing questions of ideology and surveillance in relation to subjectivity. By critically engaging with various Freudian connections between narcissism and homosexuality we will attempt a queer examination of mobile media and sexuality. Finally, by considering narcissism as a complete disconnection from the world and a total withdrawal from objects and a full-on pre-occupation with one's self, we will discuss the recent interest of contemporary psychoanalytic thought in *ordinary psychosis*, ostensibly a psychic phenomenon of our times where technology facilitates structural shifts in sociability and subjectivity.

This chapter takes us into the heart of the complexities of the concept of narcissism, which has been deployed by psychoanalysts, film theorists and cultural critics to various and often contradictory ends. I begin by considering the use of narcissism as a diagnostic category used to examine the ills of modern society, especially in the work of writers like Christopher Lasch. This discussion leads me to the theorisation of narcissism in the work of Sigmund Freud, and I suggest that the concept is much more contradictory and complex in Freud's work, which makes its usage an act of interpretation—an interpretation, I will suggest, with crucial consequences for how we conceptualise the modern subject's relationship to new media technologies, as well as the politics of representation.

The Lacanian concept of the 'mirror phase' is an important intervention in the theorisation of narcissism and is discussed in this chapter in order to understand the smartphone screen as a field of representation and identification. By extending the problematic of the mirror to the screen, and by taking into account Joan Copjec's critique of psychoanalytic readings of the cinematic screen, we will examine the specificities of the mobile screen in relation to ego formation. This account makes a break with Foucauldian theories of the subject, and I offer a psychoanalytic critique of panopticonist theories of subjectivity,

which I suggest, lead to an impasse in how we think about the screen—whether in the cinema or as the surface of a modern day mobile phone.

In order to ground these theoretical ideas, we will go on to examine Amalia Ulman's Instagram durational performance called 'Excellences and Perfections.' During the performance, which lasted five months, Ulman assumed the role of an aspiring model that has just moved to LA. Ulman followed a scripted narrative incorporating various clichés she identified as central in the construction of social media femininities. In this chapter Ulman's performance is read within the domain of what art theorist Amelia Jones calls 'radical narcissism', a re-appropriation of narcissism by feminist artists who use their own bodies in order to criticise current gender norms. This links to the initial discussion regarding the multiple function of narcissism and allows for a further theorisation of the mobile screen, social media and their relation to the ego. Finally, I conclude this chapter with an account of 'over identification' as an artistic strategy that tries to negotiate the difficulties of formulating a critical and creative response to contemporary politics.

Narcissism and society

While reviewing newspaper articles on narcissism, one encounters a paradox: we live in a capitalist society where personal gain, private growth and vulgar individualist competition are core values, and yet narcissism is seen through a lens at once moralistic and dismissive. It seems as if the subject in our times is a contemporary Daedalus: you are allowed to use your magnificent egoic wings in order to achieve personal growth and success but do not fly too high and love yourself too much, because then you will follow another Greek mythological figure's demise and drown into your own reflection. Indeed, looking at contemporary readings on the topic, it seems that narcissism is presumed to be the nemesis of modern societies.

In order to understand how that which was initially understood as an individual pathology came to describe a social problem, we need to examine the genealogy and different trajectories of the term 'narcissism'. This will allow us to see how narcissism became a social issue and what the discourses were that defined its conceptual emergence. It was in the 1970s that narcissism entered everyday vocabulary, departing from its clinical and

largely psychoanalytic context, with theorists and writers popularising aspects of what was previously a technical concept. A series of writers of the time thematised narcissism as a dominant social trend of the new capitalist era and problematized what they identified as a narcissist turn of our society. Post-war consumerist joy was challenged by a series of historical shifts and transformations that marked a new period of moral doubt and introspection; self-indulgence and the unhinged search for pleasure were identified as the cause of emerging social problems.

The *narcissist* as described by Lasch (1991) and Kernberg (2004) was a moral wreck, the personification of lack of empathy and social conscience, the agent of societal decay. These writers identified the United States of America as the land of narcissism, the native habitat of this new character, 'the narcissist'. The *New York Times* offered an exposé of what they presented as 'the age of narcissism', further popularising the term (Lunbeck, 2014). It was a critique attractive to both the left and the right. The American left was searching for a nuanced criticism of consumer culture, in an attempt to move away from a traditional Marxist focus on the means of production. The right, on the other hand, was concerned with the emergence and rise of youth cultures that undermined traditional values and aesthetics (Ibid).

Christopher Lasch, a conservative social commentator, was particularly concerned about new 'individual-based social movements' such as feminism, the black and gay rights movements, and what he conceived of as anti-American struggles such as anti-Vietnam war activism of the time. In these struggles Lasch saw an insistence of individual pleasure over social coherence and prosperity. As we will see later in this chapter, accusing women and homosexuals of being anti-socially narcissistic is neither Lasch's innovation nor does it end with his writing.

Central to Lasch's analysis is *authority*: once authority loses its strength, men degenerate into narcissistic, self-indulgent creatures. Authority should be internalised, in order for the individual to be functional and socially minded. According to Steven Frosh, Lasch outlines modern man as a hollow shell, unable to participate in intimacy and connectivity, trapped in his own image, his superficiality and depthless existence (Frosh, 1991).

Lasch offers remarkable cultural insights that might help us understand his 'era of narcissism'. In his discussion of modern art, for example, he identifies a shift in what art is supposed to do. In contrast to traditional art, which would offer a meaningful encounter with reality – an attempt to transform reality and deal with its traumatic nature – in modern times, he claims, art only expresses a certain kind of nostalgia for the lost omnipotent feeling people experienced as infants. Modern art would thus recall 'oceanic experiences and trance inducing imagery, more of a hypnosis and less of "working through"' (Frosh, 1991). For Lasch, the narcissist artists of our times deny authority and by not accepting the prohibition that authority represents, they seek to return to the primary narcissism of their infancy when reality and fantasy were inseparable and hence everything was possible. In this account, modern artists cannot produce sublime pieces of work that can be enjoyed by a larger community; the work a narcissist artist produces is incoherent and masturbatory, pleasing only to its creator.

Lasch takes his analysis of the narcissist 'oceanic experience' of omnipotence from the psychoanalytic discussion of infants' psychic life. In the Freudian paradigm, every child experiences the world as unified field of stimuli. That period of omnipotence and fragmentation comes to an end when children start understanding the limits of their own bodies and the fact that they are separate from the maternal/feeding body. In psychoanalytic ontology, infants upon their birth are not yet capable of understanding the boundaries of their bodies and environments and this realisation only comes later when certain experiences of displeasure insert a first iteration of an external reality, an imposed reality principle. Modern art, instead of helping people cope with the reality principle is not re-conciliatory as its fragmentation and non-coherence is reminiscent of infantile narcissism.

In Lasch's work, the absence of a strong paternal figure is identified as the cause of narcissism. When no authority is there to stop the infant's fantasy of merging with the mother, to put a limit to his or her pleasure, then the infant does not internalise the aforementioned reality principle. This analysis is indeed compatible with Freud's first conception of narcissism, but, as we will see, the Freudian position on narcissism undertook significant shifts during Freud's lifetime.

Lasch sets the tone for all future critiques of narcissism as a social problem. The narcissist takes different forms: he is the ruthless banker, the CEO, the Wall Street sociopath, the lying politician, the selfie maniac teenager, the attention seeking YouTube celebrity, the Instagram beauty queen etc. Instead of further examining commonplace understandings of narcissism we could examine narcissism as a function of the ego, narcissism as a way to experience pleasure, narcissism as a way to relate to the world. In the end of this structural analysis of narcissism we will be able to re-approach the mythical figure of Narcissus himself and consider his differences or similarities to the rest of the 'normal' people.

Narcissism in Freud

Psychoanalysis defines narcissism as a structural element of the human psyche, and thus it is worth focusing on Freudian approaches to the issue. Freud drew the term from Havelock Ellis' catalogue of pathologies. For Havelock Ellis, 'Narcissus-like' is an attribute of a person who takes their own self as a sexual object; the person who gets sexual gratification from their own spectral image. Freud adapted it for his own purposes. Freud was a prolific writer and his writing presents the reader with ideas in different stages of development. He provides contradictory definitions, exposes his self-doubts and engages with exploratory concepts that by his own admission are obscure and inchoate. Due to his influential position, concepts he developed at specific moments in his work acquire a life of their own. Even when particular positions have been later abandoned or significantly altered by Freud himself, they retain a certain appeal and they are used in other theorists' work in their earlier iteration. Narcissism is a good example of this, as Freud provides several contradictory definitions over the years with most of them operating as starting points for different future theorisations.

Freud first uses the metaphor of Narcissus in his early theorisation of homosexuality (Pontalis and Laplanche 1973). In 1910 Freud suggested that the homosexual 'chooses' as sexual object his own self-image.

The boy represses his love for his mother: he puts himself in her place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love. In this way he has become a homosexual. What he has in fact done is

to slip back to auto-erotism: for the boys whom he now loves as he grows up are after all only substitutive figures and revivals of himself in childhood—boys whom he loves in the way in which his mother loved him when he was a child. He finds the objects of his love along the path of narcissism, as we say; for Narcissus, according to the Greek legend, was a youth who preferred his own reflection to everything else and who was changed into the lovely flower of that name. (Freud 1910, p.100)

It is noteworthy that while in the later Freud we encounter more sophisticated accounts of homosexual desire, this initial theorisation remains potent and influential, with countless derivative analyses ever since. We shall return to the discussion of homosexuality and narcissism in the following chapter where we will examine Leo Bersani's argument on homosexual desire and its relation to the ego formation.

In 1911, in his discussion of the autobiographical writings of Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud identifies a pathological complex he names 'narcissistic neurosis.' This *new* pathology is characterised by a lack of interest in objects that lie outside oneself: 'The patient has withdrawn from the people in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them. Thus everything has become indifferent and irrelevant to him...' (Freud 1911, p.70). In Freudian terminology, libido is not invested in objects of the real world but remains trapped within the person's own ego. This is linked to Schreber's suppressed homosexuality and it leads to fantasies of grandiosity and most importantly delusional ideas and hallucinations:

But in paranoia the clinical evidence goes to show that the libido, after it has been withdrawn from the object, is put to a special use. It will be remembered that the majority of cases of paranoia exhibit traces of megalomania, and that megalomania can by itself constitute a paranoia. From this it may be concluded that in paranoia the liberated libido becomes attached to the ego and is used for the aggrandizement of the ego. A return is thus made to the stage of narcissism (known to us from the development of the libido), in which a person's only sexual object is his own ego. On the basis of this clinical evidence we can suppose that paranoiacs have brought along with them a fixation at the stage of narcissism, and we can assert that the length of the step back from sublimated homosexuality to narcissism is a measure of the amount of regression characteristic of paranoia.

The withdrawal from outside reality comes with a proliferation of *internal*, imaginary objects. As the terminology advances, this structural lack of investment in the outside world is assumed to consist of a whole different conceptual territory that is referred to as psychosis.

Narcissism becomes a distinct analytic entity in Freud's seminal work 'On Narcissism' (1914) where he suggests that narcissism is a much more prevalent phenomenon than he thought previously ('an allocation of the libido such as deserved to be described as narcissism might be present far more extensively, and that it might claim a place in the regular course of human sexual development.' (Freud 1914, p.73). It is not an anomaly but a developmental stage, a passage from autoeroticism to object love. As we have seen earlier, in psychoanalytic theory, the infant comes into the world without a pre-defined sense of self ('a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed.' (Freud 1914, p.76). The ego, in Freud's theory, emerges through the process of primary narcissism, a function that is described as *self-instinct*; a force for self-preservation that produces the self as such. In this articulation of theory, primary narcissism is a stage destined to diminish once the subject starts investing libidinally in outside-of-self objects. In a way, primary narcissism signifies a passage from an initial helpless state of the infant to a prioritisation of self-preservation; the first loosely organised expression of the subjects' biological needs (Adams 2014).

The first auto-erotic sexual satisfactions are experienced in connection with vital functions which serve the purpose of self-preservation. The sexual instincts are at the outset attached to the satisfaction of the ego-instincts; only later do they become independent of these, and even then we have an indication of that original attachment in the fact that the persons who are concerned with a child's feeding, care, and protection become his earliest sexual objects: that is to say, in the first instance his mother or a substitute for her. [...] We say that a human being has originally two sexual objects—himself and the woman who nurses him—and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating fashion in his object-choice. (Freud 1914, p87–88)

Secondary narcissism appears then as a form of regression. Later in one's life, due to specific circumstances, there might be a retraction of libidinal investments from outside objects and back onto the self-image. In this account, secondary narcissism, where it

results in a cathexis of external objects in favour of an ego cathexis, may lead to a fragile grasp of reality and megalomania. What was initially a survival instinct would now hinder the social life of the individual. We have to notice that Freud does not offer at this point a proper analytic distinction between object-love and narcissistic love, and neither can he conceptualise the process that allows this shift (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). In Peter Gay's words, 'according to his traditional theory, the ego drives are not in any way erotic and the libidinal drives are not egotistic. But if the ego can be charged with libido – as it became clearer and clearer to Freud that it can be – this sharp division must collapse.'

Freud overcomes this tension with the third explication of narcissism in his 'Ego and the Id.' In this work, published in 1923, Freud proposes a different topographical model of the psychic apparatus, moving from his early conception of Preconscious-Conscious-Unconscious (Cns-Prc-Unc) to the dynamic model of Ego-Superego-Id. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, this shift in Freud's conception of the psyche has to do with a better understanding of the role identifications play in the 'formation of the personality and of the permanent structures which they leave within it (ideals, critical agencies, self-images)'. Freud, at this point, realises that the ego is not a fully conscious agent operating in opposition to the unconscious: 'A part of the ego, too—and Heaven knows how important a part—may be Ucs., undoubtedly is Ucs. And this Ucs. belonging to the ego is not latent like the Pcs.' (Freud 1923, p.18). But what is the Freudian Ego if not a conscious agent, and how does it relate to the unconscious?

[The ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own. (Freud 1923, p.25)

In this elaborate metaphor we see how the ego is a helpless rider that sometimes tries to control his horse and other times is simply driven by it. Another significant shift we observe in 'Ego and the Id' is Freud's account of narcissism. Here, narcissism changes from a developmental stage to a structural precondition for the ego formation.

Understandably, since we talk about a period where the ego is not yet well formed, the

difference between 'subject' and 'object' are not clearly defined. These two entities emerge at the same time and this is the reason narcissistic love cannot be conceptually separated from object love (Moncayo, 2008). So instead of seeing a passage from narcissistic love to object-oriented love, we see a reconfiguration of our understanding of libidinal investment.

If this displaceable energy is desexualized libido, it may also be described as sublimated energy; for it would still retain the main purpose of Eros—that of uniting and binding—in so far as it helps towards establishing the unity, or tendency to unity, which is particularly characteristic of the ego. If thought-processes in the wider sense are to be included among these displacements, then the activity of thinking is also supplied from the sublimation of erotic motive forces. [...] At the very beginning, all the libido is accumulated in the id, while the ego is still in process of formation or is still feeble. The id sends part of this libido out into erotic object-cathexes, whereupon the ego, now grown stronger, tries to get hold of this object-libido and to force itself on the id as a love-object. The narcissism of the ego is thus a secondary one, which has been withdrawn from objects. (Freud 1923, p45-46)

In the new 'economic model', there is a finite amount of libido and once the 'object libido' increases the 'ego libido' gets depleted. Laplanche and Pontalis offer the metaphor of a libido reservoir in order to explain the function of Ego in this process. From this reservoir, libido will be sent out to the objects and this is the *location* where libido coming from outside objects will be stored. Narcissism puts up a dam to the libido, a limit that no other object-cathexis can completely overcome (Laplanche et Pontalis 1973). As the Lacanian psychoanalyst Raul Moncayo observes, Freud's 'economic model' of the psychic organ significantly changes the focus of psychoanalysis. In the earlier period, psychoanalysts wanted to elucidate the deep secrets of the unconscious and to figure out what the unconscious conflicts and forgotten memories that cause psychological disturbances are. In this new era, the ego becomes the focus point: how was it constructed, how is it shaped, how does it reflect previous conflicts and experiences. In a way, the ego comes to represent the precipitate of all libidinal cathexes, a complex configuration of all neuroses.

But we have still not tackled the important question: how is narcissism related to object libido and how is this 'dam' of psychic excitation related to inter-subjective relations? It

appears from the theorisations we presented so far that narcissism could be no more than a barrier, a separating construction. Laplanche and Pontalis offer an alternative understanding of this function through the Lacanian concept of the mirror phase. According to this theorisation, the ego is formed when the subject starts understanding their bodily boundaries. Going back to Freud: 'The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface.' (Freud 1923, p26).

Ego and the mirror

Following upon our discussion of Freud, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's influential theorisation of the mirror phase provides a valuable tool for understanding the relation between the body and ego. In this account, the ego emerges when the child encounters their spectral image in the mirror. The ego is shaped in accordance to the image of the body, and the process is facilitated by a third person (usually the mother) that guides the infant through, and helps it recognise itself as a coherent entity. This 'mythological' scene detailed by Lacan shows how narcissism is distinguished from a genetic, quasi-biological force of instinctive ego-creation (such as the initial Freudian primary narcissism) in that, while it occurs automatically/instinctively, it is nonetheless a phenomenon that relies on specific environmental and social interactions. We can thus deduce that narcissism is not essentially a separating function aiming to a solipsistic self-interest for the whole process implies the presence of another person. I will elaborate on the mirror stage as described by Lacan later in the discussion, as I believe it offers key insight in the understanding of self-image.

In this section we will follow the Lacanian analysis of ego formation which provides a series of metaphors that can help us link the function of media representation and the visual field with certain psychic modalities. Lacan conceptualises the birth of ego as an immediate effect of what he calls the mirror phase. In developing his mirror phase Lacan incorporated theoretical elements from contemporary developmental psychologists (who were interested in the question of when the child starts understanding themselves in the mirror) and animal ethologists (who ask whether other animals besides humans are able to identify themselves in the mirror) alongside source material from the Freudian corpus.

The mirror phase can be observed when the infant first realises the mirror's function, when they are able to identify with their spectral image for the first time. This takes place between the sixth and the eighteenth month and according to Lacan has certain repercussions in the constitution of subjectivity. In front of the mirror we construct our first loose yet coherent image of ourselves.

There are two elements of the mirror phase whose importance we shall underline. First, the gestalt of a complete image of ourselves comes from the outside. Children encounter a coherent image that surpasses in completeness the experience they have of their own bodies. The human infant has poor motor-coordination skills during the first years of its life. Due to this poor motor-coordination, young infants can only have a disorganised sense of their own body. Their spectral image on the other side appears to have a well-defined shape and form, offering a promise of control and bodily sovereignty. To re-iterate, the body as depicted on the mirror is much more complete and coherent than the experienced body, the body that the child carries and inhabits.

[T]he total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it. (Lacan, 1966)

This image will become the vessel which will carry a phantasmatic completeness. As the identification with the body comes from an identification with an initially *foreign, external* image of a body, there is, subsequently, an inevitable surplus; something is necessarily 'missing out': *If I can only see my body as an object where does my gaze emanate from? If I can only observe myself as an object, how can I ever be whole?* On top of that, when we watch ourselves in the mirror we can only observe a certain aspect of our body; we can never have a complete overview of the body-object. Again, a sense that 'something must be missing'. This fundamental incompleteness, so central in this initial moment of identification, is crucial for subjectification, as we will see later in our discussion.

The second important aspect of this process is the validation of the identification with the spectral image through a third person. When we talk about the mirror phase we need to take into account that the whole process does not take place in vacuum. Usually it is the

mother (or the primary caretaker) who is facilitating the process. She looks into the mirror beside her child, pointing at the child's reflection and telling him: "yes, that's you!".

A child, who is being held in the arms of an adult, is expressly confronted with his image [in front of the mirror]. We must give full weight to the movement of the child's head when the child ... turns around toward the adult who is holding him, without our being able to say, naturally, what he expects from the adult, whether it is some sort of agreement or attesting. Referring to the Other nevertheless clearly comes to play an essential role here. (Lacan 2015, p.353)

The ego presents itself and sustains itself qua problematic only on the basis of the Other's gaze. (Ibid., p.354)

At the same time, she operates as a visual reference point, her real self and her spectral double offering an explanatory framework for how the mirror works. If we extend mirror phase beyond the literal mirror, the mother is also supposed to mirror the child's voice and facial expressions in her attempt to develop pre-linguistic communicational gestures.

Thus, we should not understand the mirror phase as a cognitive process within the individual, but rather as a psychosocial, intersubjective function involving at least a second person (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973). This notion sets the basis for understanding narcissism as an essentially social experience, despite its seeming antisocial, introverted tendency. Narcissism can only be achieved when a third actor (actual or internalised) witnesses our self-realisation. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, narcissism is not only identification with the other (the spectral image, the image of the mother) but also internalisation of a relationship with the other.

The mirror phase emerges during the time when another psychoanalytic foundational process takes place: the birth of desire. According to Lacanian theorist Dylan Evans, desire is a concept that lies in the centre of the Lacanian project as Lacan, following Spinoza, proclaims desire to be the 'essence of the man.' It is not conscious desire that psychoanalysis is preoccupied with, but unconscious desire—hidden and elusive, and constitutive of intersubjectivity. Desire is the 'beyond' to articulated demands, or that which cannot be put into a specific request (Lacan, 1966).

Evans defines desire as the remainder you get when you subtract need from demand. In order to better understand that, let's return to the child and its biological needs. Very soon in its life the child will start expressing its need through its cries—a series of amorphous yet intense demands. Demand is something expressed towards the Other; even though selfhood is not yet configured there is an outward motion, the child is asking for something from the outside world. As it becomes obvious by observing a young infant's behaviour its demands are not always geared towards covering biological needs (hunger, protection from environmental conditions) but often are cries for attention, love or more for the Other's presence.

For Lacan, “desire to be the desire of the Other” and desire is indeed formulated and first articulated in the domain of the Other. Lacan introduced the idea of the ‘big Other’ (‘Other’ with a capital ‘O’) – in 1955, as a distinct entity from the ‘little other’ (‘other’ with a lowercase ‘o’).

1. The little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the ego [...]. He is simultaneously the counterpart and the specular image. The little other is thus entirely inscribed in the imaginary order.

2. The big Other designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. Indeed, the big Other is the symbolic insofar as it is particularised for each subject. The Other is thus both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject. (Evans 1996)

Desire emerges in the field of the Other; it occurs when the subject encounters this radical alterity.

[I]f desire is an effect in the subject of the condition — which is imposed on him by the existence of discourse — that his need pass through the defiles of the signifier; and if, as I

intimated above, by opening up the dialectic of transference, we must establish the notion of the Other with a capital O as being the locus of speech's deployment [...] then it must be posited that, as a characteristic of an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the Other's desire. (Lacan, 1966, p. 526)

It is thus formed by the ambiguity of the Other's intentions, by the Other's presence or absence, what is presumed as the Other's love (caring presence) and hate (absence/withdrawal). A biological need can be satisfied (i.e. satiating hunger) but desire can never be satisfied; its object is always unattainable. In the mirror we internalise the big Other's distance and ultimate unapproachability and at the same time we construct a small other, an image we can approach and understand as whole. From this psychoanalytic theorisation of the phenomenon, we can conclude that narcissism is not just the fetishisation of our own image/self but also the precondition in order to form our image/self. As a cognitive function, self-realisation emerges neither as a genetic destiny nor as a disjointed fascination with specular image; it is in fact shaped by the birth of a nascent social bond.

In order to properly contextualise the mirror phase within Lacanian ontology we need to present here a brief overview of the three distinct yet interconnected domains of reality according to Lacan: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. Lacan presents his infamous triptych in 1953 and despite the fact that all terms have appeared in his earlier work individually this is the first time he presents them as complementary and interconnected. The symbolic is identified with the law and social structures and as those rely heavily on language, the symbolic is essentially conceived as a linguistic field. The symbolic order is the domain of the Other and very often the Lacanian big Other stands for the same things as the symbolic.

The imaginary is closely linked to the mirror phase and is essentially the order of surface appearance and observable phenomena. Images are assumed to hide the underlying structures; images give the illusion of completeness and coherence but carry empty promises, according to Lacan. The imaginary domain is the domain that emerges through the mirror phase, hence is the primary domain for identification, ego relations and narcissism (Evans, 1996). As we saw earlier, the mirror phase does not happen in a pre-social setting, but is rather mediated through the presence of the Other. In that sense, the

imaginary is always structured through the symbolic. In order to comprehend the world through our senses we need to have built cognitive schemata and categories.

The Lacanian real is probably the most difficult of the three domains to comprehend and describe, as it stands for what is completely inaccessible, that which lies outside language and resists symbolisation. According to Evans, '[w]hereas the symbolic is a set of differentiated, discrete elements called signifiers, the real is, in itself, undifferentiated' (...) It is the symbolic which introduces "a cut in the real" in the process of signification (Evans, 1996, p. 162).' We can infer the unsymbolised force of the real in the experience of anxiety and in traumatic moments. Those experiences cannot be properly expressed through signifiers in their raw immediacy.

An essential element of the triad is the interconnectivity of those domains as each one links to the others and each one allows for the others to emerge. In that sense, there is no such thing as pure imaginary since even the first sensory experiences are mediated through an intersubjective (proto-social) environment; there are no symbolic signifiers without the signified equivalents in the imaginary; and both the imaginary and symbolic rely on the existence and threat of the unsymbolizable real. In the next chapter we will return on these domains and we will see how Lacan moved from the primacy of the symbolic to a prioritisation of the imaginary and the real in his later teaching. The imaginary, as the domain of the viscosity and the ego, plays a central role in our analysis. The primordial ego, formed through the mirror phase is a form of an 'ideal ego' and functions as a baseline for all future identifications (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973). Since the primordial ego is constructed through and is defined by the imaginary domain, this also shapes all future interpersonal relationships.

Our relationships will always carry the burden of the mirror, the mark of this initial fascination with the image. And most importantly, this initial alienation from our self-image will lead to aggression towards the ego. The same ambivalence will also define our relations with other people who are treated as alter-egos (small others, reflections of ourselves). This insistence of imaginary identification both in the early formation of the ego but also later in our lives, compels us to talk about a mirror phase rather than a mirror stage. The latter would imply a unique moment in developmental history, whereas the former suggests an insistence of the mirror function in adult life.

Screen as mirror

The mirror as an object has fascinated humans with its reflective, almost mystical, properties since the beginning of history. The mirror as a metaphor has appeared in philosophical explorations of reality and its representation since antiquity – for example, Plato used the example of mirroring to discuss the nature of perceptual truth. Mirror(ing) is central both in the original myth of Narcissus and in the Lacanian mirror phase. ‘Mirror’ as a metaphor/function will be the starting point for our theorisation of the screen in relation to narcissism.

As we saw in the previous section, the mirror phase signifies the internalisation of the Other’s gaze and is a constitutive moment in the very conception of ourselves. The psychoanalytic implication of the Other (the symbolic/social dimension) in the foundation and shaping of our selfhood allows for a political critique of what is often presumed to be merely psychological. Psychoanalysis enables us to theorise ‘internal’ psychic life as interconnected with external, social conditions and the other way around. Lacan develops his account of the gaze in his eleventh seminar ‘The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.’

I was in my early twenties...and at the time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical.... One day, I was on a small boat with a few people from a family of fishermen....as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean... pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can... It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – You see that can? Do you see it? Well it doesn’t see you (Lacan, 1964, p. 95)

Cultural theorist Henry Krips (2010) offers useful insights in his explication of this small anecdote that Lacan uses in order to introduce the problematic of the gaze. According to Krips, the sardine can itself is an insignificant object and only acquires significance through the annoyance it poses to young Lacan’s vision. The discomfort Lacan feels is not physiological but rather he feels some sort of anxiety as he is reminded of his class privilege in relation to the fisherman in the boat. According to Krips, the anxiety and shame that Lacan experiences relate to the Freudian “unrealistic anxiety” – an anxiety

that is in excess of what its apparent object merits' (Krips, 2010, p. 93). The moment of the light reflection Lacan asks himself who he is and what he is doing there being overwhelmed by unpleasant feelings; suddenly, he goes from scrutinising the environment to scrutinising himself.

In Freud's terms, we may say that the scrutiny that the young Lacan directs outwardly at his surroundings encounters resistance from the blinding light reflected by the tin can; and as a result the scrutiny "turns around", that is, reflexively turns back upon Lacan, at the same time as it switches from active to passive voice – from "I look" to "I am looked at". (Krips, 2010, p. 93)

The Lacanian gaze is thus not a literal seeing point of view; it emanates from a blind spot of the subject itself. Lacan, not being able to see due to the sun's reflection on the sardine can becomes introspective and anxious. The obstruction of his view causes anxiety, as if he was being seen by someone else. It is not only an obstruction in the visual field that can cause this 'irrational anxiety'; it can also be an aural stimulus ("the sound of rustling leaves heard while out hunting...a footstep heard in a corridor..."), proving in a way that the gaze exists as a psychic function, even outside visuality. In Krips' words 'the subject is brought to recognise that there is a hole, a lack, in his visual field – a something that, because it is present but cannot be seen, functions as a point of failure of the visual field' (Krips, 2010, p. 94)

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey combines the Lacanian metaphor of the mirror with Lacan's analysis of the Other's gaze, in order to discuss the political repercussions of the cinematic screen (Mulvey, 1999). In her critical reading of French psychoanalysis, she identifies new, radical ways of understanding the social implications of subjective experiences, including 'natural' processes such as the act of *seeing*. For Mulvey, the world of representations is a world of multiple directionalities where the subject and the object of observation can exchange positions. In a psychoanalytic sense, the subject becomes the object as the game of identification unfolds through successive and alternating projections and introjections: the subject projects parts of itself and his/her identity on the screen and introjects images and ideas from the screen in front of them. According to Mulvey, the Other's gaze operates in three levels when it comes to cinema.

First, there is the gaze of the camera as it is filming and this, following Metz, is always a voyeuristic gaze. Second, there are the looks intrinsic to the film narrative and these are usually the looks of male protagonists, as they position women characters within the narrative itself. Finally, there is the gaze of the spectator, and, as this gaze is facilitated by the previous two positions – of the camera and of the protagonists within the film – it is an inherently male position to adopt. (Homer 2005)

As it is noticeable straight away, the gaze appears in Mulvey's account as a much more literal term than in the Lacanian anecdote. Unlike the sardine tin, the three functions of the cinematic gaze in Mulvey's work require an actual scopic agency. It is not a failure in the visual field that facilitates the Other's gaze towards the subject but rather an actual voyeuristic intentionality. Before we go further into our analysis of the gaze, we need to examine the context within which Mulvey develops her theory, namely Marxist feminism of the 70s, and consider how that affected her reading of Lacan.

It is worth mentioning that psychoanalysis was not very appealing to feminist theorists of the time as it was viewed as phallogentric and essentially patriarchal. The attitude towards psychoanalysis changed due to Lacan's theorisation of the subject and most importantly due to Louis Althusser's analysis of ideology. These theoretical developments made psychoanalysis more compatible with a semiotic-materialist approach, prevalent in the 'new left' theorists of the time (Hollows, 2010; Mitchell and Rose, 2001).

Mulvey, in her influential work 'Visual pleasure in narrative cinema', discusses mainstream cinema as an ideological apparatus. By extending the Althusserian idea of the apparatus into the visual field she attempts a semiotic understanding of the moving image, a politicisation of the sensory, radical at the time. According to Louis Althusser, the ruling classes do not only subordinate the masses through repressive state apparatus (such as the police); they also use extended networks of ideological indoctrination, what Althusser defines as 'ideological apparatuses'. The screen, in this context, is another field of ideology and another field of signification.

For Mulvey, cinema operates as an ideological mechanism of male domination, and through film we can see the operation of a new kind of disciplinary ideological construction: what she defines as the *male gaze*. Within the cinematic apparatus, the

female body is objectified and the female spectator can only *exist* by acquiring a male position; she otherwise remains abjectified. According to this analysis, the vast majority of mass-produced cinema effectively operates as patriarchal propaganda.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey, 1999)

According to Joan Copjec, Mulvey and other Marxist film theorists of the 1970s (such as Jean Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Jean Louis Comolli, Stephen Heath) err in conflating the Foucauldian conception of the Panopticon and Lacan's theorisation of the gaze of the Other in order to construct a theory of the cinematic screen as an ideological apparatus. In this conflation the cinematic screen operates as a mirror: the viewer looks at the projected image and then accept it as their own, they identify with what they see. The characters on the screen operate as a version of the viewer's ideal ego. In this way, viewers are indoctrinated into hegemonic roles and values. When you watch a film there is a big Other, a social reality that also 'observes' you; a normalising gaze that requires your obedience. Even if you cannot identify with the projected ideal ego, the big Other will convince you to internalise it as true. This theorisation, according to Copjec creates a 'Foucauldianised Lacan' and misses certain nuances of the psychoanalytic ontology.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Foucault develops a theory of surveillance around the metaphor of the Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century prison design. In Bentham's Panopticon, the prison guard stands in the middle of a cylindrical building at the centre of the prison; he is able to observe any prisoner at all times whereas they are not able to see if they are being observed. Unable to know when the guard is actually looking at them, the prisoners feel themselves to be constantly surveilled, resulting to their internalisation of the guard's presence and ensuring their subsequent obedience. According to Foucault this process shapes modern societies of control in which each and every member of contemporary societies takes the role of both prisoner and prison guard for both themselves and those around them. A new social reality of surveillance is

formed. What Foucault names 'Panopticism' shapes his understanding of power relations: each member of society internalises and reproduces ideological systems of power. For Foucault there is no such thing as the unconscious or rather the unconscious is an effect of normative discursive regimes such as psychoanalysis and philosophy. This is an important first distinction between the panoptacist and the Lacanian argument.

The subject shaped by the panoptic modality of surveillance internalises discursive regimes and then reproduces them. Power in the modern era is not enforced through physical/immediate violence (the repressive hypothesis – in the prison metaphor: obedience through use of violent suppression) but rather through the internalisation of normative technologies of knowledge. Foucault claims that the modern subject is being constantly asked to give an account of themselves (another metaphor used besides the panopticon is the Catholic confessional). The modern subject, in responding to this request, adopts the language of the interrogator. We only become legible when we adopt the vocabulary of the existing power regimes. If the subject manages to articulate an alternative position that does not conform to those regimes, Foucault claims that the systems of power will scrutinise it, categorise it and either pathologise and abjectify it or find a way to make it less threatening to by normalising it. This leads to Foucault's 'non-repressive hypothesis', according to which law operates in a productive rather than repressive way.

In Copjec's view, the problem with this conception is in the way we can then articulate resistance towards the law: Foucault's definition of the law as positive and non-repressive implies both that the law is (1) unconditional, that it must be obeyed, since only that which it allows can come into existence – being is, by definition, obedience – and that it is (2) unconditioned, since nothing, that is, no desire, precedes the law; there is no cause of the law and we must not therefore seek behind the law for its reasons (Copjec, 2015b).

The panopticon offers an analysis that seems very relevant in a discussion about the screen and new media realities. In surveillance studies we often see analyses that see the rise of mobile screen as the ultimate expansion of the Panopticon: the ideological apparatus has become portable, resourceful and literally omnipresent. While the merging of the Panopticon and the Other's gaze into one analytical superstructure seems to offer a compelling theorisation of power in relation to visibility, it misses out nuances of

Lacan's position, especially when it comes to the constitutive incompleteness of the subjectification process and most importantly the topic of resistance to power. In order to discuss this further we shall follow Joan Copjec's critique of 70s film studies scholars presented in her book *Read my Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (2015b).

Copjec makes a radical departure from the Panopticon argument by employing a close reading of the Lacanian conception of the big Other. Copjec suggests that Mulvey and her contemporaries conflate the gaze of the Other with the Panopticon, leading to a series of historicist reductions and omissions regarding the complexities of psychic life. As we have seen, the Panopticon argument allows us to understand subjectivity in relation to discourse and power by employing the disciplinary effects of surveillance. According to the theory of panopticism, every attempt to decipher our selfhood is expressed as an iteration of power within us. Our self-understanding is an illusion as selfhood itself is a construction. As power regimes define our position within social reality, our sense of selfhood is yet another iteration of power. Women especially, in this context, can only find the words to describe their inner realities after acquiring a place in patriarchal symbolic order. They can only speak with the words of their oppressors, otherwise they are not only stigmatised but also expelled from the symbolic order. In Mulvey's theorisation of cinema, women can only be represented as objects for the male gaze to consume. Resistance to the gaze is not possible without a radical break-through, a leap that goes beyond the current order of things.

For Mulvey that kind of transgression is impossible without a re-structuration of the visual field as such, and she suggests that truly subversive cinema can only occur through a restructuring of the medium itself, something attempted by the avant-garde filmmakers of her time. Similarly, feminist philosophers such as Hélène Cixous suggest the idea of feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) as an alternative to phallogentric art. The main idea in those theorisations is that language itself is imbued with phallogentrism on a structural level. The writing/speaking subject of the western canon is categorically male and in order to overcome that women have to invent another language (Cixous, 1976). The idea of feminine writing has since been criticised for essentialising sexual difference but nevertheless offers a useful critique of the male literary canon. We will return to the issue

of feminine writing in our last chapter when we discuss Julia Kristeva's account of what she defines as the semiotic chora.

Copjec is critical towards the totalising political critique of cinema, as she identifies in this polemic a certain kind of deterministic reductionism. In the Panopticon argument, women are always perfectly legible as subjects; their whole existence is constructed through power and even their deepest desires can be understood as side effects of the law. Historically defined conditions shape not only women's social position but also their understanding of themselves and their inner worlds, presumably including their discontent about their position and their comprehension of inequality. The only chance for transgression within the Panopticon, according to Foucault, comes when the intersection of two (or more) regulatory systems produce unexpected outcomes. For example when religious and legal power bears contradictory incitements, then the solution of the tension can be novel and unexpected for the subject.

But difference, claims Copjec, does not defy the Panopticon. On the contrary, once any difference gets articulated, it consequently helps the Panopticon expand by mapping a new discursive territory. New positions allow for a more pluralistic decoding of social reality; the intersection might create a short-lived tension but the resolution of this tension will produce what we can call an *updated* panopticon. These tensions work as 'upgrade patches' for the panopticon, rather than destabilising forces. If we follow this particular Foucauldian argument we sooner or later reach a limit regarding the potentiality for resistance to biopower and Panopticism. If the Panopticon constructs all positions and incorporates all exemptions, how does resistance operate?

As mentioned earlier, Foucault rejects psychoanalysis, seeing it as yet another tool of biopower that aims to make subjectivity more legible and essentially governable. In this schema, the psychoanalytic unconscious is no more than an ideological construction. Psychoanalysis constructs the unconscious by describing it within discourse. We can conclude then that in the Foucauldian paradigm, all knowledge we might have of ourselves essentially comes from the socially defined outside, an accepted assumption among social constructivists. In the Foucauldian paradigm, the screen (cinematic and beyond) is no more than another power regime; a spectatorial field that informs us of how the world and ourselves *truly* are. The screen offers an image of an ideal ego and the

spectators take that image as their own. Whoever does not comply with that specific image is judged, or worse, stigmatised and abjectified. People internalise the rules and become the 'invisible' guard of the panoptic tower. As appealing as this theorisation might appear, we will attempt to conceptually surpass its deterministic conclusion by revisiting the potency of the Lacanian introduction of the real. The Lacanian real, Copjec claims, is not yet another discursive construction.

In Mulvey's theorisation, the gaze shapes the way we watch and comprehend film. Filmmakers develop their work having in mind a certain type of subjectivity (white heterosexual male). The audience can only enjoy the film by assuming this position and by identifying with the gaze. Copjec intervenes here to remind us that if we follow this strand of film theory, the cinematic image will stand for the signifier and the spectator for the signified. The gaze in this articulation stands in front of the screen, identifying with the position of the viewer.

On the contrary, the Lacanian gaze emanates from the point of failure of the visual. Copjec says 'this point at which something appears to be invisible, this point at which something appears to be missing from representation, some meaning left unrevealed, is the point of the Lacanian gaze. It marks the absence of a signified; it is an un-occupiable point.' Unlike the film theory gaze that coincides with the signified, the Lacanian gaze comes from a point of emptiness. Instead of being in front of the screen, the Lacanian gaze actually comes from behind the screen. Most importantly, it is unlike the panoptic gaze that is regulatory and disciplines the subject into a particular way of being. As Copjec writes:

Lacan does not ask you to think of the gaze as belonging to an Other who cares about what or where you are, who pries, keeps tabs on your whereabouts, and takes note of all your steps and missteps, as the panoptic gaze is said to do. When you encounter the gaze of the Other, you meet not a seeing eye but a blind one. The gaze is not clear or penetrating, not filled with knowledge or recognition; it is clouded over and turned back on itself, absorbed in its own enjoyment. The horrible truth, revealed to Lacan by Petit-Jean [the fisherman], is that the gaze does not see you. So, if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own; the gaze of the Other is not confirming; it will not validate you. (Copjec, 2015b, p. 36)

The big Other is constantly looking towards us, or so we think, while the mirror/screen is obfuscating the painful reality: the Other is indeed blind, the Other is lacking content. This big Other is constructed as omnipresent and powerful but can only maintain this illusion by reproducing the opacity of what separates us from him (and it is language and its signifiers that play the role of the screen). The subject is incapable of identifying the exact location of the Other's gaze within itself. According to Copjec, the gaze is unidentifiable/unoccupiable. So Copjec's reading of Lacan suggests that behind the screen of signifiers there is actually nothing. But of course it is not an accident that we cannot anticipate or properly comprehend this nothingness. It is exactly this function of language that orients us towards the world. This is why we exist as desiring subjects.

The narcissism of the mirror stage requires the subject to fall in love with their spectral image, their ideal self. Following that idea, Mulvey suggests that the audience of cinema should fall in love with the ideal image as presented on the cinematic apparatus and then accept it as an identifiable role. But as narcissism does not work in accordance to social norms, similarly the modality of narcissistic identification is much more complex and contradictory to what is anticipated. We have seen earlier in our overview of the mirror phase that there is always something missing from our reflection as the mirror shows a partial image of ourselves and as we understand our body as initially foreign to ourselves. Copjec suggests:

[...] narcissism cannot consist in finding satisfaction in one's visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that one's own being exceeds the imperfections of its image.

Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with which the subject constantly finds fault and in which constantly fails to recognise itself. (Ibid. p.37)

That should explain how narcissism in front of the screen is not a closed system of representation and indoctrination, but rather a complex and ambivalent encounter.

Narcissism is far from a harmonious and passive process and as we saw earlier, Freud warns us about the aggression involved in the narcissistic libidinal investment: 'setting itself up as sole love-object, and desexualizing or sublimating the libido of the id, the ego is working in opposition to the purposes of Eros and placing itself at the service of the opposing instinctual impulses'(Freud, 1923, p. 46).

In her conclusion, Copjec suggests an inversion of Mulvey's argument: Instead of thinking of the screen as a mirror we should instead think of the mirror as a screen; a screen of signifiers the subject encounters, internalises and connects. To extend Copjec's argument, we might say that the screen – whether cinematic or mobile – cannot be defined within the narrow context of a new panopticism. The very process of identification is flawed, broken and essentially incomplete. Narcissism is not a harmonious identification with an ideal image coming from the mirror/screen. The relationship with that ideal image is not necessarily loving and pleasant and more often than not involves anger, frustration and anxiety.

In order to see the practical applications of these theoretical reflections we will examine a series of contemporary feminist and queer artists' work that deals with identity, gender politics and the question of narcissism. While moving away from a panoptical approach and by adopting a psychoanalytic understanding of narcissism we will attempt to examine how certain artworks deal with the politics of capitalist iconoclastic media realities. The starting point in our discussion is Amalia Ulman's durational Instagram performance called *Excellences & Perfections*. During her performance, Ulman developed a new Instagram persona combining a series of clichés in order to attract as many followers as possible and documented her ascendance to Instagram celebrity. Her work will allow us to reflect on Mulvey's theorisation of the male gaze and see how Copjec's intervention might lead us to more nuanced analyses of feminist representation in media cultures. Ulman's exploration of new digital realities will be discussed in relation to earlier feminist artists who used the self-portrait as their main medium attempting to draw a genealogy of feminist 'narcissist' art.

Excellency is in the eye of the beholder

Amalia Ulman in her *Excellences & Perfections*, builds a coherent and realistic persona: An ambitious young woman arriving to Los Angeles wanting to become the new 'it girl'. She starts her modelling career, makes money and generally enjoys a glamorous life. Her journey to fame is recorded in countless photos she shares with her Instagram followers. Her persona is full of recognisable Instagram clichés. Stylised pictures of avocado on toast, close ups of luxurious products and most importantly 'spontaneous'

selfies from her various every day activities. Amalia Ulman's project offers an excellent starting point to problematize 'selfie culture' as it provides insightful reflections on digital media, new media representations of the self and narcissism as such.

Ulman's project was proclaimed in press as the 'first Instagram masterpiece' (Sooke, 2016). Instagram was launched in October of 2010 and as its name suggests (instant telegram) was initially an attempt to combine a reconstruction of nostalgic and stylised version of the past with the fast processing and sharing functions of a modern smartphone. Instagram's main innovation, at the beginning of its existence was applying 'retro' filters on the photos users took through their phones. The retro-tendency of the hipster culture in the late 00s is exemplified in Instagram's success, a smartphone application that makes pictures look like they were taken in the past through analogue means. That almost hauntological¹ element of the application gradually receded as the social network aspect became the main selling point. Instagram evolved into the most popular picture sharing social network of the smartphone era. Filters still exist in the application but are not aiming at creating a retro effect but rather to accentuate colours or soften facial imperfections.

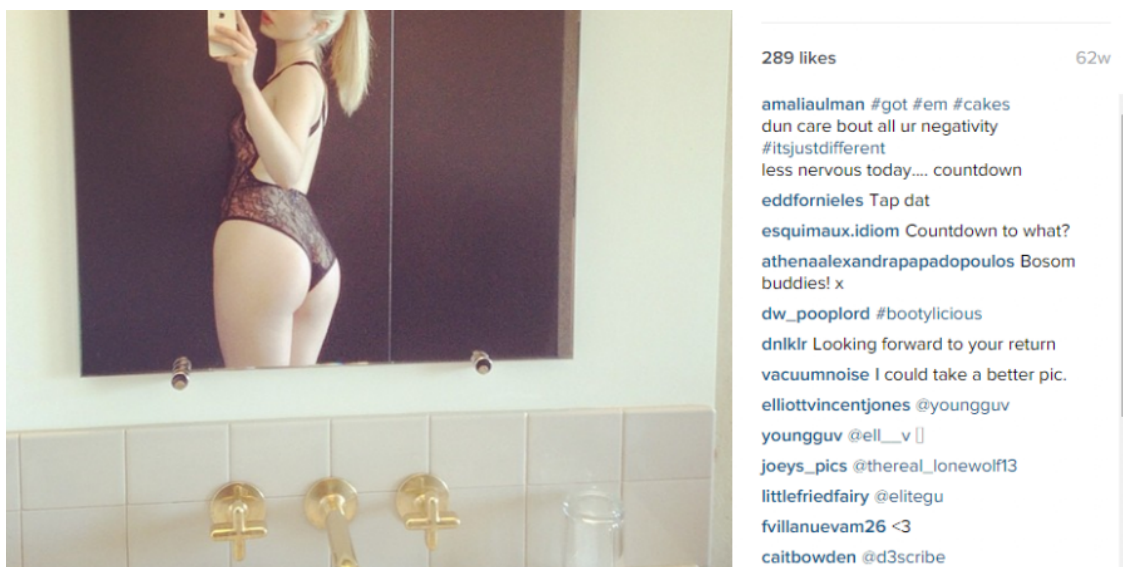
Instagram is now conceived as a visual diary, where the user keeps track of time and space, selfie after selfie. Instagram, just like twitter, beyond a certain set of meta-data (such as location, date and username) also allows the users to add a series of hashtags that not only describe the picture they accompany but at the same time they also create a real-time complex network of signifiers that connect different users that do not share relations of social or geographical affinity. Hashtags allow for finding content outside one's narrow social network and facilitate the creation of instantaneous virtual communities organised around keywords.

It was April 2014 when Amalia Ulman posted on her personal Instagram account a plain frame with "Part 1" written on it. From then on, all of her posts would be part of a scripted performance, a three-part digital media docudrama where a fictionalised version of herself would try to *make it* in L.A. The first part of the series involved her posting motivational messages, photographs of expensive lingerie, luxurious brunches and

¹ Hauntology is a concept developed by Jacques Derrida but popularised by cultural theorist Mark Fischer. [expand]

generally bragging about her new exciting lifestyle. In the second part she introduced her *ghetto* period, using tropes of working class femininities (through the prism of white privileged girl appropriation) and she intensified the sexualisation of her image.

More sexual pictures, more urban themes and the use of drugs helped her build the image of a bad girl. At that time, she presented to her audience a series of fake plastic surgeries, including facial corrections and breast augmentation. Then, she posted a couple of 'intimate' personal moments of introspection with a bit of crying and scripted confessions in order to introduce the last period of her experiment where she would repent her past vices and become obsessed with healthy lifestyle and positive thinking. The last instalment would demonstrate healthy food, post-exercise selfies, pastel colours and flowers. In the process of those five months, she gained about eighty thousand followers who fell for the persona she created.



The artwork attracted media attention with some praise, but a fair bit of scepticism with regards to the project's aims and results. Kyla Bills and Emily Friedland for example both doubt Ulman's innovation as they see what she did as a standard practice among the millennials. This is what Instagram users do, both articles claim, they create and perform a persona; they painstakingly adapt to certain social trends and attempt to create an appealing image through building their own personal brand. For Friedland what is actually missing from Ulman's persona is something very often central in the millennial new media routines: the need to hide that they try to maintain a persona and generally a tendency to

avoid showing their desire for attention. However, we could argue that the point of Ulman's work is not to be original in that sense, on the contrary her main intention is to highlight the process through which new media personas are constructed. Ulman's character may be careless about hiding her ambition, consumerism or the need for attention, yet this very character gained thousands of followers and made a project that got media attention and has been showcased in prestigious art institutes around the globe.

Both of the aforementioned critics agree that Ulman is no less narcissistic than those who inspired her work. As we saw earlier, Lasch identifies modern art as an exceptional manifestation of narcissism of our era. According to Lasch, both making art out of consumerist imagery (like pop-art of his time) that elevates the banality of everyday life into beauty instead of focusing on the sublime, and the excessive pre-occupation with oneself (like in the selfie epidemic of our times) are signs of the narcissistic contemporary society. Besides that, he warns us of the dangers of art presenting reality as fictive; art that presents society as the result of 'narratives.' Narcissist artists who could never internalise the 'reality principle', according to Lasch, tend to prefer a worldview according to which reality is nothing more than fiction. In the use of narcissism as a condemnatory term in the aforementioned responses to Ulman's work, we see certain echoes of Lasch's conservative moralism. In all of these accounts, the fantasy of the artist as selfless is in operation.

Ulman's *excellences* do not offer an aesthetically reparative experience, and she does not produce a transcendental gesture towards the sublime, as a good artist, according to Lasch *should* do. On top of that her work is full of herself with self-portraits and pictures from her everyday life. Her body, the image of her body and the performative identity she creates occupy a central position in her work blurring the boundaries between parody and real, genuine and meta, embodied and virtual. Even when the target of Ulman's satire (gender norms in new media) is indeed accepted as a real problem her choice of medium is challenged and often ridiculed. For us, it is the exact blurring between the intimate and the public, between the quotidian private and the reflective political that marks her work as an *excellent* case study for our analysis of narcissism and media.

Going back to the problematic of the mirror we can conceptualise Ulman's selfies - and in fact any selfie - in relation to ego formation. As we saw earlier, selfies, just like mirrors can never offer a complete representation of oneself. Narcissism cannot find satisfaction in its own image. Joan Copjec reminds us that '(narcissism) must, rather, consist in the belief that one's own being exceeds the imperfections of its image. Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with which the subject constantly finds fault and in which it constantly fails to recognise itself.' Narcissism in that sense even when appearing to entrap the subject in a repetitive and solipsistic motion it facilitates reaching towards the Other, as the image of the self can never be complete.

In Laura Mulvey's understanding of the male gaze, *Excellences and Perfections* is a project that perfectly fits patriarchal modes of representation. Ulman presents her body in a similar way as the women in magazines and mainstream Hollywood films. It is objectified, sexualised, an image to be consumed by her thousands of male followers. We suggest that Ulman, by obscuring the subject/object dichotomy and by thematising her objectification, disrupts the normative patriarchal dynamic. In the Panopticon ontology a subject can either conform to the gaze of the Other or be exterminated, but in the psychoanalytic context there is more space for ambivalence and reflection.

Lacan put forward a model of subjectivity that goes beyond dichotomies such as internal/external and social/psychical. The term extimacy was coined by Lacan to signify the paradoxical concepts of psychoanalysis as it combines ex- from exterior and -timacy from intimacy (in French extimité from extérieur and intimité). Extimacy is used to describe the unconscious, and as the term suggests, for Lacan, the unconscious is both intersubjective and deeply intimate. For psychoanalysis the Other can never fully comprehend the subject, the Other's gaze can never fully grasp the subject's identifications and unconscious thoughts just as the subject itself cannot do it either. That is why we argue that Amalia Ulman can at the same time be subjected to the male gaze and resistant to it.

Reyes et al. in their paper 'Disconnected/connected: On the "look" and the "gaze" of cell phones' (2015) offer an analytic distinction useful for theorising social and mobile media. According to these writers, there is a fundamental difference between being seen and being subjected to the gaze. Following the Lacanian explication of the gaze, the authors

suggest that the social media are not facilitating the gaze but rather operate on the imaginary level of relationality. The screen is a veil of signifiers, the sliding, or shall we say *scrolling*, of signifiers is in place to conceal the gaze. The gaze emerges when the screen is off, when the users hold the phone in their hands but they are not looking at it. The user anticipates a notification that does not come; they are fidgety. That is the moment when the gaze of the Other forces the subject to deal with themselves, the moment of anxiety.

The phone, unlike the Lacanian sardine tin, can in fact return the look as it opens up to a whole new field of communication and socialisation. In that sense, the mobile phone, according to Reyes et al, offers a circulation of anxiety and comfort, as it satisfies the need to be seen and recognised and at the same time produces anxiety, facilitating the gaze of the Other. The mobile phone with this double function becomes an appendage of subjectivity, and a perfect vessel of the drive that circulates from the subject to the object and back to the subject. In Ulman's pictures, her phone features in the selfies she takes in front of the mirror and it becomes the quilting point between the persona she constructs and her *real* life. The same bedazzled phone she uses to portray the stereotypical character she builds for *Excellences* is the phone she uses to contact her friends and family. The subject in the new media era stands in front of the mirror holding their phones; the phone becomes part of the self, the self is stained by a hole: the smartphone camera. In one of her interviews, Ulman says that many of her friends were really disturbed with the change of her Instagram posts even though they knew it was an art-project. This presence of the upsetting in the ordinary, this anxiety provoking banality is one of the chief reason we have discussed this project here – like the sardine-tin, an otherwise typical Instagram profile becomes provocative and disturbing when it forces us to think of ourselves.

Narcissistic feminist art

Feminist art has a long history of problematizing body and gender representations and lived realities. Since the 70s several female artists disrupted the normative phallocentrism of the art world by putting forward work that reflected their embodied realities. They often achieved that by using their own bodies to express themselves and to establish a new

body politics that also reflected the political climate of the time (counter-cultures, sexual revolution, the emergence of identity politics). By turning their own bodies into their very medium, feminist artists attempted to disrupt a long history of objectification of the female body in art: this time it was women themselves that took control of the female image. Intriguingly, some art critics of the time labelled instances of body-centred female art as self-absorbed and narcissistic (in opposition to the universal interests of the male artist). We encounter here an old trope where psychoanalysis played its role: women are vain and narcissistic and they only care about (their) appearances. In psychoanalytic orthodoxy women are often portrayed as obsessed with their own image while men fixated to the *other* sex. Art theorist Amelia Jones (2007) examines in her work artists from what she identifies as feminist *body art* from the 70s and discusses the reception and legacy of it. For Jones the persistent characterisation of those art works as narcissistic is not defamatory or even misleading; it is indeed accurate, yet not in the way the critics intended. Amelia Jones takes into account psychoanalytic theorisations of narcissism (similar to the ones presented earlier in this chapter) in order to defend narcissist feminist art as such. In order to pursue this re-appropriation of narcissism Jones creates the new analytic category of *radical narcissism* [Amelia Jones, *Body art/performing the subject*]. In the case studies examined by Jones the body and its image are re-thematised: classic motifs are re-examined and the body acquires a radical re-signification.

The artists themselves present their own bodies and they often expose them naked and sexually charged. The female nude carries a long history of objectification both in artistic representations and in media cultures. Feminist body art deals with this history in a seemingly paradoxical way, by re-appropriating the very same poses and gestures that patriarchal culture invented and circulated. Contrary to classical Odalisques and pin-up girls, the female and radically narcissistic artists present their own raw representation of their bodies. The artist in this case is not an invisible – transparent in his naturalised position as a subject of creation – man, but on the contrary the artist exposes her own body defying the distinction between the subject who creates and the object that is being presented.

Body art brings forward the intrinsic tension of narcissism as presented in the mirror phase theorisation. As Amelia Jones notices, the narcissist depends on the Other in order to exist. The ego is always dependent on the Other and always negotiates the boundaries of its selfhood. In the proclaimed articulation of narcissism in body art, the body image becomes a photograph, a video projection and a painting. The artist adores her body as foreign; she learns how to define its boundaries and invites the audience to be part of this process. Carolee Schneeman, one of the artists discussed by Jones, creates films of herself having sex with her partner. She then scratches the film and plays with the celluloid chemicals developing an expressionist pornography.

The body resists the dissolution of the film; the viewer gets glimpses of the sex scene between a kaleidoscopic assemblage of colours and cuts. Schneeman's sexuality seems to literally attack the film as the bodies merge, faint and re-emerge. Freud suggests that society sublimates sexual energy into artistic and intellectual achievements; in Schneeman's *Fuses* sexuality and art collapse into each other. The film dissolves, the body becomes transparent, and in Lasch's terms the work gets lost in an oceanic feeling of primary narcissism. Narcissism portrayed as an oceanic feeling though, offers us a glimpse of a new conception of the ego, an ego that is not quite as closed and self-contained as is usually conceived but, as we saw earlier, it is open-ended and dependent on the Other's presence and recognition.

In the example of Schneeman's *Fuses*, what was perceived as a private moment turns into a public performance. Looking at your reflection in front of the mirror appears to be a private affair that could be shameful to practice in public. Tracing your ego's boundaries, examining your bodily limits and understanding your desire should happen away from the public eye. Moments of displayed narcissism remind us of our initial encounter with the mirror; the mirror as a terrain of alienation, the mirror as in fact the very reason of our comprehension of selfhood as alterity. The narcissistic subject of body art, according to Jones takes a heroic position: she reclaims the body as the passionate territory of that exact constitutive alterity.

Jennifer Linton (2010) in her discussion of Hannah Wilke's nude self-portraits focuses on the paradox of feminist body art. The feminist artist (in this case Wilke) exposes her naked body to the male gaze. Wilke has produced during her prolific career hundreds of

artworks featuring her naked body. The political significance of the agency and intentionality of the artist is once again central; it is not a male photographer that offers Wilke's body to the public (as a gift, as an object), it is in fact the artist herself who does it, and by doing so she disrupts the normative circulation of female images/bodies. As Linton points out, feminist art critics of Wilke's time were not convinced about the radicality of this gesture. According to art theorists Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, who follow a line of thought similar to the Mulvey argument we discussed earlier, Wilke does nothing more than objectifying herself.

Her critical position does not come through at first sight and therefore the subversion she claims to facilitate remains largely an intention rather than an actualised and effective gesture (Linton, 2010). In one of Wilke's interviews presented by Linton the artist exposes her ambiguity towards the politics of her work. On one hand, she expresses her alliance with feminism and discusses the problematic of female objectification. On the other hand she wants to investigate her feelings in relation to that position, she wants to use her *female narcissism* in order to comment on the social reality she inhabits. Amelia Jones suggests that body art enacts *narcissism as contingency*. It is not the fixation to the body as an object but rather the return to the body as a broken promise of coherence. Wilke in her photos proudly wears her wounds. In her piece *S.O.S Starification Object series*, she presents a series of self-portraits where her half-naked body – in casual poses with several props – is covered with small vaginal sculptures made of chewing gum. For Wilke chewing gum is the perfect analogy to how society treats women and wears them proudly creating a bizarre iconography. The vaginas on her body, instead of signifying lack, as patriarchal society (and psychoanalysis) wants them to become an absolute sign of excess. As Jones writes: '(u)nveiling her flesh and forcing it to symbolise the externalisation of the (wounded) self, Wilke performs her body/self as radically excessive.' In a similar, yet more subtle way, Ulman offers her follower images of her body after plastic surgery. In a move of radical transparency, she shows how much she has to suffer in order to conform to beauty standards.

In another powerful discussion of narcissism in art, Joan Copjec turns her attention to Cindy Sherman's self-portraits from the project *Untitled Film Stills*. Sherman, like Ulman and Wilke, focuses on gendered roles and uses her body and its representation as her

medium of expression. In Sherman's *Stills* we see a series of self-portraits, which operate as parodies of several cinematic clichés. Sherman is always in the centre of the frame enacting familiar poses from imaginary films. Copjec suggests that the psychoanalytic conception of narcissism offers in fact an analysis of femininity that goes beyond the critique of the male gaze. In order to explicate that, she follows the concept of the Ego as developed in Leo Bersani's close reading of the Freudian *On Narcissism*. For Bersani (Bersani, 2013), as for Freud himself, the conceptual distinction between narcissist libido and libido proper (or anacletic libido) makes no sense. Bersani offers us an account on how the narcissistic libido that is initially objectless allows for the formation of the ego. Central in Bersani's conception of narcissism is the sexual drive. According to Bersani, the drive can have no object, and assuming the drive taking as its object the ego is a false assumption.

The drive, according to Bersani, is essentially a force of destruction, a form of desire that cannot be satisfied, a violent circular motion from the subject to the world and back to the subject. Every outward blast of the drive creates an excitation through its self-shattering force, and as a result it brings a "masochistic disturbance of psychic equilibrium". This self-shattering excitation effectively functions as the object of the drive or in Bersani's words 'a pleasurable shattered consciousness becomes aware of itself as the object of its desire.' The ego as a result can be understood as a 'passionate inference [...] necessitated by the anticipated pleasure of its own dismantling.'

This is Bersani's take on the process of primary narcissism. The limitless infantile narcissism comes as an outcome of the subject's capacity to be shattered; shattered into sexuality, shattered into the world. The subject becomes aware of its existence through the pleasure of attempting to dismantle that very existence. When the outside environment will introduce a new form of refined ego, a coherent image through the mirror phase, the subject will attach this primordial sense of selfhood into this external proposed ideal ego.

As Copjec observes, Bersani's objectless passion leaves little space for any conceptualisation of sociality or connectivity as it traces the existence of an almost autistic – yet passionate – subject. Copjec agrees with the idea that the 'I' is no more than a 'passionate inference', but she does not discard the role of objects in primary

narcissism. For her, it is the objects that allow for such an 'inference' to take place. The ego like an amoeba takes its shape while reaching for the objects; the objects organise narcissistic love. Women, Copjec says, can only be narcissistic by loving, to love is to want to be loved and thus love is always narcissistic. We can only understand both the ego and in fact libido itself through examining the object cathexes, those points outside of us that effectively organise ourselves. In the *jouissance* we experience when loving things we find 'a corporeal experience of the self.'

Taking into account these insights, let us return to Ulman and her Instagram selfies.² In one of her interviews, Ulman notes that when her project began, the gallery that represented her got in touch in order to complain about her new media behaviour. The gallerist warned her that no one would take her seriously in the art-world if she kept posting pictures like that. The Instagram account Ulman used to develop this experiment/art project was actually her already existing personal Instagram account. The artwork begins with 'part 1' and ends with 'the end' but *excellences and perfections* are just an intermission in the middle of Ulman's *regular* account's stream of photos. This is a striking aspect of this project: Ulman did not stop posting photos from her everyday life after the end of the project, she still does as she did during *excellences*. Now, she shares her moments with the 80.000 fans she acquired during her *excellences*, as well as the arty crowd that came to know her after she publicised her project.

As we noted, in Friedland's critique, *excellences as perfections* is presented as a naïve, overstated version of what most normal millennials already do, but if we focus on the exact moment when the exaggerated persona turns into the *normal* Ulman, we come across a shocking moment of ambiguity and confusion. We can return then to the Panopticism question as presented in the beginning of this discussion. Is there an exit point when it comes to new politics of surveillance? Is it possible that one can offer a truly critical account that might resist a recuperation and further expansion of the panopticon?

² While editing this chapter, Cindy Sherman published an Instagram account, with a series of surrealist portraits and pictures from her everyday life.

The art of over-identification

The artist duo BAVO following an argument made by Slavoj Žižek suggest what they call 'over-identification' as an effective strategy for political art in our time. Žižek uses over-identification to defend the aesthetics and public performances of Slovenian art group and rock band Laibach. According to Žižek (2014), dissident art in communist countries of the early 80s was mainly trying to plead for more humanitarian and democratic reforms within the existing regimes. Laibach, on the contrary, in their performances requested for a more austere, strict and conformist communism by accusing the current Yugoslavian regime for being too soft. When following the strategy of over-identification, BAVO claim, you have to take the system you want to criticise more seriously than it takes itself, obliging the audience to reflect on their current state of affairs.

In *The Art of Over-Identification* (2007), BAVO discuss different strategies in producing antagonistic political discourse through art. In their critical evaluation of so-called political art from the sixties, BAVO assess different ways in which artists attempted criticism of the existing socio-cultural reality. One of the modes of critique they identify in late 60s political art is what they call 'marginalism'. Marginalism is expressed through counter-cultural productions and as the name suggests these productions are born in the margins of society. Rock and roll and later punk offer this kind of positioning. According to BAVO, 'marginalism' is not as effective in our times, as communicative capitalism is extremely capable of assimilating and consuming counter-cultural movements almost in their very conception. Contemporary capitalism almost glamourizes subcultural production and turns its achievements into consumer products.

A different approach, more common in our days, is the construction of a utopian vision through art. According to this strategy the artistic production aims at providing glimpses of political utopias: suggesting a new set of rules and modalities that exist completely outside of contemporary social reality. This reminds us of Mulvey's suggestion of a new feminist avant-garde that completely destroys the conventions of patriarchal cinema. Nevertheless, BAVO seem sceptical of this exercise in utopianism too. Taking into account the fact that we already operate within the limitation of a certain political ontology, we can assume that utopian imagination is bound to utilise existing ideas

coming from the old ideological regime. Besides that, utopian visions are often prone to absolutism and authoritarianism. Finally, and above all, similarly to the 'marginalist' approach, capitalism's ability to assimilate liberatory and utopian visions makes BAVO cautious towards these gestures.

So at this point BAVO seem to reach a discursive deadlock: If you cannot fight against the system through new counter-cultural identities of resistance and if it is impossible to envisage a radically new utopian world within the current paradigm (and more so, a utopia that is not bound to absolutism and suppression of difference), is there any possibility of political resistance through art at all? BAVO suggest a political equivalence of homeopathy according to which we shall swallow all of the sweet poison of the current regime in order to drastically break away from our addiction to it; we should embrace wholeheartedly what troubles us most. The situations emerging from over-identification projects are never clear in their message as the artists oscillate between a critical position and a position of passionate embracing of what is assumed to be bad. Žižek suggests in his theorisation of over-identification, that when you deny the audience an answer to the question 'where does the artist stand' you compel them to decide upon their own desire. Over-identification seems to provide a psychoanalytic *solution* to the problem (and thus not a solution at all).

Laibach for example, due to their militaristic aesthetic and lyrics are adored by fascists all over the world. Laibach do not just identify with the oppressor in order to ridicule them as for example a parody project would do (i.e. Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*). Laibach identify with the enjoyment of the oppressor and that makes them terrifying. Critics of Laibach will often attack that particular element of their work: if you dress like a fascist, sing like a fascist, and even being admired by fascists, how are you not one of them? There is not an easy way to reply to that, especially not while maintaining a politically clear-cut position. Art, unlike discourse, is more capable of occupying contradictory positions. The image, operating primarily in the domain of the imaginary is more prone to the ambivalence of the mirror stage, whereas words have to obey to the meaning-making laws of the symbolic.³ Ulman states at a blurb in her website: 'When

³ Although as we will see in the next chapter that is not necessarily true also for the signifier

narcissism becomes a stratagem we need mirrors to learn our poses, to attract and seduce.’ In her *Excellences* Ulman operates as the feminist critic of gendered conventions while she enjoys a version of femininity that is not deemed worthy in the high-culture context.

As we saw earlier, Ulman’s gallerist was upset when she started the Instagram project; her friends were upset with her even though they knew it was an art intervention. Unlike a clear parody project (i.e. Ulman posing as if she takes selfies and then present the result in a gallery space), where the spectator feels the safety of distinction by the enjoyment of what is criticised, in *Excellences* the spectator can never fully comprehend what part of what they observe is real and what is fictional. It is Ulman’s enjoyment that is threatening as it was in Hanna Wilke’s and Cindy Sherman’s self-portraits. Their bodies being excessive, narcissistic, loving. For Copjec, it is the celluloid that activates Sherman’s love about the world. The medium becomes the object of affectation. In Ulman’s case we identified with her mobile phone, as the object that puts the drive in motion. The smartphone becomes the two way mirror-machine, which allows Ulman to assert her open-ended ego.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was, as the title suggests, to go beyond commonplace understandings of the selfie as an ephemeral cultural production of limited scholarly interest, or as a symptom of a narcissism that is assumed to be a moral failing, whether at the individual or social level. There have been previous attempts to re-engage with the self-image and narcissism using psychoanalytic theory, notably in the feminist art theorists of the 1970s and 80s. But what has been missing in many of these discussions is a theoretical model that situates the ego image in relation to the Other, and therefore in the social field. In this chapter, I turned to Lacan to argue that the image of the self is inherently and inextricably linked to the Other whose gaze secures it. I have argued that it is inasmuch as the narcissistic image is situated in the social field that it is of potential interest to consumer studies, as well as highlighted questions where this new approach has relevance.

My starting point was an examination of narcissism within psychoanalytic literature. In my attempt to develop a psychoanalytically-informed discussion of new media realities, the first and most challenging issue was to theorise the idea of selfhood and how it might be affected by technological advancements. As Freud is one of the first philosophers to extensively focus on the mythical figure of Narcissus and subsequently on the concept of narcissism, and as my work is explicitly informed by psychoanalytic theories, Freud offers the necessary backbone for my understanding of narcissism as a complex psychosocial phenomenon.

A large part of this analytical desire to reframe and re-examine narcissism came out of my need to consider the phenomenon outside of a moralist point of view. Most contemporary criticisms of narcissism and of our supposedly narcissist cultures link to Christopher Lasch's accounts and his seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism*. In closely reading Lasch, and by comparing his analysis of narcissism to that of Freud, I was able to identify how Lasch's political agenda informed his theorisation of the phenomenon. My departure from Lasch's analysis led me to question the moralising that pathologises contemporary media cultures as inherently narcissistic. If a preoccupation with oneself is for Lasch a sign of the decay of our society, we can draw different conclusions, provided that we question some of his fundamental assumptions. What is striking in Freud's work, for example, is that instead of being presented as a psychological problem, narcissism is rather discussed as a necessary phenomenon in the process of ego formation, hence the starting point of all intersubjective relations.

In order to better contextualise Freud's theorisation of narcissism in relation to media and to introduce the problematic of the screen to my discussion, I employed Lacan's theory of the mirror phase. In his theorisation of the mirror, Lacan suggests that the initial formation of the ego is shaped by the encounter of the subject with its specular image. This model of the ego allows us to understand the radical alterity of subjectivity, inasmuch as it is shaped in relation to an external imago. This theorisation, as presented in this chapter, allowed me to argue for an understanding of the mobile screen that functions like the mirror, in the formation of self-identity.

Lacan's theory of the mirror phase emphasises that all such ego identifications are inherently flawed and unstable: the image in the mirror is whole, a complete and

enclosed territory, in a way that the subject's being is not. Yet even this completeness is illusory; looking into the mirror, the subject can never observe their whole body; there is always some part escaping their perception, and crucially, they can never observe where their gaze emanates from. By theorising the complex process of the mirror phase I show that the mirror phase is not a merely cognitive process that allows the subject to acquire a self-image. Rather, it is an essentially intersubjective and open ended process. This is crucial in order to better understand narcissism as a function rather than as a subjective pathology.

The Lacanian account of the mirror phase became popular in the analysis of the cinematic screen in the 1970s, when feminist Marxist theorists identified the political significance of the modern visual cultures in shaping and affecting popular ideologies. In my critical reading of these theorisations, I identified a certain kind of reductionism. If the Lacanian mirror phase is an essentially flawed process, in feminist film studies very often the identification with the filmic ideal ego is presented as inevitable. By examining this argument through Joan Copjec's deconstructive analysis, I conclude that this account of the cinematic screen as a deterministic and repressive apparatus is more reflective of the Foucauldian conception of the Panopticon rather than the Lacanian account of the Other's gaze. This distinction and the disambiguation between the two theoretical schemas allowed me to envision a politics that is open to difference and resistance to the will of the Other, as the latter is not conceptualised as an all-encompassing, all observing entity.

In my analysis, I refer to a mirror phase rather to a mirror stage, as this difference allows us to appreciate the relevance of the mirror beyond early childhood. Where the mirror stage refers merely to a developmental stage of the child, the mirror phase signifies a process that happens throughout one's life. By opening up this possibility, I was able to then discuss selfies in relation to the mirror and the formation of the ego, and suggest a theorisation of the mobile screen as a mirror, a device that allows the subject to construct their self-image and at the same time experience it as mediated by the social Other.

Following the already established parallels between the cinematic screen to the Lacanian mirror, I then apply these to the mobile screen. While the cinematic screen shares certain qualities with the mobile screen, it certainly also has significant differences. Unlike the

cinema screen, the mobile phone screen is an interactive surface. The phone does not simply receive images, but enables images to be taken and shared. It is a portable screen, giving its user access to media wherever they happen to be. From the office to the bedroom, from public to intimate spaces, mobile screens are a constant in contemporary life.

In their engagement with narcissism and the phenomenon of the selfie, theorists have frequently referenced Lacan's mirror phase. However, their attention has been restricted, for the most part, to the mirror phase as articulated in Lacan's earlier work, where the subject's encounter with his specular other is unmediated by any third factor. As Lacan developed his theory of the mirror phase he gave greater weight to the role of a third position, that of the gaze of the Other, which secures the position of the subject in relation to its mirror other. The image of the self is, then, from the beginning one that is rooted in the social field, in the Symbolic. The subject is not lost in its identification with the specular image; there is always another position from which to see themselves and their semblable. This more nuanced understanding of the mirror phase is, I believe, essential in comprehending the function of narcissism as a phenomenon, yet is missing in many discussions of narcissism in cultural and consumer studies. The narcissism I end up talking about is not an anti-social psychopathology but rather narcissism as contingency, a radical dependency on the validation of the Other. As Lacan says, the ego presents itself and sustains itself qua problematic only on the basis of the Other's gaze.

One of the innovations of my research came from the incorporation of examples from feminist art history in order to better understand selfie culture. By analysing the so-called narcissistic practices of visual artists who use their own bodies in their artworks, I was able to better understand the mechanism of narcissism and its potential political significance in the context of patriarchal power regimes. Women throughout modern history were deemed narcissistic, too preoccupied with themselves, trapped in their own specular images. What radical narcissist artists from the 70s showed is how this preoccupation with oneself is not anti-social, insofar as the subject mediates the self-making process through the gaze of an audience.

The main case study of the chapter comes from Amalia Ulman's work, which makes a bridge between the self-portrait and selfie culture. *Excellences and Perfections* is a

durational performance that Ullman creates on Instagram. The work is an experiment on how new media femininities are constructed and consumed. What is remarkable in both feminist body art from the 1970s and Ullman's contemporary work is how they manage to both critique how femininity is constructed and at the same time celebrate and play with the artist's own femininity. These artists, in a way, expose their own narcissism in its full glory. I was inspired by these artworks as they present nuanced positions on subjectivity, gender and desire, while maintaining a playful and self-reflexive attitude. The artists I discuss in this chapter question the lines between private and public, intimate and political, essence and representation, and I try to follow their example in my research method, drawing theoretical conclusions from an eclectic mix of sources and references while implicating lived experiences and embodied struggles, cartographies of subjective frustrations and false revelations.

One of the main analytical tools I draw upon to demonstrate the politically subversive potential of narcissism is the concept of 'overidentification', a term taken from Žižek's discussion of Laibach. Strategies of resistance here take another shape; in overidentification, one not only accepts the insignia of the normative regime but fully embodies fully. According to Žižek, by taking this role of the zealot and by exaggerating the effects of the regime it is possible to make a more effective criticism than by simply pointing to its shortcomings. One of the most effective aspects of overidentification as a strategy of critique is its refusal to offer a comfortable position to its audience: it is neither clear-cut parody nor a simple acceptance of the norm. Through this very ambiguity, overidentification creates anxiety in the audience, which is challenged to take an active position and answer where they truly stand themselves. I consider Ullman's work exemplary of both radical narcissism and overidentification as a mode of resistance.

My work politicises psychoanalysis by critically employing a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity. By theorising the ways the subject is constituted, I propose a nuanced understanding of psycho-social phenomena that allows for new political projects. By criticising the Foucauldian Panopticism argument, I make space for a new conception of power that is not deterministic and reductionist but allows for creativity and resistance. Through the psychoanalytic framework I assemble, we can think of selfies as a creative process that allows the subject to re-configure their self-image in relation to the

Other. Selfies thus become an anchoring point for a subject who seeks stability in an ever-changing world; selfhood comes to represent an evolving yet constant factor in one's life and selfies come to create a visual diary of this reality.

Thus, even though the selfie as a cultural practice does not carry the same authorial intentions as Amalia Ulman's work, it does bear a certain element of what I term in this chapter as radical narcissism. If radical narcissism is all about exposing narcissism as contingency, narcissism as a modality of relating to the Other, a precondition of all sociability, then selfies are a social phenomenon that exemplifies this precise process. As selfies are not taken for the user's own pleasure but rather in order to be shared on social media, the implication of the Other's gaze is an essential element of their very existence and popularity. If anything, by closely examining a more avant-garde and artistic use of a new medium we can predict and better understand the future of an evolving phenomenon. This focus on emerging media phenomena can thus have a predictive role in relation to mainstream media cultures, something essential for a future-oriented consumer culture research. Consumer cultures change rapidly and constantly and it is therefore useful to focus on those fringe experimentations that potentially showcase traces of emerging cultural trends.

This chapter is titled 'beyond the selfie principle', a reference to Freud's paper, 'Beyond the pleasure principle', where he introduces his controversial idea of the death drive, a principle in people's life that goes beyond the mere seeking of pleasure. In a similar way, I have identified ways of thinking about selfies beyond their mere appearance and perceived function. I would like to re-contextualise selfies as a phenomenon that goes beyond the media culture that gave rise to it, and elevate them into a metonymy of self-creation; a story of selfhood in flux, selfhood that is essentially open, selfhood that always somehow implicates the Other.

Gay spatialisation – towards a real imaginary

In the previous chapter we examined the ways in which psychoanalysis introduced and developed the concept of narcissism, first as a psychological pathology and then as a structural pre-condition for the birth of ego. Furthermore, we examined how the psychoanalytic conception of narcissism could be used in our theorisation of social reality and more specifically how it could inform our analysis of media cultures. We particularly focused on the structural aspect of narcissism following the ‘mirror phase’ argument by Jacques Lacan. In this context, we attempted an analysis of the ‘selfie’ and we reflected on various instances from art history where self-portraits played a pivotal role in the feminist struggle for representation.

In order to advance our argument we deployed the concept of radical narcissism as developed by Amelia Jones and thus we re-approached social media practices, widely understood as narcissistic and we explored their potential political value. In this chapter, we will further expand on the complex relationship between narcissism and new media technologies, this time, focusing on the figure of the male homosexual as theorised in psychoanalytic literature. We do that for two reasons: first, the male homosexual is represented in early Freudian texts as the paradigmatic narcissist and by examining this theorisation we will advance our understanding of narcissism as such. Second, real time gay dating applications such as *Grindr* offer a great terrain for reflection on new media realities and their relation to psychic phenomena.

After we introduce the main thematic motifs of our discussion and we critically engage with the psychoanalytic theorisation of homosexuality, we will focus on the idea of the drive, a concept of a great importance for both Freud and Lacan. Our theory of the drive will focus on Leo Bersani’s analysis of cruising (the practice of wandering about a (typically public) place in search of a casual sexual partner) as a cultural practice that relates to sexuality but goes beyond mere sexual gratification. For Bersani, cruising relates to ‘*sociability*’, a term he uses to describe co-existence in the social world. By employing the concept of sociability, we will re-contextualise the function of location-based dating applications. In order to better understand sexuality and its relation to the process of subjectification we will also engage with the psychoanalytic theorisation of the

Oedipus complex and the problematic of castration and we will do so with a queer ethos that goes beyond psychoanalytic orthodoxies.

Our queer theorisation of Oedipus will allow us then to reflect on the political implication of cruising and more broadly on what Leo Bersani calls 'homosexual ethics'. In the last three sections of this chapter, we will engage with the theoretical framework that Jacques Lacan developed later in his work. We will focus on the concept of the *sinthome* that appears in the twenty-third seminar of Lacan. Through the *sinthome* we will then try to explore alternatives to an Oedipalised relation to the symbolic order. By focusing on the late work of Lacan we will also examine the ways the imaginary domain can in fact offer an alternative relation to the real that is not necessarily mediated through the signifier. Those insights will allow us to solidify our analysis of the ego as an open-ended entity and better understand narcissism's relation to intersubjectivity. We conclude this chapter with an examination of the question of locality/locatability in relation to Grindr and other real time dating apps and introduce the problematic of space in new media cultures – a theme that we return to in the following chapter.

Radical narcissisms: the male homosexual



In this provocative self-portrait, a young Robert Mapplethorpe poses in full-leather attire with a bullwhip hanging from his anus. Mapplethorpe exemplifies in this photograph the

aesthetics of the sadomasochistic gay scene he was part of and fascinated by. In the picture, he looks straight at the camera while the whip peeking out of his ass appears as an appendix to his body. Building on our analysis of the self-portrait as an act of radical narcissism, we might consider this picture an appropriate bridge between the previous chapter's focus on femininity and this chapter's analysis of male homosexual subjectivity. In this picture we encounter yet another narcissistic photographer, posing as the object of (his) desire and blurring the lines of the looking/being looked at dyad.

This implication of the photographer as pornographic model, as we saw in the previous chapter, bends the conventional understanding of objectification. Furthermore, the picture brings into the mainstream, visual elements from a marginalised sub-culture; it elevates into high art what would be conventionally regarded as fetish pornography. The homosexual subject/object, in this case, appears not only as an agent of sexual desire, but also literally penetrable. Bringing the political struggle of his contemporary gay liberation movement into the forefront, Mapplethorpe re-presents what shall remain non-representable: the male subject – penetrated. Jonathan Kemp in his analysis of the penetrated male states:

Metonymy takes the traditional feminisation of the penetrated male body as evidence of a destabilisation of all epistemological categories. Metonymy thereby locates the erotic corporeality of the penetrated male body as necessarily inside discourse, as the part of discursive reality most resistant to the protocols of representation, and as a consequence capable of throwing them into greater relief. (Kemp, 2013, p. 124)

The metonymic process operates in more complex ways in this portrait. Mapplethorpe is not just the receiver of penetration, and therefore he is not just an embodied metonymisation of femininity. This picture represents circuits of pleasure that operate on different levels. The bull-whip is at the same time what penetrates the body but also what is excessive and phallic. The composition evokes an almost human/animal hybrid with the whip resembling a tail. While we are looked at by Mapplethorpe himself, in the Lacanian sense, the anxiety-provoking gaze emanates from the bull-whip as that is the point that operates as a stain on the visual field. The image acquires an intimidating dimension while remaining casual and quotidian.

One could argue that the internet era is saturated with pornographic imagery; nevertheless, an artistically constructed intimate depiction of a sexual body can still cause emotional reactions and disturbances. In a psychoanalytic context sexuality signifies a stumble of all meaning; a disruptive force not in a sense of being a moral provocation but rather being a remnant of the traumatic dimension of the real. As Alenka Zupančič vividly describes: 'sex does not function as a stumbling block of meaning (and of the count) because it is considered morally naughty. It is considered morally naughty because it is a stumbling block of meaning (Zupančič 2008).'

What is implied in Zupančič's comment on sexuality is the relation between sex and the real in the Lacanian sense. In the previous chapter we presented Lacan's three registers: the domain of language and law (symbolic), what people perceive through their senses (the imaginary) and what lies outside any symbolisation (the real). Sexuality might be perceived and codified through words and socially determined rituals, but - according to Lacan - it is fundamentally a liminal phenomenon and something that lies on the verge of, and resists, symbolisation.

Contemporary gender and queer studies often define sexuality in relation to Judith Butler's theory of performativity. This approach indeed allows us to grasp the complexities of socio-historically defined sexual identities and practices. Butler's performativity introduces a historicist account of embodiment and provides a framework where corporeal realities can be understood through an analysis of discursive regimes of power. Butler builds on the legacy of Michel Foucault in an attempt to de-naturalise bodily practices and - in doing so - escapes a biological determinism previously predominant in the analysis of human sexuality. Despite its analytical rigour and political efficacy, Butler's account of gender has been criticised as reductionist by psychoanalytically-informed theorists such as Tim Dean and Joan Copjec.

Copjec's psychoanalytic argument against Butler's performativity echoes her critique of feminist film studies. According to Copjec, Butler's performativity prioritises a certain account of sexuality that is linked to discursive regimes. In that sense, Butler presents an account of sexuality that is bound to what Lacanian ontology defines as the symbolic order. Similarly to Laura Mulvey, Butler focuses on the primacy of the signifier in order to conceptualise sexual difference and sexuality as a result of the patriarchal Other's

regulatory gaze. The Other is constructed as the inevitable guarantor of all sexual relations making defiance difficult, if not impossible, to be conceived of. As we saw in the previous chapter, one should not conflate the gaze of the Other with the Foucauldian Panopticon, as the two theories are founded on different ontological assumptions. Zupančič in her discussion of Judith Butler's work explains how Butler's misconception of Lacanian theory led to a theory of performativity:

To a large extent, Lacanian psychoanalysis seems compatible with this account, and it is often presented as such. The primacy of the signifier and of the field of the Other, language as constitutive of reality and of the unconscious (including the dialectics of desire), the creationist aspect of the symbolic and its dialectics (with notions such as symbolic causality, symbolic efficiency, materiality of the signifier) [...] All of these (undisputed) claims notwithstanding, Lacan's position is irreducibly different from the above performative ontology (Zupančič 2012).

What seems to differentiate the Lacanian account is not a reductionist biologism that would re-centralise the physical body and its instincts, but the idea that on top of the performative socially signified body there is an additional *something*. In Butler's work '(g)ender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Gender Trouble). The theory of performativity renders the subject's inner life irrelevant as subjectivity itself only exists as an expression of socio-historical conditions.

On the contrary, sexuality in psychoanalysis can never be fully comprehended just by analysing its discursive context. In Zupančič's words: 'Sex appears in the discourse, it is discussed and analysed, it is captured and framed, but it seems to always maintain a stain of the real, there is always something eluding definition and linguistic enclosure. We can talk of sexuality but we can never capture its essence or explain its experience; sexuality in its very essence, threatens to shutter subjectivity.'

Mapplethorpe's self-portrait might not necessarily cause discomfort or arousal but most certainly evokes affective reactions.⁴ The sexuality of the picture is self-evident yet elusive in its conception. The further we move away from genital and reproductive understandings of sex, the more difficult it becomes to define sex as such. As humankind intensifies the sexualisation of sex, it moves away from defining it as a reproductive activity. As Zupančič points out 'The further the sex departs from the "pure" copulating movement (i.e. the wider the range of elements it includes in its activity), the more "sexual" it can become.'

Queer sex offers a departure for the formulaic ideal of reproductive copulation. Queer theorist Lee Edelman, following a Lacanian theoretical trajectory, defines queer sexuality as a liberatory celebration of the death drive. Separated from reproductive economies, queer sexuality becomes an expression of enjoyment that defies the need for conserving the current social status (Edelman 2004). But as Tim Dean notices, it is not only queer sex that defies the normativity of reproductive sex; in Freud's theory, it is in fact all sex that is queer, and psychoanalysis is queer theory *avant la lettre*. When sexual acts involve speaking subjects, it is impossible that we have a 'pure copulation' that is not imbued with the proliferating and perverse vigorousness of fantasy.

In this chapter, we discuss sexuality in relation to the problematic of the drive. Unlike a historicist approach that relies solely on the discursive regimes of truth (such as science and religion) in order to form an analysis of subjectivity, we also take in account what Zupančič names the 'additional something' of the real. Central to this focus on the real is the psychoanalytic concept of the drive, described by Freud (1915) as:

[A] concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.

Lacan emphasises that for humans, unlike animals, there is no given relation between the drive and its object: "As far as the object in the drive is concerned, let it be clear that it

⁴ I recall encountering the picture for the first time in Mapplethorpe's retrospective in Smithsonian institute, LA. I had a burst of laughter, and then got embarrassed with my juvenile reaction. I then observed other visitors who had similar reactions.

is, strictly speaking, of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference” (Lacan 1998, p.168). The drive according to Lacan does not have an aim, but it gets satisfaction in going in circles around its object.

If Freud makes a remark to the effect that the object in the drive is of no importance, it is probably because the breast, in its function as object, is to be revised in its entirety. [...] To this breast in its function as object, objet a cause of desire, in the sense that I understand the term—we must give a function that will explain its place in the satisfaction of the drive. The best formula seems to me to be the following—that la pulsion en fait le tour. I shall find other opportunities of applying it to other objects. Tour is to be understood here with the ambiguity it possesses in French, both turn, the limit around which one turns, and trick. (Ibid. p.168)

Our prioritisation of the drive in our discussion of sexuality is not an attempt to approach the phenomena we examine under an ahistorical and universalist light. The drive in Lacanian ontology does not exist outside social relations and, as we mentioned earlier, it cannot be reduced to a biological function.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the relation between narcissism and the drive using examples from feminist artists and their self-portraits. In Mapplethorpe’s ‘selfie’, we see the archetypal depiction of homosexual narcissism: men perverse enough to take their own image as a beloved object. At a first glance, this form of narcissism appears to derive conceptually from the female equivalent. Once we investigate the details of the two cases, though, we are confronted with the paradoxical possibility: the derivative could be very easily assumed to be the original. Narcissus, after all, was a male falling in love with his image. The mythical predecessor of all narcissists could be very much assumed to be a male homosexual.

Mapplethorpe, by involving his own body in the picture: vulnerable, penetrable, horny, disrupts the politics of objectification as we outlined earlier. Not only does the final composition feature his own body at the very centre, but it also diverges from a focus on the ‘Apollonian’ abstract ideal body. The body in this self-portrait is sub-cultural, subversive, caught in the middle of a sex act. The image he offers to us is difficult to digest. It is a particular, autobiographical, fleshed-out picture that resists normalisation and canonisation. Mapplethorpe has died from complications related to AIDS in 1989, but

before his premature death he was recognised as one of the most important photographers of his generation. By transgressing the boundaries of pornography and a documentation of a subcultural underground he brought the poetics of fetishism and gay desire into the mainstream. What could his provocative, stylised self-portrait tell us about contemporary media consumption by gay men? In order to answer this question, we will further investigate psychoanalytic conceptions of narcissism while examining *Grindr*, a dating application for men desiring men.

The body of the drive and the allure of sociability

Psychoanalysis makes a fundamental distinction between desire and drive. Before presenting our main argument, we shall discuss this distinction in order to better comprehend our theoretical starting points. According to one of the most famous Lacanian aphorisms 'Man's desire is the desire of the Other' (Lacan 1998, p.235). This demonstrates the positioning of the Lacanian subject in relation to desire. The Other, as we have already seen, represents social reality, and thus desire is identified as a phenomenon mediated by a linguistic, symbolic reality. The subject enters the symbolic order through the process of castration, a term that Lacan extracts from Freud's theorisation of the Oedipus complex. Freud's first account of castration comes in 1908 in his 'On the sexual theories of children'.

The child, having been mainly dominated by excitations in the penis, will usually have obtained pleasure by stimulating it with his hand; he will have been detected in this by his parents or nurse and terrorized by the threat of having his penis cut off. The effect of this 'threat of castration' is proportionate to the value set upon that organ and is quite extraordinarily deep and persistent. Legends and myths testify to the upheaval in the child's emotional life and to the horror which is linked with the castration complex¹—a complex which is subsequently remembered by consciousness with corresponding reluctance. The woman's genitalia, when seen later on, are regarded as a mutilated organ and recall this threat [...]. (Freud 1908, p.217)

Parental prohibitions against masturbation – 'stop playing with that or I'll cut it off' – are recalled with horror when the male child encounters female genitals and registers the

lack of penis. Confronted with this lack, the child deduces that the mother must have had a penis that she lost, and his penis could similarly be taken away.

For Lacan (2017, p.163–196), castration is used as a function of the symbolic order. It is not the physical penis that is on stake but rather the signifier of the phallus. In this account of castration, the mother is initially conceived by the child as a phallic mother, a mother that has everything. Soon the child realises that the mother does not possess the phallus but that the phallus is the object of her desire. The child will then try to take the role of the phallus. At this point, the father (or a third actor) will appear and will disrupt the mother-infant relationship, and in the child's fantasy this person will be imagined to have the phallus. The child will have to then accept that it cannot be the phallus for its mother (as someone else has it) and therefore accepts its castration which comes as a resolution for the Lacanian version of the Oedipus complex. Castration puts a limit to the child's enjoyment of the maternal body and that instigates the process of desire; the subject starts looking in the world of signifiers for what it has lost in order to enter that world.

Let us, then, disambiguate the distinction between desire and the drive. Desire is always oriented towards a lack, a lack that as we saw, is the result of castration. Something is missing due to the process of subjectification and the subject yearns to find it. But the object of desire (what Lacan names *objet a*) is fundamentally un-reachable.

We must keep in mind that *jouissance* is prohibited to whoever speaks, as such—or, put differently, it can only be said between the lines by whoever is a subject of the Law, since the Law is founded on that very prohibition (Lacan 2006, p.821)

Every time the subject thinks it approaches the object, it transforms into something different, making the desiring process a never-ending struggle. The drive, unlike desire is not set in motion due to lack. The drive exists in the domain of the real where no lack or differentiation exists. While desire is entirely articulated within the symbolic order and the subject can experience and express it through signifiers, the drive (and the Lacanian *jouissance*) is not subjected to the same set of principles. *Jouissance* and the drive are concepts that are used to describe the relationship of the living body to what Lacan theorises as the real.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Lacanian real is identified with events of affective excess (ecstatic moments, orgasmic pleasures, trauma) but the existence of the real is also inferred from instances of compulsive repetitions (for example the insistence of the neurotic symptom, our inability to move out of a habit). And repetition is indeed one of the characteristics of the drive which is often conceptualised as a circular movement around the object. As the Argentinian psychoanalyst Néstor Braunstein points out, desire is the result of law and prohibition whereas the drive is a force of positivity that knows no lack. The drive, unlike biological instincts, does not emanate from an ahistorical transcendental genetic origin. It is indeed contingent to the subjectification process without being an absolute effect of it. The drive represents a force, a constant force that does not follow cycles of satisfaction and relaxation but rather 'underlines the impossibility of satisfaction in its uninterrupted insistence' (Braunstein). In that sense, while desire aims at a goal (and constantly re-constructs this potential encounter in fantasy), the drive is aimless. As Braunstein points out: 'The drive does not aim at a visible, sensitive goal, but at the effect produced in its return, after having missed and gone around the target, after confronting the real, that is, the impossibility of full satisfaction.'

But how can we relate the seemingly unbound force of the drive to social phenomena emerging in a mediated linguistic reality? First, let us consider the role of the drive in the process of narcissism, which is at the core of our theorisation of selfhood. According to Bersani's conception of the ego, narcissism and subsequently the ego are by-products of a self-shattering excitation facilitated by the drive. Bersani describes this process as 'a pleasurable shattered consciousness (that) becomes aware of itself as the object of its desire'. Narcissism is the process of subjectivity becoming aware of itself due to the pleasure it gets out of trying to destroy itself. Narcissism, in the end, is a process that allows for intersubjectivity as it can neither fully destroy subjectivity, nor create a perfectly closed and self-sufficient ego.

By building on the theories of narcissism, I will attempt a theorisation of the relation between narcissism and sexuality. As we saw in our genealogy of narcissism, in the Freudian corpus there is a significant yet controversial psychoanalytic account of homosexual desire as inherently narcissistic. In this section, we will attempt a queer re-appropriation of this aspect of psychoanalytic theory by reframing the Freudian

explication of homosexual narcissism with the help of Leo Bersani's close readings of the Freudian text. I will ground these theoretical perspectives on the male homosexual and the drive in a discussion of the gay dating app, Grindr⁵, one of the most popular smartphone applications for men who have sex with men (abbreviated as MSM).

Grindr was launched on 25 March 2009 by 'Nearby Buddy Finder' company. The company was based in the United States, but the app quickly gained worldwide popularity through word of mouth and mentions in various media outlets. Grindr has more than 9 million active users in 200 countries across the globe. We consider this application an ideal starting point for our discussion as it allows for reflections on narcissism, sexuality and new media technologies.

While reviewing journalistic writing on Grindr, one encounters both enthusiastic and critical accounts with regards to the application's impact on the gay community. The usual criticism of app-based dating focuses on the cynicism of a medium that reduces the criteria for arranging a meeting to appearance and/or politically dubious categories such as race, age, HIV status, body type etc. In addition to that, recent critics highlight Grindr's influence on the closing of LGBT venues in western urban centres. Since people do not need to meet in a bar in order to arrange having sex, those spaces where members of the community typically gather, become redundant.

Other voices praise the safety and immediacy of dating apps and go as far as saying that Grindr has completely revolutionised the way people relate to each other, forming instantaneous communities based on desire and geographical proximity (Blackwell et al 2015). In this analysis I want to go beyond the debate about whether Grindr is good or bad by examining its function, through the lens of psychoanalytic theories of the self. By examining Grindr, we can better understand the links between technology, ego and the drive.

Our starting point in our theorisation comes from Leo Bersani's discussion of cruising in his essay '*Sociability and Cruising*.' By cruising, Bersani refers to the practice of MSM

⁵ Since the launch and success of Grindr a series of similar applications were launched and our discussion could very much expand to include them (though they might offer platform specific elements that contradict some of our claims)

walking or driving looking for a sexual partner, usually for a casual, anonymous one-time encounter (dict). In order to better utilise Bersani's argument we will have to trace the similarities and differences between old-school cruising and use of dating apps and see if Bersani's theoretical conclusions apply to our analysis of Grindr.

Bersani develops his main argument around the concept of 'sameness', as it appears in philosophical and sociological texts of his time. Sameness is defined in opposition to difference and according to Bersani, it is often considered ontologically lesser and a synonym to identity: the enemy of all change and progress. In this hierarchy, heterosexual love is implicitly represented as an eminent encounter with difference whereas homosexuals are bound to sameness and narcissism. Bersani attempts a deconstruction of this dichotomy, or rather a radical defence of 'sameness' as such.

In order to achieve this, he introduces a theorisation of 'sociability', a term he borrows from sociologist Georg Simmel. Sociability is proposed as a form of social bonding that is not related to desire or pleasure. Bersani describes sociability as an almost 'ascetic conduct' that leads to what he poetically calls 'the pleasure of rhythmized being'. Sociability seems to be taking place almost automatically; it involves the pleasure of co-existing, a peaceful movement within the social world. It seems to almost acquire a metaphysical (or hyper-physical) function, as - in order to describe it - Bersani uses metaphors such as the relation between the waves of the sea or the molecules of air. Bersani's definition of sociability as 'a form of relationality uncontaminated by desire' is similar to Georg Simmel's sociological analysis of the same concept.

According to Simmel, sociability is an essentially non-sexual phenomenon. It is not about being intimate and passionate but rather about sharing a feeling of general belonging. Bersani extends the conditions of Simmel's sociability from a social bond that is not affectively sexual to a process of bonding that transcends identity as such. Sociability does not require, Bersani says, a unity under a single identification, nor a collective compliance with an ego ideal. Bersani's argument aspires to draw an ontological parallelism between homosexuality and sociability where sameness does not bear the stain of stagnation, but on the contrary becomes a manifestation of pleasure in co-existence. In order to develop his account, Bersani re-examines certain Freudian texts, which discuss homosexuality.

Freud, as Bersani informs us, is the first to connect sociability and homosexuality in his '*Group Psychology and the Ego*'. In this work, Freud identifies at the core of all social ties the suppression of homosexual desire. He suggests that it is inhibited homosexual libido that is sublimated into social bonds allowing the creation of functional societies. But then, in what appears as a contradiction, Freud suggests that even fulfilled (and not suppressed) homosexual tendencies are closely related to sociability as well.

It seems certain that homosexual love is far more compatible with group ties, even when it takes the shape of uninhibited sexual tendencies – a remarkable fact, the explanation of which might carry us far. (Freud 1921)

Had he not offered this little paradox, the implication of the text would be very different: beneficial social bonds would be conceivable only thanks to the suppression of homosexual tendencies, hence homosexual tendencies would have to be suppressed in order for normal social bonds to prevail. By including unrepressed homosexuality in his theorisation of social bonding, Freud seems to make a more structural, almost ontological observation in relation to homosexuality.⁶

Bersani further elucidates what he finds an ostensibly ontological claim about homosexuality by closely examining another Freudian text, '*Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*'. In this work, Freud attempts a psychoanalytic reading of Leonardo da Vinci based on biographical information from his life and specific motifs that can be observed in his prominent artworks. One of the main themes of the book is Freud's analysis of da Vinci's speculated homosexuality. In order to understand the Freudian conception of (male) homosexuality we have to briefly engage with one of the most contested yet influential Freudian ideas: the Oedipus complex.

Although Freud first uses the term 'Oedipus complex' in his 1910 article, 'A special type of choice of object made by men', his formulation of the oedipal drama appears earlier, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where he conjectures that 'It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father'. As the theory is developed over the years, the

⁶ It is noteworthy that Judith Butler reads Freud's connection between suppressed homosexuality and sociability as the foundation of all homophobia: society can only exist while mourning the lost homosexual drives.

Oedipus complex became a concept that encompassed all unconscious loving and hostile experiences that the subject experiences in relation to their parent. In the traditional Oedipal schema, the child desires one of the parents and as a result becomes antagonistic towards the other parent. The Oedipus complex emerges between the third and fifth year and ends when the child renounces their sexual desire for their parent of the opposite sex and identifies with the gendered position of the other parent.

In its simplified form the case of a male child may be described as follows. At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother's breast and is the prototype of an object-choice on the anaclitic model;³ the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time, these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. Henceforward his relation to his father is ambivalent; it seems as if the ambivalence inherent in the identification from the beginning had become manifest. An ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother make up the content of the simple positive Oedipus complex in a boy. Along with the demolition of the Oedipus complex, the boy's object-cathexis of his mother must be given up. Its place may be filled by one of two things: either an identification with his mother or an intensification of his identification with his father. (Freud 2001, p.31-32)

For Freud this theatrical ritual shapes the core neurosis of all people and every disturbance at that stage could potentially affect the adult life of the subject.⁷

Lacan does not adopt the Oedipus complex as a term and - instead - names the phenomena Freud would refer to as Oedipal as 'family complexes' (Evans 2007). Lacan puts a strong emphasis on the socio-cultural contingency of family structures as Levi-Strauss and his contemporary structuralist anthropologists who theorised kinship and familial relations as effects of social rules, thinkers that heavily influence his work. For

⁷ Freud at the beginning of his theorisation of Oedipus claimed that the two sexes experience symmetrical versions of the Oedipus complex. Soon, he realised that this cannot be the case as both boys and girls initially desire the maternal body. That means that girls do not start their libidinal lives desiring their father and antagonising their mother but this comes as a secondary process.

Lacan, the only universal structure that is necessary for the creation of societies is the triangular schema that emerges when a third actor (in patriarchal context, the father) disrupts the dual relationship between the infant and the mother (the primary caretaker).

The Oedipus complex means that the imaginary, in itself an incestuous and conflictual relation, is doomed to conflict and ruin. In order for the human being to be able to establish the most natural of relations, that between male and female, a third party has to intervene, one that is the image of something successful, the model of some harmony. This does not go far enough – there has to be a law, a chain, a symbolic order, the intervention of the order of speech, that is, of the father. Not the natural father, but what is *called* the father. The order that prevents the collision and explosion of the situation as whole is found on the existence of this name of the father. (Lacan 1993, p.96, my italics)

As we saw earlier, the child has to lose something in order to acquire a place in the symbolic world. The child has to give up on the pleasure of co-existence with the maternal body in order to acquire a name and subsequently in order to gain access to language. The father inserts the prohibition: the infant cannot enjoy the eternal joy of its co-existence with the maternal body. The prohibition of incest in Lacan comes from the name-of-the-father. In French the expression works as a pun, *le nom du père* (the name of the father) sounding similarly to *le 'non' du père* (the 'no' of the father) emphasising the importance of prohibition (Evans 2007).

For Lacan, the Oedipus complex becomes a metaphor; the 'paternal metaphor'. In the paternal metaphor the 'name-of-the-father' substitutes the signified of the 'desire of the mother'.

A metaphor, as I have already explained to you, is a signifier that comes to take the place of another signifier. I am saying that this is the father in the Oedipus complex, even if that must be astonishing to the ears of some people. I am saying exactly this – the father is a signifier substituted for another signifier. That is the mainspring [...] of the father's intervention in the Oedipus complex.

The father's function in the Oedipus complex is to be a signifier substituted for the first signifier introduced into symbolization, the maternal signifier. [...] [T]he father comes to the place of the mother, S in the place S', S' being the mother insofar as she is already linked to something that was x, which is the signified in relationship to the mother.

[...] The question is – what is the signified? What does she want?

(Lacan 2017, p.158–159)

In other words, the subject can enter the symbolic, once it assumes that the answer to the question of its mother's desire lies outside of their dyadic relation: 'S enters into possession of the object of the mother's desire by way of the metaphor, which henceforth presents itself in the form of the phallus' (Ibid., p.159). This triangulation is according to Lacan the foundation of all meaning-making processes. When the paternal metaphor is foreclosed (not represented in the symbolic), then the subject is psychotic. The child who has not given up on the maternal body and did not internalise the name-of-the-father is prone to experience hallucinations and other disturbances of *jouissance*, as the real is not properly separated from the symbolic. We will return to the problematic of the paternal metaphor later when we examine post-Oedipal theories of subjectification, but for now, let us further discuss Bersani's take on the original Freudian conception of the Oedipus complex.

While Freud's starting point is the bourgeois heterosexual family, Bersani nevertheless sees in his close reading of *Leonardo* a potential for queer political disruption within that context. For Bersani, the failure of the Oedipal complex in the case of Leonardo da Vinci, as described in the Freudian text, could be claimed as a big success from a queer standpoint. Following a critical tendency that recognises the descriptive potency of the Oedipus complex but does not accept it as a universal and ontologically necessary precondition for all life on earth, Bersani identifies the homosexual case study in '*Leonardo*' as politically useful. But let us first examine the Freudian text:

The child's love for his mother cannot continue to develop consciously any further; it succumbs to repression. The boy represses his love for his mother: he puts himself in her place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love. In this way he has become a homosexual. What he has in fact done is to slip back to auto-eroticism: for the boys whom he now loves as he grows up are after all only substitutive figures and revivals of himself in childhood – boys whom he loves in the way in which his mother loved him when he was a child. He finds the objects of his love along the path of narcissism, as we say; for Narcissus,

according to the Greek legend, was a youth who preferred his own reflection to everything else and who was changed into the lovely flower of that name (Freud 1910).

In the 'normal', heterosexual scenario the boy would initially recognise the maternal body as a desired object and after the paternal prohibition, the boy would then identify with the male position and learn to desire women 'like his mother' but not the mother herself. Bersani argues that this battle with the father, this patriarchal game of submission, might grant the status of 'normality' in the social order but nevertheless bequeaths to the subject the wounds of a war. In this Oedipal war, if the boy wins against the father, he is in danger of becoming psychotic, merging with the maternal body and foreclosing the name of the father. If the boy loses, he is granted a neurotic position in the heterosexual universe but with the eternal burden of this loss staining his future sexual relations.

In Bersani's schema, the male heterosexual defeat in the Oedipal battle is at the core of all future gender antagonisms and specifically at the core of misogyny. By accepting the absolute prohibition of the maternal body, heterosexual man constructs femininity as a radical Otherness, inaccessible and prohibited. This construction of femininity as radically 'outside' will define all future relations between the two sexes. For Bersani, the homosexual short-circuiting of this process as described in *Leonardo* allows for a bloodless exit from the battle with the father. In the queer solution of the Oedipal drama the subject does not partake in the battle. It avoids the battle by occupying a 'perverse' alternative position. Leonardo, according to Freud, identifies with his mother's desire for him and as a result he looks for himself into the world. This homosexual position, according to Bersani, allows for relationships based on sameness but not identity. The distinction between sameness and identity is crucial at this point. The male homosexual is not looking for others *like* him, others who resemble him, but he looks exactly for himself into the world, making the world a synecdoche of himself.

The psychoanalytic homosexual is indeed a stranger to the *murderous* Oedipal antagonism. Bersani describes this subject as someone who 'wanders in the world – cruises the world, we might almost say – in search of objects that will give *him* back to himself as a loved and cared for subject'. This is a twisted version of the narcissist-homosexual: Bersani's narcissist is at-home in the world, he is 'longing for sameness that

allows a loving relation to what is different'. In a world of Oedipalised relations, Bersani seeks a narcissist alternative that re-territorialises desire within the domain of sameness. Unlike the ego ideal that renders the world into a radical alterity, always unattainable and always hostile, Bersani's homosexual narcissist is looking for himself in humanity.

This selfhood is constitutively displaced and dispersed. Cruising becomes the perfect example of a new modality of co-existence. In cruising, the homosexual subject is entering a spatialised field of desire; the bodies it encounters become fragments; different body parts are connected by nothing else than lust. This is precisely the body of the drive: a body not bound to the dictates of the signifier but rather following the pulsating streams of the self-shattering drives. Bersani insists that we should not conflate the analytic homosexual with contemporary gay and lesbian identified subjects. Gayness is in this instance something we need to learn, a new moral practice that goes beyond modes of identification. In this context homosexuals need to learn how to be gay too, as Michel Foucault has famously proclaimed.

Replaceable lovers and irreplaceable body parts

Bersani's argument opens up the possibility for new understandings of relationality. In this section we will further investigate Bersani's theory of sociability in relation to new media technologies and particularly in relation to Grindr. As we saw in the previous section, in Bersani's sociability, individuals find pleasure in not being themselves, or rather by exploring the limits of their selfhood within the social sphere. Can we expand this theorisation to new media realities that – like cruising practices – rely on a sense of anonymity and ceaseless connectivity?

Tom Roach discusses what he calls '*fungibility of lovers*' in an attempt to expand the idea of sociability as developed by Bersani, to the world of dating apps. According to Roach, the experience of being fungible, appearing as one of many interchangeable pictures on the Grindr screen, part of a digital mosaic of similars, resembles the experience of being lost in a cruising space. Tom Roach, unlike Bersani, directs his analysis towards the political critique of neoliberalism. For Roach, the fungibility of the desirable bodies is reminiscent of the fungibility of the workers: everyone is replaceable in the capitalist machine. In Grindr's operation, Roach identifies several core values of free market

economy: the element of relentless competition, dehumanising superficiality, quick and easy consumption.

Nevertheless, Roach does not restrict his analysis of Grindr to a critique of neoliberal subjectivity. Nor does he claim that in Grindr we witness yet another recuperation of a homosexual transgressive behaviour (cruising) into a marketable neoliberal practice (dating applications). Roach rejects this ostensibly technophobic position and entertains the possibility that Grindr could still have a radical potential. Roach develops Bersani's concept of sociability, identifying what he terms a "shared estrangement" in the experience of Grindr users. It is precisely in this shared estrangement that the potential of Grindr to sabotage the neoliberal paradigm is located. Both Roach and Bersani deal with the theoretical problem of a relationship reduced to identity. As we saw earlier, Bersani warns the reader that once a friendship, group formation, or generally any relationship is reduced to the product of identification, then it produces an immediate effect of hostility towards anyone different, the outsider, to that which lies outside this identification. As we saw in our analysis of Oedipus, identity is shaped by what is constructed as a radical Otherness and as a result every in-group identification is functional only in relation to an external, negatively signified difference. Tom Roach's 'shared estrangement' allows us to think relations outside the tight constraints of identification.

But how can we experience shared estrangement, and how is Grindr a paradigmatic example of that? Unlike more traditional spaces of co-existence, Grindr allows for a simultaneous co-existence that is not guided by a necessary sense of 'assimilation of difference into identity'. Roach historicises this form of relationality by identifying certain moments and modalities within queer histories where forms of shared estrangement defined the structures that allowed for queer communities to exist as such. In a sense, Roach insists on the formation of communities that are queer in their structure and operation rather than communities that consist of queers.

The (in)communicative and anti-intersubjective relational innovations of the queer community— from the micro (Foucault's impersonal friendship with novelist Hervé Guibert) to the macro (the sexual practice of anonymous cruising)— reveal the value of this relational model for political movements, specifically those related to Aids caregiving and activism. Friendships of shared estrangement cultivated in queer relational practices,

I claim, form the bedrock of activist organisations such as act up, whose powerful interventions and tactics continue to resonate.

Roach uses as his examples communities of care that were not reduced to kinship and/or reciprocation and instances where sexuality was not bound to romantic affinity and/or monogamous coupledness. In the quoted examples the alienation that seems to characterise queer lives was essential in avoiding assimilationist identifications. Queer life in that sense can be anti-social without being autistic and, to return to our main argument, queer life can be narcissistic without being separated from the world. Both Bersani and Roach use in their analysis long-established homophobic tropes and re-appropriate them in order to advance a theory of co-existence that goes beyond the need to exterminate/subordinate the other/different.

In order to understand the difference between older forms of queer sociability – such as cruising – and more contemporary forms of sociability mediated by applications such as Grindr, we have to take account of some of the major changes technology brought in communication. In the case of Grindr we shall start our investigation with a phenomenological reading of the smartphone as a device. In terms of functionality, the components of the smartphone that we identify as crucial for our analysis are: the touchscreen, the mobile phone camera, the Internet connection and the GPS locative technology. But most importantly, as we saw in our previous chapter, we cannot ignore the importance of the device itself and the experience of it ‘being there’ in our everyday lives.

The touchscreen is a combination of an input and output device normally layered on the top of an electronic visual display of an information processing system (Walker 2012). The touchscreen acquired prominence after the commercial success of the first *iPhone* and became the favoured input modality for all generations of smartphones that followed. The touchscreen is an interface that has dominated media technologies of the past ten years and has become synonymous with mobile media. The specificity of the touch screen is found in its double function as optic output and haptic input. The screen shows an image; the fingers touch the image, interact with the image, change the image. The point of contact is a point of merging between the physical sensorial body and the virtual screen-image. The other phenomenological shift that came with the widespread use of

smartphones was the incorporation of a portable and easily accessible camera. We are particularly interested here in the immediacy of the connection between the camera and the screen; the camera captures a moment and the screen displays it instantly. This kind of instantaneity had existed before in digital cameras, and in a certain sense in the Polaroid camera, but it enters a new era with the almost universal adoption of smartphones among a large part of the population. The camera becomes omnipresent and the phone literally acquires the function of the mirror.

In this context, the selfie becomes a central modality of imaginary identifications. Selfies, like the mirror, do not construct a rigid self-image that offers a complete apprehension of the self. The selfie, insofar as it is shared on social media, implicates the Other not only as that which mediates this experience only as a metaphoric entity representing the internalisation of the social order within the subject's psyche, but also in the thousands of 'small others' who have access to the subject's social media feed. Every picture is seen, scrutinised and 'liked' by other active users, a swarm of others that in their unknowability can be taken as an Other.

Another kind of body emerges in the images shared on Grindr, glimpsed through sexualised close-ups, headless body-shots (for anonymity) and quite prominently, through genitalia pictures, the infamous '*dick-pic*'. Unlike selfies, the dick-pic does not attempt a reframing of the imaginary body as a whole. In contrast to any attempt for re-creating selfhood as a complete gestalt, the dick-pic is a manifestation of the body in parts.

Copjec, in her analysis of Cindy Sherman's *untitled stills* offers a compelling theorisation of close-ups in film. Following Deleuze's argument, she claims that a close-up is not just a closer look at a detail of a scene; it does not isolate a detail of the scene in order to magnify it, but rather 'discloses the whole scene itself'. In Copjec's words:

What, then, is (close-up's) function? It establishes the reality effect itself; without it, all the other details together would compose not a realistic scene, but a hallucinatory one. [...] (t)he close-up in film represent objects that though included in the scenes, do not properly belong to them; they are not subsumable as elements of the set of details composing the scene. The partial object of the drive, I will argue, exemplifies this same logic; it does not form part of the organism, but implies an absolute change. (Copjec, 2004)

For Copjec, the close-up relates to the idea of 'partial objects'. Partial objects were initially mentioned by Freud in his analysis of partial drives but were extensively developed and re-theorised by Melanie Klein. According to Klein, the underdeveloped perceptive mechanisms of the infant represent the world as a series of objects. The primary example and most central in the infant's perceptive world is the mother's breast, which appears as 'good' when it meets the needs of the child (feeding) and as 'bad' when it disappears (when the mother is not present). For the child all objects are separate and independent and do not form a complete entity until much later in the psychological development of the infant: only later is the breast experienced as being part of a whole mother, for example. For Lacan, all drives are partial and as a result all objects can be nothing more than partial too. In this context the body of the drive we talked about earlier re-emerges in pieces.

The screen and the camera split the body into bits and desirable parts. The screen functions as a barrier between the subject and the beloved others and at the same time it sets in motion the compartmentalisation of bodies and the virtual exchange of body parts. For Roach 'the screen stands as an ever-present reminder of the impossibility of intersubjective fusion, and yet feelings of deep interdependence brim over.' In Roach's analysis, the screen signifies not only a point of convergence between the physical body and the virtual body parts but moreover, the screen signifies a generative obstacle. The ego that ogles the kaleidoscope of portraits and body parts while cruising online, can be nothing more than dissolved, dispersed, yet persistent. Adrift in a sea of resemblance and difference, lost in a spectacle of similar – yet not identifiable – others, the self recognises itself as one of hundreds, thousands, seeking connection (Roach, 2015b).

In the previous chapter we discussed the possibility of radical narcissism as a response to patriarchal constructions of femininity. The notion of radical narcissism was helpful not only as a political gesture – re-appropriating the objectified body as a position of resistance – but moreover epistemologically, as it introduces a new possibility of theorising the self vis-à-vis the Other. Radical narcissism is exactly radical as it acknowledges and showcases the inter-subjective dimension, inherent in the narcissistic position. In Grindr, radical narcissism meets the force of the drive with an even more dissociative and disorganising result. The circulated body parts re-synthesise hybrid body

images, glued by lust and longing. The homosexual narcissist, as we saw in *Leonardo*, is looking for his body parts in the world and Grindr offers a corporeal cartography of an impossible coherence.

It becomes clear that instead of communicating a complete image of the ego, in Grindr the ego is no more than a passionate inference – to borrow Bersani's expression. This process, Roach tells us, can be liberating as it is dehumanising. The ego – in a similar way to the open-ended ego we theorised in the previous chapter – appears only as an inference from its outward reaching orientation rather than due to its coherent individual structure. The ego is neither legible – as presented in the Panopticon theories – nor self-evident as argued in ego-psychology; its existence needs a constant re-affirmation and this re-affirmation comes from its reaching towards the beloved objects; a movement that threatens its very existence. The ego in Grindr, unlike how it is presented in other social media, is not interested in constructing a well-rounded description of itself.

On the contrary, the *Grindr ego* is only an amoebian shell that wants to reach out to other partial objects, re-constructing its basic outline and finding its essentially temporary place within a constellation of fragmented others. This phantasmatic re-construction of the body happens in what we introduced earlier as the Lacanian register of the imaginary. The imaginary, as the domain of images is the register where most new media realities of our times primarily take place. The sensorial perception of the imaginary appears real and objective, but it is very often susceptible to cognitive biases due to existing pre-conceived notions that shape it (Fink, 1997). In Lacan's early theorisations, imaginary relations were considered illusory and the aim of analysis was to unveil the causality of psychic phenomena in the signifiers of the symbolic order.

We have already seen that the mirror function introduces the image of oneself as a foreign object into psychic reality. That leads to an ambivalent relationship to our own image (as constitutively foreign) and all other relationships are modelled accordingly. Our analysis of the mirror is informed by the early Lacanian theorisation of the imaginary as superficial and often deceiving, contrary to the more authentic underlying structures of the symbolic. Later in his teaching Lacan re-examined his understanding of the imaginary due to its potential affinity with the real. This led to a transformation of the Lacanian clinic that moves away from a strict focus on the signifier; this will also allow us to develop our

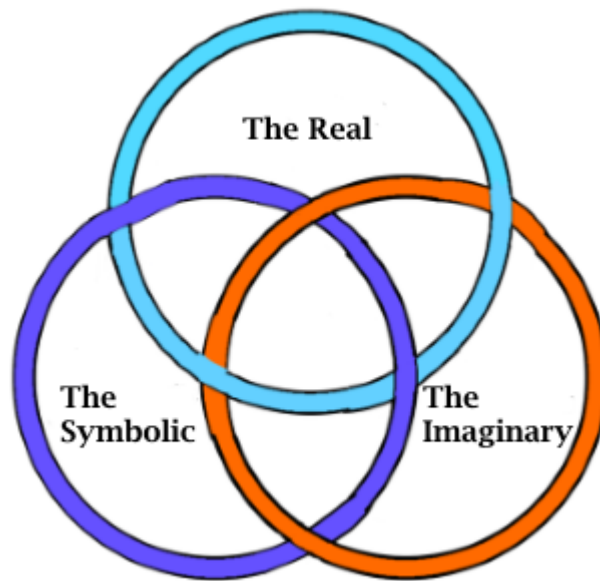
explorative argument with regards to technology and its relation to the psyche. In order to grasp the later Lacanian thought we will now engage with the concept of the *sinthome* that is ostensibly the last major conceptual development in Lacan's work.

The *sinthome*: post-Oedipal technologies of enjoyment

In order to better understand the relation between subjectivity and technology we will follow the analytic framework offered in Jacques Lacan's twenty-third seminar titled *The Sinthome*.⁸ In seminar twenty-three Lacan revisited some of his earlier theorisations around subjectivity and modified some of his key concepts. We talked earlier about the importance of the paternal metaphor in the process of subjectification. In the *sinthome* Lacan attempts a theorisation of a *different* way to relating to the symbolic order that does not involve castration. In his later seminars he employs several mathematical concepts, mainly extracted from the domain of topology.

Lacan is really enthusiastic about paradoxical structures and non-Euclidean geometries that work as appropriate models for describing psychic phenomena. In seminar twenty-three, he assembles a unique combination of literary analysis, mathematics and psychoanalytic observations. The main topological concept Lacan uses in this seminar is the *borromean knot*. The borromean knot appears for the first time in his previous seminar in order to describe the relation between the three registers of psychic reality. According to Lacan the borromean knot showcases perfectly the relation between the symbolic, imaginary and real. The main condition of a borromean knot is that if any of the links it consists of breaks, all the other links are not connected any more.

⁸ Lacan's seminar twenty-three was published in English for the first time as I was writing this chapter, but nevertheless unofficial translations were already in circulation.



This condition of the knot is central in Lacan's theorisation of the three orders. The three registers are equally important as the absence of each and every one of them threatens the whole structure: 'The knot which may be termed borromean cannot be cut without dissolving the myth it offers of the subject, as non-supposé' (Lacan 1975, seminar of 18 November). Lacan uses the schema to also describe the overlapping areas the different registers share.

The three circles of the borromean knot are all three, as circles, equivalent — I mean that they are constituted by something which is reproduced across the three. I situate the support of consistence in the imaginary. Likewise, I make the essential constituent of the symbolic the hole. And I make the real the support of what I term ex-sistence, in this sense: in its sistance outside of the imaginary and the symbolic, it knocks up against them, its play is something precisely in the order of limitation; the two others, from the moment when it is tied into a borromean knot with them, offer it resistance. In other words, the real only has ex-sistence ... in its encounter with the limits of the symbolic and the imaginary. [...] But what is the result of this? — If not that these terms should be conceived as linked to each other. If they are so analogous, to use this term, could one not suppose that this is due to a certain continuity? And thus we are led directly to tie the triple knot. Starting from the inter-balancing, inter-leaving of the three, it is not a great step to link up the points and make their arrangement one of continuity.

The area where the symbolic meets the real is where Lacan locates the symptom. The symptom in psychoanalysis is very different to the medical symptom. The symptom does not 'warn' us of an underlying pathology. In Lacan's earlier theory, the symptom is considered as 'anything that is analysable', something that 'appears behind a mask' and therefore requires deciphering, or interpretation (Lacan 2017, p.305). Psychoanalysis unlike most of psychotherapeutic approaches does not aim to the cure of a symptom, as in psychoanalytic theory the subsidence of a symptom often gives birth to another symptom. *Sinthome* is essentially a different spelling for symptom, one adopted by Lacan in his later work.

Before we continue with the *sinthome*, let us briefly return to the borromean cartography: the territory where the real and imaginary intersect is where Lacan locates anxiety. Anxiety is produced when the real's unsymbolisable force comes into our perception. The imaginary and symbolic meet in the territory of inhibition. Inhibition is according to Lacan 'a symptom tucked away in a museum' (Lacan 2014, p.10). After a symptom has been transformed into something else, inhibition comes as a ghost of its past potency. In the centre, where all links intersect, and the three registers overlap is where Lacan places the *object a*. The object *a* is (among other things) what Lacan poses as the object of desire. Lacan claims that, according to Freud what binds the three orders is the name-of-the-Father. In the course of seminar twenty-three he moves away from the Freudian conclusion as the sole theorisation of subjectivity.

Earlier in the chapter we engaged briefly with Oedipus and his everlasting drama. We had also the opportunity to engage with the Lacanian conception of the paternal metaphor. *Sinthome* is potentially Lacan's response to his contemporaries who disputed the universality of castration as the only way for a subject to exist. Seminar twenty-three takes place a few years after the publication of '*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*', an influential book, co-authored by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze (1972). *Anti-Oedipus* presented a fierce critique against what Deleuze and Guattari defined as Oedipalised conceptions of desire. For *Anti-Oedipus* psychoanalysis in its attempt to describe reality ascribes it with certain characteristics. In a sense, according to Deleuze and Guattari (similarly to the Foucauldian critique of Freud), psychoanalysis claims to be describing when in reality it is brutally re-affirming normative ideals and

rituals. Deleuze and Guattari did not only attack Freud but also expanded their critique to include the Lacanian departure from the Freudian Oedipus.

It is the idea of castration as briefly presented earlier that according to *Anti-Oedipus* re-affirms a certain perception around desire and the symbolic order. Desire in the Lacanian ontology is a response to lack and lack is introduced to the subject through castration. In this formula, desire can only exist within the domain of the Other and this implies that all desiring subjects are subjected to an existing law (either by affirming or by reacting against it). According to *Anti-Oedipus* the Lacanian desire can never be defiant or lead the subject towards an exit from the existing symbolic order. The Lacanian ontology according to *anti-Oedipus* is not only politically reactionary, but also epistemologically incapable of conceptualising social change.

If the law is essential in order for the subject to be, how can we even envision a radical horizon outside or against the law? For Deleuze and Guattari the answer comes through a negation of the Lacanian argument. It is not the trauma of castration that makes being possible but on the contrary, they claim, it is desire as a positive force that needs no lack in order to exist, that allows for existence. That is a brief and schematic presentation of the *Anti-Oedipus* argument in order to understand seminar twenty-three's political and cultural context. Lacan in *sinthome*, responds not only to Deleuze and Guattari's critique but also to a change of attitude – on a social level – towards the paternal function / paternal metaphor. If the father is a natural metaphor for the law when Freud produced his work, this was not the case when Lacan presented his seminar in the seventies, and is certainly not the case nowadays.

In seminar twenty-three Lacan presents James Joyce as a case study that exemplifies a different relation to castration and potentially a new theorisation of subjectivity. In an unusual methodological gesture Lacan combines a structural analysis of Joyce's writing and connects it to certain biographical elements from Joyce's life in order to expand his theory of subjectification. In the *sinthome*, Lacan moves away from the linguistic-structuralist focus on the signifier of his early teaching or rather re-examines the signifier as a more complex entity. At a first glance, the focus on Joyce seems unexpected. Lacan's use of poetry comes from his belief that literature is 'the aesthetic domain that is closest to the analytic experience' (Harari 2002).

Lacan follows a methodology similar to Freud who also discussed artworks in his theorisations. Both Freud and Lacan though, do not just apply psychoanalysis on an artwork, in order to explain it, or in order to explain the artist's motives, but they rather use the artwork to advance psychoanalytic theory. Lacan was deeply fascinated by Joyce's complex poetic writing. Joyce with a name that reminds us of *jouissance* (like Freud's name in German that is also reminiscent of Joy) through his writing stretched the limits of poetic language and offered new ways in how we understand discourse. Lacan is also interested in Joyce's biography: An alcoholic, absent father; a domineering mother and the fact that later on in his life Joyce's daughter was diagnosed with schizophrenia. According to Lacan this family history exemplifies a case of a non-working paternal metaphor (MacCannell 2008).

Apart from the familial problems, what also captures Lacan's attention is Joyce's relation to language. As an Irish writer Joyce carries the ambivalence and discontent of writing in English as in Ireland this is the language of the colonisers. His language is literally the language of the Other as the Irish subject becomes linguistically displaced within their own land. Joyce's home country's language, Irish, is a place he cannot really go back to and besides that he very often in his writing stands ambivalent if not outward critical towards Irish nationalism and towards the fantasy of going back to a pre-colonised Ireland. Joyce's identity is constructed in this limbo between a past that only exist as retroactive re-construction and a future of eternal displacement.

Joyce deals with this contradictory place in the world by developing his own personal language. He uses the language of the colonisers as a starting point for his poetic work but at the same time he deconstructs it by inserting Gaelic, French and gibberish; he dismantles English from the inside. Joyce's English become an individual endeavour but at the same time he retains it open to interpretation and communication; it is not a completely hermetical language, not a psychotic delirium but rather a poetic code. Philippe Sollers describes Joyce's approach to language with the term 'Velangues' (Harari 2002). This is a pun on 'les langues' (languages) with the term elongation. The discourse of Joyce, is being stretched-out between languages, stretched-out between meaning and non-sense.

Sinthome is the word Lacan chooses to describe Joyce's relationship to the symbolic. Unlike the common neurotic *symptom* that emerges as a result of castration and prohibition of the law; *sinthome* is the subject's self-made construction, a psychic gadget that allows a subject that has foreclosed the paternal metaphor and hence according to Lacanian ontology should be psychotic, to acquire a relationship to the Other. According to Lacanian psychoanalyst Roberto Harari, at the core of seminar twenty-three is the concept of 'suppletion' or 'making up for.' 'Joyce strives to make up or find suppletion for what he lacks; his art serves as the guarantee of his Phallus (Harari 2002).'

Sinthome is an old spelling of symptom in French. Lacan draws this inspiration by Joyce's sarcastic mention of Hellenization of language in *Ulysses*. Greek enters French discourse as a foreign agent; the language becomes a contested space of origins and cultural references. The *sinthome*, due to its innovative and hybridic nature, is very often theorised in relation to new technologies of the late capitalist era. The name of the father, the traditional expressions of paternal law fade and new gadgets, new articulations of the borromean knot come into being. This is why I consider the *sinthome* a useful tool in our understanding of new media technologies. I argue that the paternal metaphor becomes increasingly more obsolete as a foundational myth for subjectivity and we look for new gadgets, and individualised structures in our struggle for nuanced understanding of contemporary psychic realities.

In this context Joyce offers an archetypical hero, where a glitch within a traditional familial structure offers a new theoretical horizon. In a similar way we suggest that certain aspects of contemporary media offer unintentional glitches in the ways we articulate our desires and to a certain extent our self-image. There is a quote from '*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*' that Lacan re-visits throughout seminar twenty-three: 'I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.' The quote exemplifies what Lacan finds most fascinating in Joyce: a copious forging of new psychic devices. According to Harari, race here stands for lineage and not biological race. It is the broken patrimonial line that Joyce is trying to re-configure while being in a constant state of exile from his 'paternal' land.

But what makes Joyce's language so innovative in its form? Joycean scholar D. Hayman in his analysis of *Finnegans Wake* – the last and indisputably most difficult work by Joyce

– offers a starting point for this discussion. The discourse of *Finnegans Wake* is according to Hayman made of ‘knots of allusion or meaning, clusters or strips which make up topographies and serve as ways of structuring the text rather than as integral parts of its argument’ (Hayman). The innovation of seminar twenty-three is this new relation to the signifier elucidated here. The signifier is not only part of the signifying chain of meaning, but rather organised around strips of phonetic topographies. The text expands beyond signification and creates new textual realities that defy the rigid rules of the symbolic order.

For Lacan, the *sinthome* is the addition of an extra link to the borromean knot. Mathematically speaking, one cannot just add an extra link to an existing knot. In order for a borromean knot to have four linking parts, one has to do it from the beginning. And that is what the *sinthome* is about: un-linking the orders of reality and re-configuring their connections from scratch.

What is the result if what is of the order of the subject, inasmuch as the subject is always merely *supposé*, finds in the end its support in this knot? Is the triple knot tied into a borromean knot enough? (Lacan 1975, seminar of 18 November 1975)

Lacan’s answer here is that there is always a fourth knot ‘propped’ upon these three knots — it is this that Lacan terms the *sinthome*.

‘I have allowed myself to define as *sinthome* not what allows the knot, the knot of three, to still make a knot of three but what it preserves in such a position that it *seems* to be a knot of three.’ (Ibid., my italics). Following the last statement, we understand that the *sinthome* in this case is not just something that Joyce utilises in order to cover the lack of paternal metaphor in his psychic life, and in extension it is not just an exceptional phenomenon that rarely takes place in cases of psychotic geniuses. On the contrary, this transition from the triple knot to the quadruple one, introduces a singular innovation in the way we approach psychoanalytic ontology. For Joyce, Lacan argues, it was ‘by wanting a name for himself that Joyce compensated for the paternal lack’, the lack of the paternal metaphor that would, in neurosis, function to bind together the three registers. In Joyce’s case, writing provided a means for achieving this: ‘it is clear that the art of Joyce is something so particular, that the term *sinthome* is indeed what is’ (Lacan 1975, seminar of

18 November 1975). In this sense, then, Joyce made a name for himself, created a singular name, rather than the name of his father.

The taking of the father's name is necessarily referred to the past, to a logically prior moment in the subject's history. Joyce's making of a name has no such reference and is, instead, directed to the future. Harari speak of this in terms of 'anticipation', an anticipated naming. For Harari, Joyce does not just substitute what is missing but he anticipates something new. And that is what draws Lacan into theorising the mechanics of this anticipation. Harari proposes that we can use the *sinthome* in order to understand the end of psychoanalytic treatment, the end of analysis⁹. Analysis, according to Harari, must initially work towards dissolving the neurotic configurations of the ego. This threatens the stability of the borromean knot. Then through the analytic discourse the subject re-builds a new structure from scratch. But this time it is a quadruple knot that emerges as the process of analysis allows the subject to suture their own configuration of a symptom (or more appropriately, a *sinthome*).

Harari proposes a new theory for the end of analysis where the analyst is there to enable 'the subject to suture, stitch, unstitch—that is, to tie or untie something, to re-tie things otherwise. [...] There is no unknotting without reknitting, and vice versa' (Harari 2002). Psychoanalysis if we follow this argument, has nothing to do with truth. The subject does not strive for finding the truth of their inner selves. The *sinthome* is yet another barrier to the truth. But it is an obstacle that the subject has created for themselves. The subject does not aspire for truth but for singularity. Singularity, Lacan warns us, should not be confused with particularity. The particular is an 'illustration of some generality' whereas singularity indicates something that is distinct (Harari 2002).

In order to understand what Grindr shares with *Ulysses*, we would have to focus on the language of the medium. Keeping in mind what Lacan identifies as a potential shift in the way we understand the properties of the signifier we can then apply our theorisation of the *sinthome* into new media realities. What Tom Roach detects in his analysis of Grindr's language is extremely relevant to what Lacan identifies in his close reading of

⁹The end of analysis is a very charged topic within the clinical psychoanalytic world. It signifies the moment when the analysand decides to finish their personal analysis not because they got rid of a symptom but because they have somehow changed their relation to the way they enjoy their symptom.

Joyce. The language of Grindr, Roach tells us, becomes abstract, fragmented, almost non-sensical.

In that way the neoliberal agenda that gives birth to mobile media and subsequently to Grindr, is not quite adequately fulfilled in the end. For neoliberal capitalism the desired result would be a maximisation of profits and productivity. Instead of that and due to the almost accelerationist modality of the medium, Grindr, instead of creating a free market of bodies, it ends up offering a platform for the drive that subsequently creates an unruly mob of body parts. The interchangeable body parts follow their own pulses and syntactic rules that often defy the restrictive grammar of the law.

The discursive exchanges typical of MSM location-based apps — from the introductory interpellations, “hey,” “sup,” “woof,” to the inevitable request for “pix” — reduce dialogue to a series of churlish grunts and crass propositions — connection-as-such: not a Facebook post sharing a portion of one’s “personal life” (however fabricated that life may be), but a sensual mingling of interchangeable types (twink, daddy, bear, bro) devoid of subjective interiority. (Roach 2015:18)

In seminar twenty-three, the production of nonsense is related to the jouissance of the phonemics. Poetic nonsense draws our attention to the materiality of the signifier. The signifier becomes an emptied out acoustic experience. This is how the real manifests within discourse. What Lacan primarily identifies in Joyce’s language is the resonant qualities of the signifier. In order to better understand that, we should revisit the borromean knot as we presented it earlier and see how linguistic elements emerge in relation to the knot.

The social rules represented by the symbolic are undeniably the primary domain of language. Both the imaginary and the real play a secondary (yet essential) role in our perception of language. The real as we saw earlier is what cannot be codified, what lies radically outside of language. Nevertheless the real is part of all linguistic communications. Affective elements, slips of the tongue, disruptions of the discourse and the enjoyment in talking are all traces of the real within discourse. The drive as an agent of the real has the force to disrupt the process of signification. Lacan, as we saw earlier, in seminar twenty-three recognises that the signifier has not only a symbolic function but can also be resonant, it can also carry the pulsating force of the drive.

There must be something in the signifier which resonates. It is surprising that this has been in no way apparent to the English philosophers. I call them philosophers because they are not psychoanalysts—they have a rock-solid belief that language has no effect. They imagine that there are drives and so on (...) for they don't know what a drive is: the echo in the body of the fact that there is speech [dire]; but for this speech to resonate (...) the body must be sensitive to it. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 18 November 1975, 4)

The signifier, apart from being an abstract linguistic point of reference, acquires intonation, rhythmic vibration and corporeal resonance. The resonance of the signifier presents an unexpected answer to the question of social change. As we saw earlier in Deleuze and Guattari's critique of castration, the signifier is inevitable—in its conception—bound to the law of the Other. According to Lacan, just adding a new signifier cannot change the symbolic order that already encompasses all signifiers in a chain of interchangeability. To actually change the symbolic order, you need some other force to shake it up. A striking signifier, a pulsating signifier, a resonant signifier can come and disrupt the chain of signification carrying the untamed virility of the drive.

The *sinthome*, in Joyce's case was not the result of conscious effort. Joyce did not invent his *sinthome* in order to find an alternative way to connect with the symbolic order while avoiding the paternal metaphor. But following Harari, we should not think of the *sinthome* as an exceptional irregularity in the process of subjectification. Lacan offers a new theory on the subject's relation to language with multiple potential uses, especially within the Lacanian clinic. As we saw earlier in our brief introduction of castration the signifier is initially conceived as the barrier of jouissance; we give up on the primordial enjoyment in order to acquire a position in the social world.

As Juliet MacCannell (2008) notes, the *sinthome* is a formation that allows the flow of jouissance and upsets the linguistic economy of castration. By accepting that jouissance is not necessarily antithetical or antagonistic to the signifier we can re-configure a libidinal economy that goes beyond the dilemmas such as neurosis versus psychosis, language versus enjoyment, desire versus the drive. In this new context the role of the imaginary order is re-negotiated. The imaginary has a different relation to the real as the former does not emerge in the eclipse of the latter. If the symbolic emerges as a negation of the real, then we have to employ imaginary mechanisms in order to accommodate a new

libidinal economy the era of the *sinthome* promises. While the symbolic fails to catch up with the jouissance overflow of our times the domain of images seems to be doing well.

Joyce's writing has, it seems, confronted Lacan with a new means to the truth, which depends on a renewed sense of urgency, the urgency of art, the urgency of making psychoanalysis a part of this urgency, and reconnecting both to a freshly revalued imaginary. This new imaginary is (and must be) realised as providing something both completely new and yet very ancient: a confrontation with the real that the self-enclosed, self-satisfied "symbolic" no longer seems capable of confronting. (MacCannell 2008)

There is an urgency for art and representational media in the era of the *sinthome* as plain words fail to encapsulate social reality. We opened this chapter with a provocative portrait by Robert Mapplethorpe that underlines this urgency. Mapplethorpe's body transcends symbolic rules: it is betraying maleness while remaining masculine, it is penetrable and at the same time a subject of desire. The body in Mapplethorpe's case carries the urgency of the real and perfectly conveys it within the imaginary.

Linking to the previous chapter's analysis of the selfie we can see that the new imaginary era is not necessarily destined to be trapped within its vain illusions. The selfie is not just the prison of the ideal ego, as repetition does little to convey stability. While staring at your image you open up the possibility of realising its fundamental alienation. The repetitive aspect of the selfie culture does not solidify a sense of selfhood. In a way, selfies aspire to establish a perfectly-shaped ideal ego but miserably fail achieving it. The more selfhood is realised as unfinished, the more the subject yearns for more connectivity, or in Bersani's words, sociability.

Throughout this dissertation I theorise what I consider to be a new articulation of the ego, and more specifically the technologically assisted ego. Ego, in early Lacanian teachings is represented by a circle. The imaginary according to these accounts, always strives for an enclosed totality and hence the circle of the ego is undisrupted. These rules do not apply any more. As the symbolic lifts its totalitarian rule, the imaginary fantasy is no longer looking for enclosure, it is no longer pressurised to conform to this ideal form and can open up to the polymorphous perversity of the drive. The ego turns from an enclosed territory to an open shape; a broken circle.

In Joyce, Lacan discovered another kind of imaginary and another kind of ego, an open one: he diagrams the “open ego” as a set of brackets, rather than as a circular link through which experience flows—without being referred back to its effect on the fortress with which it has surrounded itself. This is an ego no longer ensnared in (and buried under) a mass of verbiage that tries to obscure the enormous power of the drives. (MacCannell 2008)

The Joycean ego is porous and does not resemble a fortress. The selfie is always presented in a social openness; it is always presented in long feeds of disparate objects. Grindr screen is yet another instance of this process. The exposed body is located, literally located, amongst other similar bodies. The temporal and spatial alignment allows for identifications at the same time that the dehumanising broken discourse of the application disrupts the possibility of community. Unlike the university discourse [footnote] and the orientation towards a totalising truth that can be acquired through language, the fragmentation of the imaginary allows for a new ethics.

Linking to the earlier discussion of Bersani’s sociability we could envisage new possibilities for imaginary relations, not reduced to an egotistic hatred for one’s own image and for the image of the other. There can be the possibility to utilise the pulses and drives of the living breathing body in order to create new modes of relationality. The new ego I propose in this theorisation is open ended, spreading into the world, leaking into new networked realities. This does not necessarily suggest a utopian or radical horizon, as the drive does not follow political projects and directions. But it is not bound to an existing law, an existing social reality that can predict and recuperate every possible outcome in a way the Panoptacist argument suggests.

In order to understand the politics of the drive we need to rethink Roach’s analysis of Grindr discourse as a disruption of the neoliberal regime. The fragmented language of the medium goes against the aims of the structure that gave birth to it. In contrast to the Panopticon argument that would theorise Grindr as yet another expansion of the Panoptic gaze, I would argue that Bersani’s sociability and by association Roach’s shared estrangement can actually posit a different analytic schema that allows for thinking social reality as a non-deterministic, open ended process. Tom Roach is right to

say 'you cannot unlink the rise of these media from neoliberalism' but at the same time neoliberalism cannot be an all-encompassing definitive regime. The Other as we saw earlier is defined by his essential lack and his words can resonate differently when crushed upon deviant desiring flesh.

James Joyce, offers a new understanding of language. Lacan suggests that this new relationship to language allows for a major re-configuration of our understanding of the signifier. The signifier is not just bound to the signifying chain and to symbolic rules. It retains its materiality and through that it can convey the pulses of the drive. Besides that, James Joyce's relation to the symbolic seems to circumvent the traditional psychoanalytic dogma according to which all subjects need to be subjugated to castration in order to acquire a position within the symbolic world. Due to these theoretical assumptions, Lacan is able to entertain the possibility of a world where the paternal metaphor has no central role. In this new reality, the imaginary domain can offer alternative ways in dealing with psychic phenomena –for example through art – rather than only dealing with them through strictly linguistic means.

Emojis and the Japanese unconscious

In Grindr, language is reduced to empty 'grunts and crass propositions', 'polluted' with slang code-words, dick-pics and emoji. In this chapter, we are interested in identifying the ways the imaginary domain allows us to better grasp the domain of the real. The hybrid discourse we encounter in the chat-box of Grindr is an excellent case study for this examination. In order to further elucidate the complex relation between the signifier and images, in this section we will focus on the emergence and mainstreamisation of emoji.

Emojis are ideograms that portray facial expressions, common objects, places, types of weather, and animals. They were introduced in Japanese mobile phones in the late 90s and became popular worldwide with their adoption in the iPhone (and subsequently the android) standard set of characters. Each emoji is codified as a special letter. Emoji means 'pictograph' in Japanese (from *e* [絵, "picture"] + *moji* [文字, "character"]). The initial popularity of emoji in Japan might be related to the way the Japanese writing system already combines phonetic writing with ideograms. In this section we will examine

Lacan's analysis of the Japanese writing system and see how his analysis applies to the contemporary use of emoji.

In his introduction to the Japanese translation of *Écrits*, Lacan informs the reader that Japanese neither need nor are capable of being analysed ('no one who inhabits this language has any need to be psychoanalyzed') (Lacan 1972). The reader may be taken aback by this shocking (and offensive) remark. But according to Japanese cultural analyst Fuhito Endo (2002), this assertion did not stop the Japanese audience from engaging with French psychoanalysis; if psychoanalysis teaches anything after all, it is that prohibition is generative. Lacan forms his position on the 'Japanese unconscious' through analysing the Japanese writing system. He is particularly interested in the ways *kanji* (Chinese ideograms) were introduced in the Japanese writing system. Kanji can be read in two ways: it can be read phonetically similarly to the Chinese way (*on*) and semantically (*kun*) using the native sounds of the Japanese language. Kanji, being ideograms, operate at the same time as a letter and as a visual symbol. Following the Freudian metaphor of the unconscious constructed as a series of hieroglyphs, Lacan comes to an enigmatic conclusion according to which 'in Japanese the distance from the unconscious to the spoken language is palpable' (Lacan 1972). The unconscious 'hieroglyphs' are exposed in the consciousness through writing, hence psychoanalysis is not necessary (or possible). By introducing the ideograms into language the process of signification – at least as Lacan theorises it for the west – does not apply. For the signifier is an acoustic impression with an arbitrary relation to the signified. In the case of ideograms words are images of things.

Political theorist Kojin Karatani uses Lacan's argument to advance his anti-nationalist deconstruction of exceptionalist notions of Japan-ness (2000). Like Endo, he sees Kanji as bringing into Japanese foreign agents that destabilise the internal consistency of the language). Karatani uses the co-existence between Japanese and foreign elements within the language in order to disrupt the purist nationalist fantasies around Japanese culture. The absorption of foreign cultural influences, according to Karatani, does not take place in some mystical deep collective unconscious but on the contrary it happens on the surface. Thinking of Japanese nationalism might be indeed a strange diversion from our main argument, but Lacan here offers an analysis that might help us understand the

disruptive potency of the wide-spread adoption of emoji in new media communications. If *kanji* disturbs normative identity formations in Japan what can emoji' influence be in contemporary western discourse?

Emojis often behave like linguistic signs and condense multiple meaning depending on the context. The emoji '💃' (defined by Unicode as 'dancer' is often used as slang for 'let's party'. In Grindr, the eggplant emoji (🍆) becomes synonym of a penis, and a peach emoji (🍑) synonym of a butt. But even when the peach becomes a butt the meaning making process at work is that of metaphorization. Lacan in his early work, introduced numerous analytic tools from linguistics into his close reading of Freud. Lacan is particularly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's theories about the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 2011). In order to understand the function of emoji within discourse we need to introduce some basic linguistic concepts. According to Saussure, language is a system of signs, and each sign is consisted of a conceptual part (the signified) and a phonological part (the signifier). The two elements according to Saussure are linked with an arbitrary bond. Whereas for Saussure the bond between signifier and signified is stable (despite being arbitrary) for Lacan this bond is precarious allowing for slips. Lacan in his account of language prioritises signifiers as he considers them (and not signs) to be what language is composed of:

For this primordial distinction [between signifier and signified] goes way beyond the debates on the arbitrariness of the sign which have been elaborated since the earliest reflections of the ancients, and even beyond the impasse which, through the same period, has been encountered in every discussion of the bi-univocal correspondence between the word and the thing, even in the mere act of naming. *One cannot and need not go further along this line of thought than to demonstrate that no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning.* (Lacan, 1966)

Following the Lacanian maxim according to which 'the unconscious is constructed like language' we deduce that signifiers are the only way we have to access our unconscious.

Lacan talks for the first time about metaphor and metonymy in his third seminar (Lacan, 1955, pp. 214–230) where he equates metaphor with the Freudian term 'condensation' and metonymy with 'displacement' (Lacan, 1955, p. 221). Our ego, in order to protect us


from 'dangerous' thoughts censors their content. Freud understood that this censoring takes two main forms: one is condensation and the other is displacement. In condensation 'a sole idea represents several associative chains' and in the structuralist schematisation this corresponds to the function of metaphor. In displacement 'an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas' and that functions corresponds to metonymy (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973)


Metaphor, according to Lacan, is the process where we substitute one signifier in a signifying chain with another signifier such that a new meaning is created. Metaphor is an essential meaning making process and, as we saw earlier, Lacan places the paternal metaphor at the beginning of all signification processes. In this seminar, he theorises the primacy of the signifier over the signified and concludes that the signifier defines not only the subject's discourse but the subject as such.

The mainspring of the metaphor isn't the meaning, which is supposed to be transposed from Booz onto the sheaf. I readily admit that someone might object to me that Booz's sheaf is metonymic, not metaphorical, and that underlying this magnificent poetry, and never named directly, there is Booz's royal penis. But that isn't what gives this sheaf its metaphorical quality, it's that the metaphor is place in the position of subject, in Booz's place. (Lacan, 1955, p. 225)

In metonymy, 'an object is designated by a term other than the one that usually belongs to it' (Dor, 2004, p. 50). Metonymy usually involves a part of the thing used to describe the whole (i.e. sails in the horizon). In a sense, metonymy designates the relation between signifiers on the same signifying chain (horizontal relation) whereas metaphor involves the substitution of a signifier in one signifying chain by a signifier from another signifying chain (vertical relation).

Emojis introduce an irregularity on the written text as they introduce an image that is closer to the signified than to the signifier. In that sense emoji can operate as symbols allowing for metaphorization. A peach emoji as we saw earlier can represent a butt. At the same time, emoji retain something irreducible to the symbolic, they retain their imaginary promise of self-coherence, a quality of the signified. They are after all pictures of things. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar as Freud has famously said, and accordingly, sometimes a peach emoji is just a peach emoji.

Grindr raised controversy in 2017 while launching its own series of ‘gay’ emoji (the gaymojis) including, amongst other ‘naughty’ images, a capital T which is, according to some users, slang for crystal meth (colloquially known as Tina). The capital T was subsequently withdrawn and in an attempt to appease the public (and the strict rules of apple-store) Grindr banned users from using certain emoji, such as the syringe emoji ‘’ that was also used to signify use of drugs. In the context of our analysis, it is not only the fragmented discourse that threatens the application’s legality and capitalist productivity but now images and abstract symbols carry new, disorganising threats. The Lacanian theorisation of metaphor and metonymy comes from Lacan’s early period when the signifier was the most important aspect of analysis. As we saw in this chapter, the primacy of the symbolic as the only way to access and understand our jouissance (and in extension our symptom) has been contested by the late Lacanian re-conceptualisation of the imaginary; emoji are yet another instance where the imaginary is introduced and disrupts the normative function of the symbolic.

The circulation of signifiers is intercepted by representatives from the order of things. In 2015, Oxford Dictionaries named  (face with tears of joy) the word of the year. Oxford Dictionaries president, Caspar Grathwohl claimed that ‘traditional alphabet scripts have been struggling to meet the rapid-fire, visually focused demands of 21st Century communication’ (“‘Face with tears of joy’ emoji named Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries | The Independent,” n.d.). According to Lacan, the introduction of symbols that are both linguistic entities and ideograms in Japanese language made the Japanese un-analysable. Shall we infer that the same goes for millennials and all those who use emoji in their everyday communications? Even entertaining the Lacanian provocation seems risqué. Nevertheless, if psychoanalysis was conceived as the study of signifiers, it might be indeed at risk when social interactions are increasingly mediated through images. If everyone is an-analysable maybe it is time for the analytic process to change.

An element of Grindr we did not have the time to reflect upon in this chapter is that of location. Grindr is a location-based service that along a series of other similar applications takes the GPS positioning of the user as a starting point for its operation. It is this exact element of locating oneself within the world that will be developed in the next chapter where ego will be theorised in relation to imaginary and material geographies.

We are interested in investigating the poetic articulations and entanglements between the ego and the spatial reality. We will examine how the subject can answer the question 'Where am I?' especially in the context of mobile technology.

We echo in this endeavour the Bersanian schematisation of the ego as a passionate inference as we consider this analysis a spatialised metaphor for the psyche. As we saw earlier, Bersani traces the homosexual ethics as a constant search for oneself into the world: '[I]f our psychic centre can finally seem less seductive than our innumerable and imperfect reappearances outside, it should then seem not only imperative but natural to treat the outside as we would a home' (Bersani, 2010, p. 62). We want to rethink of that 'at-homeness' in the context of new technology. In our final chapter, we will introduce and develop the concept of 'poetics of self', in order to describe the new possibilities we see in the narcissistic processes that become available through new media.

We want to explore how the imaginary allows for new encounters with the real and how these encounters shape our social reality. In the introduction of the literature review we presented Hito Steyerl's metaphoric representation of new media environment as the result of an exploded cinematic screen. The fragments are everywhere, and we are left to deal with them. On a similar note we aspire to theorise the ego as an exploded circle; looking for oneself in the world; composing of oneself as an assemblage made of traces. This new cartography is essentially a personal diaristic collection of moments and reflections, the *sinthome* on the map.

Conclusion

In 'beyond the selfie principle' my focus was on the function of the ego, the image and the Other at the level of the imaginary, as mediated by the symbolic function of the Other's gaze. In this chapter, I take the discussion beyond the level of the imaginary, to understand how the image of the ego is invested libidinally (as object of desire and conduit for the drive) and how it is manifested in the practices of daily life (for example, in the social exchange of Grindr). The aim here is to make a contribution to the understanding of how the Real and the Imaginary, in the Lacanian sense, intersect. As the title of the chapter indicates, my focus here is on gay life and practice. Why this particular attention? There are two key reasons. First, my discussion in 'beyond the selfie

principle' is orientated by the work of female artists and writers, whose discussion concerns the woman's body; a focus on men and the male image provides a useful counterpoint. Second, narcissism and homosexuality have been historically linked, with psychoanalytic theory focusing on the libidinal investment of the body image in cases of homosexuality. It makes sense, then, to bring this body of theory to bear when thinking about narcissism and libido.

Since the nineteenth century, the figure of Narcissus has been adopted as the prototypical narcissist, the man who is in love with his own form and looks for it in the world. We introduced this discussion by centring on a provocative self-portrait by Robert Mapplethorpe. Continuing the discussion of self-portraiture as a form of exploring the limitations and creativity of narcissism, I analysed the characteristics of the picture that make it so resonant in relation to our previous discussion. The subject of the sexually staged self-portrait blurs the subject–object division, as in this instance the photographer presents his own body as an object. Mapplethorpe's self-portrait introduces the dimension of the body in its relation to self-image. The main question of this chapter was to determine how this same relation is expressed in gay dating apps.

In this chapter, I move the analysis of narcissism on from one that is strictly to do with self-image and the articulation of the ego, in order to bring in the domain of sexuality and desire. If the body in front of the mirror strives to acquire an imaginary completeness, the body we see in Mapplethorpe's picture, or the bodies that appear when we open gay dating apps, are electrified by the unsettling effects of lust. They are bodies that seek the pleasures of fucking and being fucked, bodies that strive not to acquire a completeness but rather to shatter themselves – at least temporarily – in the intensity of pleasure. Sexuality in psychoanalysis, as we saw in our discussion of Zupančič, is a disruptive force that can never be properly captured within discourse; or more accurately, it is what hinders discourse from being properly articulated as such. This theorisation of sex and the sexed body, which focuses on its anti-egoic, self-shattering qualities, takes a distance from prevalent approaches within social theory that tend to adopt a more Butlerian theorisation of gender and sexuality as performative.

However, if sexuality is not defined purely as a product of discursive and socio-historical regimes, how can we avoid the pitfall of reinstating a naive biological definition of sex? As

we saw in this chapter, Freud introduces an important conceptual distinction in his work by identifying the difference between the instinct and the drive. I focused on the importance of the drive, in order to understand what Lacan describes as the domain of the Real, but it is important to reiterate that the psychoanalytic drive is not an ahistorical force that operates independently of socio-historical conditions. The drive cannot be simply defined as constructed within language and as we saw earlier in the chapter it is not a biological instinct either. My work focused extensively on the concept of the drive and its analytical potency, opening new ways of understanding the sexed body and the different modes of relationality one encounters in gay dating apps. By utilising the concept of the drive and the related concept of *jouissance* I opened up my analysis to incorporate what cannot be captured within discourse but yet what is essential in understanding sexuality as such.

By showcasing the theoretical affinity between narcissism and the drive, I introduce a psychoanalytically-informed theorisation of Grindr, the gay dating application. My analysis focuses on the phenomenology of the application usage: the experience of scrolling and browsing body parts within a virtual mosaic of assembled skin. My analysis is influenced by Leo Bersani's theoretical account of gay cruising practices; where cruising takes place in physical locations where anonymous bodies create a field of affection and estrangement, Grindr accelerates this process by adding the layer of a virtual interface. Bersani's account of sameness and sociability that I present in this chapter opens up new opportunities for theorising communication technologies. If sociability for example is defined as a social bond that is uncontaminated by (imaginary) identifications, we can, perhaps, see modern social networks as facilitating a sense of sociability that fosters a feeling of co-existence that does not require in-group identification.

Bersani connects his discussion of sociability and homosexuality through a queer appropriation of Freudian accounts of homosexual subjectivity. Bersani takes Freud's remarks on homosexual men and their tendency towards forming social bonds at face value and uses them in his discussion of sociability and cruising. Building on this theoretical exercise, I discussed the temporary and fragile communities that emerge on Grindr and how their function can inspire new ways of relating to each other. In this

discussion, I utilised Tom Roach's concept of 'shared estrangement', an idea Roach developed by closely examining different moments of queer relations and communities. His concept of shared estrangement suggests a new form of community that is not based on similarity and identification but rather on lust and spontaneity.

One of the Grindr phenomena I focus on in this chapter is that of the 'dick pic'. Despite the ubiquity of the dick pic – more than 50% of millennial women have received one – the phenomenon has received little or no scholarly attention to date. My discussion in this chapter employs cinematic theory as developed by Joan Copjec, to understand the function of the close-up in relation to the dick pic. Cinematic close-ups are then taken to represent the partial objects of psychoanalytic thought, objects of the drive that are not just parts of a whole but rather separated pieces with their own place in the libidinal economy. I consider this focus on the partial objects particularly relevant in modern media landscapes where mobile cameras recreate the effect of cinematic close-ups constantly in our everyday interactions through social media. The screen separates our bodies into distinct body parts, and the dick pics acquire a new life of their own. In their circulation, dick pics create a new libidinal economy of detachable and exchangeable phalluses; here again, we see the implication of the other in the narcissistic image, not simply as the anonymous other with whom the image is shared, but also as the Other of the symbolic exchange itself, the one to whom something is given and from whom something is expected (even if that something is nothing more than a lack of response).

Central to this chapter is the Lacanian theorisation of the *sinthome*, a concept articulated by Lacan in his twenty-third seminar, which offers a different articulation of the human psyche, one that goes beyond the need for castration in order for the subject to enter the symbolic order. Earlier in his teaching, Lacan saw the paternal metaphor as a decisive logical moment in the formation of the subject, one in which the desire of the other is named and metaphorized, and the identification with a position other than that of the desiring mother is made possible. It is a moment that marks the subject's entry into language and the beginning of desire itself. In the 1970s, Lacan began a reformulation of this cornerstone of his thought, seeing the paternal metaphor as just one possible outcome of the subject's encounter with lack, a kind of fiction to which the subject

cleaves. From now on, other fictions can be conceived of as performing a similar function in subjectivity, binding together the three registers of symbolic, imaginary and real. The sinthome performs this function; it is an idiosyncratic, singular response to lack that functions to bind together the three registers, a fourth loop that snakes between the three rings of the Borromean knot, preventing their falling apart. In seminar twenty-three, Lacan attempts a theorisation of subjectivity that does not centre castration. Influenced by his reading of mathematical topology and by his close reading of James Joyce he came up with the idea that there might be a different way for the subject to access the symbolic order, a sort of a self-creation or 'gadget': namely the sinthome.

James Joyce makes his own name. By adopting a theorisation of the sinthome we open up space for a new discussion of the relation between the psyche and technology. The sinthome is an invention, and just like the countless hardware and software augmentations of our psychic life, it offers a new way for us to relate to each other. By taking this in account, I offer a sinthomatic reading of Grindr that breaks away from ethnographic observations and rather focuses on the structural elements of the application that transform how the user experiences reality. In seminar twenty-three, Lacan proposed a new understanding of language. Instead of focusing on the signifier as a element of the symbolic order, in this seminar, Lacan suggests that the material resonance of language is equally important. Each signifier takes its place in the signifying chain, but at the same time the sound and the resonance it has within the human psyche should not be neglected. I used this conception of the materiality and jouissance of language in my analysis of the Grindr chat and its potential disruptive capacity. The language of Grindr, devoid of deep meaning, is reduced to 'churlish grunts', which according to Tom Roach creates less of a field of signification and more of an affective terrain where the jouissance of the phoneme meets sexual lust and boredom.

One of the innovations of my research was the adoption of the idea of the 'porous ego' in my analysis of self-image in new media cultures. Following Juliet MacCannell's analysis of the imaginary order and its relation to the real, I re-approached the imaginary aspect of ego, not as an illusory domain of a bodily identification but rather a potent field where meaning is produced and exchanged between subjects. Living in an era of visual media, we have to re-consider the primacy of visuality in the subjectification process. Moving

away from a theory of the subject that prioritises the signifier and language, we were able to re-evaluate the importance of art and the screen in the process of understanding modes of relating to each other.

Following this foregrounding of the imaginary, I then suggested a new theorisation of the emoji. The starting point for this divergence was the prevalence of the use of emoji within dating applications such as Grindr and the creative ways in which emoji are used within that context. The linguistic qualities of the emoji have been discussed in length especially in relation to their ostensible corruption of written communication. While some critics of emoji argue that this use of images within text might disrupt language as we know it, more moderate linguists note that the inclusion of ideograms within written systems of communication is as ancient as writing itself. What drew my attention was how Jacques Lacan, in his discussion of what he calls the Japanese unconscious, focuses on the coexistence of different writing systems (ideogrammatic and phonographic) within the same alphabet and how that affects the relation Japanese subjects have to their unconscious. In Lacan's analysis here we see a movement from the symbolic to the imaginary that reflects the arguments that I have made throughout this chapter. In the case of the emoji, images are interrupting traditional signifiers, creating a new hybrid language.

Poetics of self, geographies of the real

We have discussed so far different aspects of the subjectification process in relation to new mobile technologies. Starting from narcissism and its relation to the screen, we traced a new conception of the ego as inherently dependent on the Other. By centralising the function of radical narcissism we theorised the selfie as an open-ended process of identification. Then by discussing the drive and desire in relation to location-based dating services we examined different ways in which new technologies affect – if not shape – the ways we relate to each other.

What I want to address now is the ‘mobile’ aspect of mobile media: its portability and omnipresence, and most importantly, the fascinating intrusion of the private into the public. In order to discuss the mobility of mobile media, we need to re-thematise space and our understanding of it. To the extent that ‘space’ has already appeared in our previous discussions, it has been primarily as a metaphor. Psychoanalysis since its very foundation has instrumentalised spatial metaphors in order to describe psychic structures. From Freud’s conception of the Preconscious-Conscious-Unconscious and subsequently the Ego-Superego-Id, to Lacan’s non-Euclidean topography, we have already encountered plenty of spatial metaphors. In this chapter we will talk about space not as a metaphor for psychic structures, but on the contrary these psychic structures will guide us in our theorisation of the spatial, and in particular, of urban geographies.

In this discussion, I centralise ‘locative media’, those media products whose function relies on the specific geo-location of the user. We specifically focus on Pokémon GO (PG), a popular locative game that, with its 2016 launch, changed the mainstream perception of video games as an activity that strictly takes place within the confined environment of the user’s private space. Our discussion of PG allows us to reflect on psychogeographical understandings of space and investigate the implications of augmented reality for our analysis of psychic phenomena. In this chapter we will have the opportunity to deal with urban subjectivities in the light of our theorisation of selfhood.

What we saw in the previous chapter as ‘the ‘body of the drive’ will be further developed here in order to talk about the ‘city of the drive’. The city of the drive becomes a factory,

producing and reproducing selfhood in all kinds of failed ways. In this analysis we insist on the concepts of the porous ego, the broken circle we described in the previous chapter. The city of the drive becomes a factory forging different *sinthomes*, creating pulses and moments of excitation and stasis, merging and separating from the bodies of its inhabitants, and expanding beyond the signifying chains that once gave birth to it. The city of the drive explodes into myriad tiny pieces of deranged code. This city sets in motion a certain kind of poetics of the self.

We borrow the term poetics here to designate both poetry (poiesis) as making, and to designate the poetic function of language as we identified in our Lacanian reading of James Joyce's work. In many ways we could argue that the Dublin of Joyce is the archetypal city of the drive. At the same time, it is a land of exile and the most dear home, the city of alienation and love, the city of psychotic hallucinations and intersubjective communication. In order to examine the poetic function of the urban environment I created a small locative game where - within the conventions and forms of PG - people were invited to write and locate within the city small Pokémon-poems. The result is a series of geo-located autobiographical poems that create a different cartography of the city, one that goes beyond what is visible. This approach allowed participants to reflect on their experience both of the city and of the media they use in order to navigate the city. In a sense, this project allowed for an embodied reflection upon new technologies by allowing for a poetic questioning of subjectivity as such.

The 'perceptive cocoon' of mobile media and its relation to the ego

In our analysis of the city we are particularly interested in the ways the city is mediated and thus constructed through everyday use of mobile media. For our analysis of the materiality of the city, we draw from the Lacanian articulation of psychic reality as presented in earlier chapters: symbolic, imaginary, real. We first identify the symbolic city, this is the city that is structured by historical and socio-cultural relations and antagonism. The symbolic city is not immediately available for inspection as by this term we refer to the socio-symbolic structures that allow for the emergence of the city. The symbolic city is constructed through certain regimes of power and knowledge that solidify the social

relations that gave birth to its architectural and environmental elements.

But, as we saw, the symbolic is unable to provide an all-encompassing totality, and accordingly the city can never be reduced to its history. The city of images, the imaginary city or what we could potentially call the narcissist city is the city that emerges in our perception. The imaginary city is constructed through our phenomenological strolling through the urban environment. Most importantly for our research, the imaginary city carries myriads of sounds, images and text messages that we carry in public spaces through the consumption of mobile media.

The media theorist Michael Bull (2006) discusses how the introduction of the Sony Walkman changed the way people experience the urban environment on a phenomenological level. The Walkman was the first instance where mobile media affected significantly and on a large scale the way people consume music. Something that previously took place in a private space (home) or in designated areas (concert halls, bars etc.) becomes something that happens anywhere in the city. For Bull, the Walkman allowed users to create 'manageable sites of habitation', virtual spaces where time and space are made manageable. The Sony Walkman was introduced in the market in 1978 and was soon adopted by teenagers and public transport commuters and later by a wider community of consumers.

When we discuss the spatio-temporal effect of the Walkman, we refer to a series of parameters. First, Walkman users experience a change in their perceived boundaries; by blocking certain environmental stimuli they create a private space of auditory seclusion. In addition to that, according to Bull, Walkman soundscapes allow the user to create a site of fantasy, with the cinematic effect of music being introduced in their everyday lives. What is unique in the history of the Walkman is that, for the first time, the subject shifts their attention from the visual to the auditory domain. If we first learn to observe and consume urban reality primarily through vision, a portable music device makes the soundscape of the city equally important.

Bull insists that the significance of sound is under-theorised in contemporary media studies and suggests that there is 'an unexplored gulf between the world according to sound and the world according to sight' (Bull, 2006, p. 241). What I find particularly

striking in his analysis is a passing reference to an aphorism by George Berkeley: 'sounds are as near to us as our thoughts' (Ibid. p.241). While this statement resonates, it is hard to grasp its full meaning. What is it about sound that brings it closer to our internal world, in a way that image is not? We will return to the relation between sound and the unconscious later in our analysis but, for now, let's get back to our analysis of mobile media.

We use as a starting point in our analysis the Walkman not because it is an earlier example of 'mobile' media (as we saw in our introductory chapter writers such as Jason Farman (2012) claim that in fact books are the first mobile media), but because what makes the Walkman unique is – as its name suggests – the fact that it was made to be used while in transit: mobility was intrinsic in its function. The user was encouraged to 'curate' their own soundscape and take it with them wherever they go. As we mentioned, commuters were amongst the first adopters of the device and soon after the launch of the product it became very visible in trains and buses of all big metropolises. From New York to Tokyo and from Berlin to Paris the world was warming up for the coming of a new era in mobile media.

The innovation of portable devices that play music (and we can generalise here from the Walkman to iPods, other mp3 players and smartphones) is that they fill an 'empty' space with stimuli. In the case of public transport, the personal soundscape of the portable stereo separates the user from the unpleasant (for most) and certainly under-stimulating experience of commuting. The curated soundscape adds an extra layer of meaning in the experience that makes the time of commuting more palatable. For Chambers (2005) this becomes necessary as late capitalist metropolises expand and the time to get to work gets longer. The subject of late capitalism spends more than an hour commuting a day, making this transit areas an important part of contemporary urban life. The contemporary worker not only spends a lot of time in transit but can, in fact, be working from cafes or any place with a broadband connection. The contemporary worker becomes then a 'digital nomad', a person that carries a virtual office with them anywhere they go.

A life in flux and instability is re-grounded in memories and emotional landscapes constructed through music. Familiar voices and melodies establish a sense of continuity while the material environment in its constant change becomes replaceable, almost

unimportant. The subject needs new nodal points for its subjectivity, nodal points that incorporate immaterial and perhaps non-linguistic elements. We claimed in earlier chapters that a selfie might be a (failed) attempt of the subject to construct a stable ego image. In the context of 'nomadic' subjectivity this need is persistent. The subject uses selfies in order to anchor the identity into something that seems to promise stability, the stability of a fixed ego. Those small rituals (a familiar song, browsing pictures of familiar faces) allow the subject to make meaning within an environment that constantly changes.

Mizuko Ito (2007) theorises the transitional space that mobile users create when listening to music in public spaces as 'perceptive cocoons', within which the subject finds safety within the urban environment. I consider these perceptive cocoons to be conceptually relevant to our earlier analysis of the open-ended ego. Those cocoons separate the subject from its immediate environment, but not in a radical and truly antisocial way. One can still see what is going on and maintain a relative relation to their surroundings. In fact, the separation that the perceptive cocoon offers is not aggressive to society, but rather allows the subject to 'survive' in a potentially hostile society: the narcissism of this separation allows the subject not to hate its fellow commuters. An auditory cocoon allows you for example to enjoy a train commute as music accentuates the beautiful colours of the sunrise. In a way, those cocoons might be essential for the subject to accept the absurdity of the capitalist mode of production and work conditions.

Perceptive cocoons are in-between spaces where the other exists, but their existence is mediated through an inserted layer of meaning. The subject sets its boundaries on the fundamental level of perception: when music is playing, the other cannot talk to you, at least not without actively making you taking off your headphones¹⁰.

In this chapter we will examine augmented reality technologies in which we are to take this semi-openness into account. Augmented reality applications operate exactly on the interplay between real world and virtual elements. The interplay between attention/inattention, central in navigating media-rich environments of the contemporary city, exercise our perceptual mechanisms in an intense mental gymnastics, in a circle

¹⁰ and sometimes the other is willing to go that far

between introspection and 'extrospection', attention and inattention.

The private consumption of digital music does not only change our perception of the city but also – and potentially more importantly – it affects the ways we comprehend and consume music. The 'shuffle' mode of the iPod and other MP3 players broke the aesthetic barriers of what were previously strictly defined genres. In contrast to the cassette (and of course in contrast to vinyl records) the music curation follows more randomised and affective flows. The shuffle option, the easy access to cheap or pirated music, the ability to buy songs instead of albums, and the absolute privacy of the medium allowed for people to mix music in unusual and highly personalised ways. The same iPod could contain heavy metal and Britney Spears tunes and play them back to back. Once again we see the erosion of rigid and well-defined rules and categories and the emergence of a highly-individualised creativity.

In our analysis of the city in relation to the Lacanian domains of psychic reality, we omitted the domain of the real. The real city emerges when the subject is lost. The real city is the city of anxiety, the city that we encounter when our smartphone runs out of battery, when the maps do not load, and we have to find our way back home. The gaze of the Other, as we saw in the previous chapter, is located to that blind spot in our perceptual field. The real city emerges in the dark alleys and the unknown shortcuts, in the delayed trains and obstructive demonstrations in city centre. The real city emerges where we are not, a place that threatens to eradicate us but at the same time reassures us that the Other cannot inhabit the whole of the urban matrix. Even in the cities of hyper-surveillance and industrialised panopticism there will always be territory of the 'real' threatening to dismantle symbolic and imaginary architectural constructions.

The drive and the cyborgs

In our discussion of Grindr we examined a geography of the drive. The drive, in its self-shattering outward thrust, changes our perception of selfhood and at the same time defines our understanding of the world. Instead of following a symbolic compass in order to go from point a to point b, we follow a desiring path that never quite reaches a destination. The city becomes an endless composition of infinity paths. The Mobius strip we saw earlier as a metaphor for the psyche becomes a representation of urban

subjectivity in motion. Mediated through new media applications, our psyche is more than ever an 'extimate' entity. Our intimate thoughts and perceptive mechanisms are mediated through technological and corporate constructions. The city of Grindr is the city of the drive; just as the drive follows a circular movement, so the city expands while the drive moves outwards and then it collapses back to the tight limits of the ego when the drive hits back.

Bersani's homosexual subject looks for itself in the world, takes the world as a synecdoche of itself (Bersani, 2002). That does not mean that the world is a friendly and accommodating space. The homosexual subject assumes the world as itself but as a self radically alienated and essentially lost. In that sense, every stroll around the city, every attempt at 'cruising' is essentially a re-assembling of selfhood as such. The subject I describe here borrows from the city to complete itself - a mode of being that reflects that of the cyborg. The city gives back a sense of selfhood but it is short-lived and unsatisfying, as it never reaches completion. Late modernity provides us with a perfect metaphor for this process in the figure of the cyborg. Donna Haraway borrows the idea of the cyborg from science fiction in order to substantiate a new theory of subjectivity.

For Haraway, subjectivity is an assemblage of human and non-human parts. In her seminal *Cyborg Manifesto* (1999), Haraway argues that humanity has to overcome the legacy of the Oedipus complex and to reconfigure subjectivity outside the domain of castration. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway proposes a new ontology that will eventually allow for the transformation of society. Modern technology, despite the fact it was developed in order to allow for maximisation of profits and serve the interests of neoliberal capitalism, has in Haraway's view diverted from its purpose and, in an accelerationist motion, has given birth to monstrous entities that go against the will of the reality that gave birth to them. For Haraway, the cyborg is the hybrid creature that will end the hetero-patriarchal racist regime of our times.

The Harawaysian cyborg emerges as a hybrid that is able to erase its lineage, to erase the history of its forefathers and creators. It is an embodiment of the negation of all rigidly constructed dichotomies of modernity; the cyborg can at the same time be animal and human, biological and technological, physical and immaterial. Haraway considers the development of communication technologies a major point of departure for humanity as

virtual elements become essential part of ourselves. But what is most fascinating about Haraway's cyborg is that it is not only free from the desires of its capitalist creators but it is also free from all fantasies of past-utopias.

[The cyborg] has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense – a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation. (Haraway, 1999, p. 273)

Tom Roach (2015a) follows a similar line in his analysis of Grindr: Grindr came into being thanks to the ruthless rules of capitalist free markets but offers a tool for dismantling the existing system of oppression. In the question 'how does the cyborg erase its genealogy?' Haraway is herself troubled: 'The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.' (Haraway, 1999, p. 273))

The diminishing power of the paternal figure in Western metaphysics allows Haraway to envision a world without fathers or more accurately, a world where fathers are 'inessential'; not because they are not essential for the rise of cyborgs but rather because they are emptied of their metaphysical essence, evacuated by the power to grant meaning to subjectivity. Once the paternal function was questioned it lost all meaning, as it relied on its metaphysical threat. But what does a world beyond the paternal metaphor look like? If we accept that we are moving towards a post-Oedipus reality, what does that mean for our ability to connect and communicate with each other? In all its oppressiveness, the paternal metaphor subjected everyone to the same law, the law of the Other. In a world of sinthomatic singularity, communication might look and feel very different.

In a 2015 article, tech-blogger Lauren Smiley cautions us that new communication technologies do little to connect people:

In 1998, Carnegie Mellon researchers warned that the internet could make us into hermits. They released a study monitoring the social behaviour of 169 people making their

first forays online. The web-surfers started talking less with family and friends and grew more isolated and depressed. “We were surprised to find that what is a social technology has such anti-social consequences,” said one of the researchers at the time. “And these are the same people who, when asked, describe the Internet as a positive thing.” (Smiley, 2015)

Most certainly, the idea of networked hermits does not seem compatible with the previously described idea of sociability as developed by Bersani. But are we moving towards an era of digital hermits or is that fear part of some moral panic around the emergence of new technologies? The case study that exemplifies the fears expressed by Smiley comes, once again, from Japan, where more than half a million people live as ‘*hikikomori*’. *Hikikomori* (literally, “pulling inward, being confined”) are reclusive adolescents or adults who decide to withdraw from all social activities and become some sort of hermits (Teo, 2012). *Hikikomori* are usually children of middle-class families who at some point abandon all social life and only want to stay in their rooms, playing video games, watching anime and pornography. The phenomenon is well-documented in Japan with suggested explanations ranging from psychoanalytic and psychiatric to sociological and cultural analyses.

First coined by the Japanese psychologist Tamaki Saiko, who claimed there are a million such individuals in his country, the term *hikikomori* usually refers to a son or daughter of a middle-class Japanese family who avoids all social contact and has withdrawn indefinitely to his or her bedroom, or indeed any space whatever equipped with a networked computer.

For our analysis we follow Scott Wilson’s (2010) investigation of the phenomenon, as he theorises *hikikomori* in relation to the Lacanian *sinthome*, a conceptual framework we have already explored in depth in the previous chapter. Wilson introduces the topic of the *hikikomori* by following Lacan’s suggestion that the Japanese are unanalysable. For Lacan, the structure of the Japanese writing system upsets the theoretical assumptions of his theory which was developed taking into account Western writing systems. For Wilson, the *hikikomori* phenomenon suggests that the Lacanian argument might hold some truth: living in a society that is increasingly dependent on multimedia, multi-sensorial stimuli, a theory that prioritises the signifier might indeed fail to grasp the new

challenges of contemporary subjectivity.

Wilson suggests that the Lacanian argument does not in fact render the Japanese language deficient in relation to Western writing systems. It is rather an observation of a different relation to *jouissance* that Lacan also noted in the case of James Joyce.

Consequently, the idea of the *sinthome* might allow us to both understand and theorise the *hikikomori* phenomenon, as the *sinthome* is 'a signifying formulation that exceeds meaning accessible to interpretation, but nevertheless provides a means of organising *jouissance* and holding the subject together' (Wilson, 2010, p. 393). This theory of subjectivity might be more appropriate for our times where the world is rendered in multiple non-linguistic ways:

We are networked beings in which a range of virtual identities are determined in various profiles enabled and delimited by different codes and algorithms. Are we, in this sense, becoming Japanese, such that for an increasing number psychoanalysis has become neither possible nor necessary? (Wilson, 2010, p. 393)

Psychoanalysis made its name as a talking cure and thus it is built upon the premise that the subject can speak of themselves and their symptoms. In a radical departure from psychoanalytic orthodoxy, Wilson adapts the psychoanalytic argument to the post-human era by examining one of the classic Freudian texts, *Civilisation and its Discontents*. In that explorative essay Freud gives an account of the beginning of civilisation. Similarly to the post-human discourse, Freud theorises the human as a *prosthetic god*. Humans only became human when they started using tools, and technology allowed them to fantasise that one day they would be able to make everything they imagine possible. In this fantasy, Freud identifies the paradox of technological progress: instead of enabling humans to transcend reality by using tools, technology made humans realise their radical insufficiency. In Freud's words, 'Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times' (Freud, 1927, pp. 91–92).

And we have certainly reached a point in history when the prostheses on our bodies are undeniably troublesome; the closer we come to our godlike potential, the more worried

we become of the repercussions. Wilson suggests that in order to understand the subjectivity of our times, in order to be able to theorise *hikikomori* and other odd psychic formations of our networked realities, we need to expand our understanding of the unconscious. His attempt involves the introduction of what he names the ‘audio unconscious’, a concept that I suggest is very relevant to our discussion of the ‘resonant’ signifier. In our earlier theorisation, the signifier’s materiality is looked upon through an examination of language’s musicality, rhythm, and pulses. We live in times when linguistic rules diminish while the enjoyment of language as a series of sounds increases.¹¹

In our discussion of the Walkman, we saw how sound is considered to be ‘closer to our thoughts’ than images. Wilson (2015), following a similar trajectory, analyses the music of Richard D. James, also known as Aphex Twin, whom he considers as particularly relevant to *hikikomori* subjectivity. Aphex Twin, Wilson tells us, produces his work in his bedroom in a state of semi-reverie. Dissonant and tense sounds, through delay and reverberation, gain the status of what Aphex Twin himself calls ‘braindance’. This music is not produced to relax the listener as the album title *Ambient Works Vol. 2* might suggest but, on the contrary, to challenge and stress the brain. According to Wilson, ‘through multiple rhythms, tones and timbres, electronic continuity between neural circuits and circuits of digital information, creating billions of new synaptic connections between neurons in a more immediate and efficient way than language’ (Wilson, 2015, p. 191).

Aphex Twin’s braindance is an intense stimulating experience that blurs the distinction between human and machine, between neurons and chips; it is for Wilson a music that exemplifies the potency and disorganising effects of the drive, or what he calls the ‘audio unconscious’. Like the *hikikomori*, Aphex Twin produces his work secluded from his physical environment while remaining online. His computer music, criticised for being solipsistic, seems to revolve around himself. He often includes anagrams of his name in the titles of songs and albums and also includes his face in the visual material accompanying his music. Like James Joyce, Aphex Twin is constructing his *sinthome*

¹¹ The most tragic aspect of this development is perhaps the rise of Donald Trump and the whole post-truth aesthetic, with language being no more than a stream of affective non-sense.

through art. Instead of using linguistic means to achieve it, he creates a soundscape, an audio environment that is uninhabitable, yet at the same time, a room of one's own.

Aphex Twin – like Joyce – builds a complex sensorial universe that operates on its own rules. His countless puns and anagrams of his name, featuring in song titles, his various aliases and the use of his face in the visual elements of his records could be perceived as an attempt to make a name for himself 'in the absence of a paternal signifier' (Wilson, 2010, p. 405). Once again we encounter a generative narcissism, narcissism as a starting point for the formation of subjectivity. This narcissism is not bound to stagnation and isolation but is a creative process that allows for the creation of a meeting point with the Other. For Wilson, the figure of the *hikikomori* is another sign that our conception of the unconscious needs to be conceptualised beyond the signifier. Lost in a sea of pornography and video games, the *hikikomori* is isolated by the Other and not bound by the paternal law that defines intersubjectivity. Yet the *hikikomori* are not autistic hermits; they are in constant state of connectivity through the internet.

In his article, Wilson urges us to engage with a new 'modality of intersubjective interactivity'. I want to suggest that augmented reality gaming offers an opportunity to do precisely this. In Pokémon Go, briefly a cultural phenomenon when launched in the summer of 2016, before fading somewhat, we find an intersection between the enclosed virtual worlds of the *hikikomori* and the cruising adventures of Bersani's queer subject. Expanding on my earlier theorisation of Grindr, we will now examine the different ways the subject navigates the city through media.

In order to understand Pokémon GO, we have to first understand the phenomenological shift that augmented environments bring to new media users especially in relation to older applications of virtual reality. Virtual reality has been discussed in the context of critical media theory since its very conception. The idea that the futuristic possibility of a virtual environment is identical (or better?) than our sensorial reality raises new ethical and political questions. In virtual reality (VR) computers can simulate realistic environments where the user acquires experiences that were otherwise not accessible to them.

VR was theorised as 'an image or space that is not real but appears to be' (Mirzoeff,

1999, p. 91), yet very often virtuality involves not only immaterial but also invisible aspects. For example, we consider virtual identities as identity formations that are mediated through networked communication technologies. André Nusselder, a researcher working on the intersection between digital technologies and Lacanian psychoanalysis, offers some insights with regards to the new virtual spaces and their relation to psychic processes. He analyses cyberspace in an attempt to understand how subjectivity changes in the age of information (Nusselder, 2010).

For psychoanalytic ontology and post-human studies the world is already virtualised through language: as André Nusselder (2010) notes, citing Pierre Lévy, 'Human language virtualises real time, material objects, actual events, and on-going situations'. Nusselder expands on this notion and by suggesting that if reality is already constructed like fiction then it already resembles what we theorise as a virtual world. A virtual world is essentially a semiotic matrix, and if we define reality as a result of the symbolic order then the 'real world' as we perceive it, is not much different than the virtual one. For Nusselder, information technologies 'fundamentally alter the relation of signified to signifier' ((Nusselder, 2010, p. 61). As we saw in our earlier discussion of emoji, the relation of the signifier and the signified is essential in the process of meaning production.

Nusselder claims that in the case of new information technologies, it is not only the relation between signifiers and signifieds that gets disrupted but there is a new category of signifiers that emerge: the 'flickering signifiers'. In a sense, Nusselder suggests that new information technologies caused an acceleration in the process that Lacan defines as sliding of meaning in the chain of signification. The signifiers that are fundamentally designed to change position and meaning according to the context in the VR paradigm become then more prone to changes, 'metamorphoses, attenuations and dispersions' (Ibid., p.61). Once again, we see how technological advances affect the ontological qualities of the signifier.

Nusselder argues that virtuality is essentially a process of constant metaphorisation, following media scholar Marshall McLuhan who claims that 'all media are active metaphors in their power to translate experiences into new forms' (Nusselder, 2010, p. 16). As we will see later in our analysis it is exactly the modality of translatability that allows a new conceptualisation of subjectivity that goes beyond the realm of linguistics

and a thinking of the role of images, sounds and other affective elements in this process. In our analysis we focus on PG, a mobile game that is based on augmented reality (AR) technology. AR transforms space into an assemblage of material and virtual elements, which interact and co-create each other. AR projects reject the totalising effect of VR as they leave an open space for interaction between physical and virtual elements and in a way they accelerate the process of metaphorisation we described earlier as they blur the difference between reality and virtuality.

Pokémon and new media geographies

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, this research project was initially conceived as an investigation of the relationship between space and media. The notion of locative media has been at the core of this investigation. As locative media we define media whose consumption is contingent to the geolocation of the user. In order to better understand the function of locative media, I will present here some examples and then proceed with linking them to undercurrent themes of my research such the unconscious, *sinthome* and subjectivity.

In locative media projects, the city is understood as a territory for creative exploration. As we saw in our literature review, locative media practitioners use different technological applications ranging from site-specific performances to audio-tours and interactive installations. Nevertheless, the most significant locative media expansion as a genre came through the widespread adoption of GPS technologies especially after the mainstreamisation of smartphones. Both iPhones and other smartphones could subsequently operate as platforms for the development and consumption of locative media projects ranging from history and information-based applications (that expand the concept of the traditional city-guide) to projects that involve music and poetry and of course games.

Locative media have been often theorised in relation to the concept of 'urban exploration' (Pinder, 2007). The user wanders around the city with the assistance of an artistic project that aims at re-signifying the urban environment. The small intervention coming in the form of a site-specific text, image or sound allows the subject to re-approach the city disrupting its everyday normativity. Cultural geographer David Pinder (2009) follows in his

account of urban exploration psychogeographical theory and practice, as developed by Guy Debord and the Situationist International. Psychogeography involves a series of artistic practices that re-signified the urban territory. At its core, psychogeographical practice is a political project aiming at the de-stabilisation of the normative way that modern cities are organised around notions of surveillance and productivity.

As the term suggests, 'psychogeography' is an attempt to understand the complex relations between emotions, thoughts, desires and the material city. In contrast to the functionalist understanding of the modernist city as a space of productivity and consumption, psychogeography counter-suggests the *flâneur*, a rebellious figure that chooses to wonder in the city in the most aimless ways. The city of the *flâneur* is not a city of normative directions but an open playground for exploration and diversions. The *flâneur* thrives in getting lost, losing track, finding what they did not know that existed. Following our earlier analysis, the *flâneur* is a true child of the 'real' city, the city of impossibility and anxiety, the city of the drive, where confusion and discordance guide the subject to a journey of impossible self-making.

Locative media projects attempt to untangle the different threads that make contemporary cities into what they are and then reconstruct them in new innovative ways. Many of the audio-walks we presented in our literature review deconstruct the notion of a 'guided' tour as developed in traditional tourist applications. Instead of guiding the subject into a superficial understanding of the environment, psychogeographical alternatives dig holes in mainstream narratives around the city's established understanding. In Janet Cardiff's project for example, what starts as a conventional audio-tour of Whitechapel's library soon diverts into an exciting (and scary) crime story. Cardiff calls the user to follow her voice, follow her steps around Whitechapel, see and be seen, smell and hear what is going on around them. By introducing a layer of narrative in the perceptive environment of the user she allows them to re-visit a familiar territory. The city of her narrative is the same city that the user walks through in their everyday life, but now, everything is charged, mysterious and alluring.

But it is not only the relation to the city as a series of sensorial experiences that can be shaped through locative media. It is also the relation to the city as a network of relationships (Wilken, 2010). The city is the space where we encounter countless other

people, a place where other people live and meet. According to media theorist Rowan Wilken, mobile media generate instantaneous communities of affinity. Those communities, according to Wilken, cannot be reduced to identification but allow the possibility of fluidity and difference. In that sense, Wilken's argument resembles Roach's account of 'shared estrangement' and it helps us expand the theorisation we built around Grindr, to include other location-based applications and creative projects.

The assemblage of virtual and physical elements that comes as a result of locative media projects poses new challenges in the analysis of both space and subjectivity within space. In order to understand the complex semiotic network of images, text, sound and sensorial stimuli from the environment, we need to develop multi-dimensional creative tools. In my attempt to grasp how a subject navigates those complex semiotic networks I developed a methodological framework that combines ethnographic observation and art practice. Starting point for this investigation is the 2016 commercial success of Pokémon GO, a locative media project that got mainstream attention and instigated a discussion around the potential of AR large-scale projects.

Pokémon GO caused a world-wide frenzy in its launch, becoming the most downloaded app in history in its first week. The game's premise was similar to the main Pokémon's franchise games. Pokémon first appeared as a game for the hand-held console devices of Nintendo (the Game Boy). It soon evolved into a media phenomenon, with a successful TV series, movies, trading cards, stickers and all kinds of merchandise. Pokémon was initially developed by Satoshi Tajiri in the mid-90s. Tajiri, who is himself in the autistic spectrum, claimed he draw his inspiration for developing the Pokémon game from the pleasure he experienced while collecting insects as a child. And the main objective of the Pokémon game is exactly that: collecting as many different Pokémon as possible and putting them in battles with each other in order to level them up and make them stronger. The American Pokémon TV show captures the spirit of this process with its iconic slogan 'gotta catch 'em all'.

Pokémon shares in its conception many of the problematics of the *sinthome* as we examined it earlier. The main character (both in the games and in the TV show) has no father; his father does not appear neither as a character nor as a memory, he is completely absent. The character, a 10-year-old boy, starts a long journey in order to

collect all of the Pokémon. In the English version of the anime, the main protagonist's name is Ash Ketchum, a literal reference to the series motto, gotta catch 'em all. the protagonist's name comes from what he plans on doing, creating a circular paradox. The process of obsessively collecting Pokémon organises the player's anxiety and enjoyment. The Pokémon universe is odd and nonsensical if seen from a traditional, linear understanding of narrative. Nevertheless, it became a media empire and more than twenty years later it keeps fascinating children (and adults) all over the world. The Pokémon generation is arguably the generation of the *sinthome*. A generation that grew up in a world where the paternal law has receded.

On December 1997, Pokémon caused worldwide panic when an episode of the anime, reportedly caused hundreds of children to get epileptic seizures. In the episode *Electric Soldier Porygon*, the series protagonist, Ash Ketchum, gets trapped in a virtual reality world. During a battle in the virtual world a huge explosion covered the screen into red and blue flashes for a few seconds. The strobing lights, were accused for the seizures of over 600 children in Japan, and the episode was never screened again. *Electric Soldier Porygon* caused an extreme case of what we presented earlier as braindance. In this case, the flashing lights operate as a disorienting force. There is a literal disruption of normative perceptive functions, and the break caused dangerous overload of the viewers' cognitive capacity. Similarly to the Aphex Twin music, the *Electric Soldier Porygon* attacks subjectivity by creating an unbearable sensorial environment. Even though the TV show production team was more careful after that incident, the Pokémon franchise was built around and continued to produce material that was essentially based on repetitive electronic sounds and flashing colours. I would argue here that Pokémon is indeed build upon the same principles as the braindance music we discussed earlier. The main game and the TV show narrative is ostensibly irrelevant; the main driving force of the character is just to collect as many Pokémon as possible – an obsessional and repetitive task that can never be fulfilled as more Pokémon are added almost on a yearly basis. The collection of all Pokémon is the sinthomatic 'suppletion' that the character uses as a substitution for his lack of a father.

Unlike the console-based Pokémon series, in Pokémon GO the players could find and collect Pokémon in real world locations, landmarks, parks and streets. Despite the fact

the technology was there for at least ten years before the game was launched, Pokémon GO was the first mainstream success of a location-aware AR game. In Pokémon GO (PG) the user looks for Pokémon in the real world and as a result the whole of the world becomes the arena of the game. Since PG is relatively recent and its hype was admittedly short-lived there is little research around the phenomenon. Most research focuses on the aspect of physical exercise that separates PG from traditional video games. In public health studies (Althoff et al., 2016; LeBlanc A.G and Chaput J.-P, 2017), the possibility of popular video-games that encourage their players into physical activity opens new horizons for healthier living. Others (Serino et al., 2016), still operating within the health sciences fields, flag the potential danger for injuries during playing PG, as the users are focusing on the screen while walking in the real world, raising the probability of accidents.

But it was another work of medical research (Tateno et al., 2016) that gained my attention, as the group of psychiatric researchers in a series of published papers argue that Pokémon GO might be the solution in relation to the socio-psychological problem of the *hikikomori*. The hypothesis is simple: the *hikikomori* decide to never leave their rooms and instead they just want to be playing video games. But if their video game's function incorporates the real world, then they have an incentive to leave their home. Tateno follows certain patients, diagnosed as *hikikomori*, and presents an unexpected improvement in their condition after the launch of Pokémon GO. In his team's big surprise several of their *hikikomori* patients started going regularly out leading them to think that if we could develop similar applications that connect the virtual world of gaming with the real world it would greatly benefit more *hikikomori* patients. This assumption is crucial for our theorisation of Pokémon in relation to the *sinthome* as it shows how subjects that are essentially separated by society find a way to re-connect to the symbolic order through an invention of a psycho-technical gadget.

Pokémon GO was not developed by Nintendo, the company that originally developed and distributed all other Pokémon games. PG was instead developed by Niantic, a smaller company based in San Francisco that specialises in location-aware applications and transmedia narratives. Niantic's first major success that led to PG was the popular mobile game Ingress. Ingress, despite its reasonable success for a mobile game, never

captured the mainstream fascination but nevertheless was used by Niantic to pilot the concept of an AR game in order to attract Nintendo's attention. Ingress has been theorised as the first multiplayer augmented reality game (Chess, 2014) and was criticised for using its players for excessive data mining (Hodson, 2012; Hulse and Reeves, 2014), a criticism that later on was expressed against PG.

According to media theorist Sophia Drakopoulou (2010), location-based games, such as Ingress, change the way the world is being materialised. Drakopoulou analyses the interaction of players with their environments in several locative games that pre-date Ingress and notices that in all instances the players experience time and space differently from each other. Drakopoulou follows de Certeau according to whom 'Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice' in order to investigate how locative games do in fact change the environments within which they take place. The city becomes part of a narrative that was not there before the game and one that interestingly will persist in the memory of the player after the ending of the game.

One of my first experiences with augmented reality applications came during my visit to Helsinki in 2015. I was there for a conference and stayed at a couch-surfer's place in the northern suburbs of the city. When my host heard that I was interested in locative media he informed me enthusiastically he was one of the best Ingress players in Finland. The next day he took me for a long walk to show me the game mechanics and thus my first playing experience with Ingress came during a long summer day in Helsinki. Before we went out he wore trekking clothes, presenting an unconventional image for a gamer. Our experience of the city was very different to a traditional site-seeing walk. The game's narrative indeed affected the way I experienced the different landmarks we visited. The landmarks that belonged to the team my host was part of were discussed with loving affectation whereas those belonging to the enemy were approached with suspicion and disappointment. Nevertheless, when we met another player who indeed was playing for the opposing team, my host was very excited to meet another Ingress player and they exchanged tips and stories.

Having experienced Ingress, I was very excited when I was informed that Niantic was preparing a new Pokémon game in early 2016. In the summer of 2016 and while I was in Athens I had the opportunity to experiment with and talk to players of Pokémon

GO. Unlike Ingress, in PG the players in the first few weeks would represent much more varied demographics. Thanks to the massive hype that followed the game launch a large portion of non-gamers downloaded the application, although most of them did not remain active after the first few weeks. PG was a game that since its launch attracted a remarkably gender-balanced audience (especially in comparison to other video games where young males comprise the large majority). In the first couple of weeks of the game the players were hyper-visible in the city. The elements that made them visible were: a. walking down a street while looking at the screen b. carrying a portable battery charger (as the game was draining the battery of the smartphone) c. they were moving in groups in arranged Pokémon-hunting walks. The PG players were apparent to people that would not notice a video game phenomenon normally. A taxi driver told me:

Yesterday, I got a client in Vrilissia [Athens suburb] and he wanted to hunt Pokémon. He took a taxi to hunt Pokémon! If this continues I will make a special offer, 20 euros for an hour of Pokémon hunting.

The augmented reality disrupts the city inserting a parallel narrative. For the taxi driver Pokémon hunting is, even as a joke, a legitimised and potentially profitable urban activity. Unlike the virtual environments of video games, augmented reality applications ‘spill over’ into the real world. In the taxi driver’s account, PG was a paradox, but, even as such, it was acknowledged as part of urban life. In that sense, PG can be theorised in relation to the concept of sociability we examined in the previous chapter. The users are at the same time in relation to each other but without necessarily being implicated in a relationship. PG functions in accordance to Roach’s quoted phrase: ‘the screen stands as an ever-present reminder of the impossibility of intersubjective fusion, and yet feelings of deep interdependence brim over.’ The players will encounter each other within the city, as they will meet countless others who happen to pass by. The PG players during the game will explore neighbourhoods of the city they would never normally visit and interact with people they would not have interacted otherwise. Like postmodern flâneurs, PG players will get lost in the city, in the city that the video game creates.

In order to examine the phenomenon of Pokémon GO and reflect on the idea of locative gaming as a potential sinthomatic endeavour, I set up a different Pokémon game that combines the main game mechanics of PG with creative writing and diaristic self-

expression. By engaging with this experimental methodology I wanted to see how people would interact with space if they got the opportunity to create their own locative narratives and site-specific personal poems. Taking as starting point the experience of Pokémon GO, I invited a series of writers and asked them to create their own locative Pokémon-poems. Combining creative methodological tools such as poetry as research and site-specific performance as research, I aimed at both expanding the methodological horizon of consumer research and creating embodied experiences as reflections on my research questions. The result is a multidimensional network of images, texts and personalised maps of Athens.

Poems in the city

In this section I shall make what is essentially a methodological leap. From analysing a cultural phenomenon by examining its context I move to staging an intervention that gets inspired, influenced and shaped by the cultural phenomenon itself. The intervention is then used for drawing conclusions. By inviting art practitioners within the framework of my research I mainly aspired to open up the epistemological methodology into the openness of creativity. As I have presented in my introductory chapters, I strongly believe that research should not be confined within the discursive limitations of academic writing. In the previous chapters we saw how certain theoretical orthodoxies are being challenged in new media environments. We re-evaluated for example the importance of the imaginary domain within Lacanian ontology, suggesting new approaches to psychic phenomena would potentially centralise artistic expression and creativity. Besides that, in our examination of the *sinthome* we saw how James Joyce's poetic discourse was able to create a new relation to the symbolic order and that is something we aspire to reproduce in our poetic project called Pokémon Poetry Go.

Building on these assumptions and theorisations, I wanted to create a locative media platform, invite a series of people and see the different ways they interpret the framework of ideas I developed during my research. Before I go into details around the final results of this project I would like to refer to the process that led to that as this ethnographic component is important for the contextualisation of the work. Going back to the early stages of the research, as I stated earlier, the analysis of space through mobile

technologies was at the core of my research. While researching relevant artistic projects that dealt with similar topics, I was surprised to find that many locative projects were developed in Athens, the city I lived in as a student and went often back as a visitor.

During one of my visits, I met with members of the 'Akoo-o' collective, a group that was very active in the local art scene. Akoo-o is a group of musicians, anthropologists, visual artists and other inter-disciplinary artists and academics. Their work revolves around the experience of walking in the city, urban soundscapes and site-specific interventions. Through my relationship with Akoo-o, I became acquainted with their methodologies including field recordings, the use of binaural microphones and most importantly the development of locative sound-based applications. When I first met them, they were using noTours, an open-source android application developed by the Spanish programming and sound art group Escoitar.

In noTours, the user could place on a map of the city a series of different sounds. Then, using a mobile phone with GPS capacity, the user could walk in the city and hear the sounds in the places corresponding to the map positions. The platform fascinated me and I experimented with it for a while. After I met Akoo-o I realised they were one of many local art projects that engaged with locative applications and site-specific artworks in Athens during that period. According to G, a member of Akoo-o, a possible explanation for this is the fact that Athens, due to the continuous period of crisis and the subsequent socio-cultural shifts that took place in the last decade, was somehow perceived as contested territory. If Athens was a contested territory where meaning was not solidified but, due to the uncertainty and unruliness of everyday reality, was open to dispute, locative media were thriving as they could add an extra layer of meaning. Similarly to our observations, Drakopoulou in her mapping of Athenian locative projects notices that most of them are heavily politicised and as expected deeply affected by the current political climate (2010).

A city that is disputed, stretched to fit historical narratives, lingering between a glorious past and a dystopian present; a city in constant identity crisis. This is the city where mobile media can insert a series of meaningful layers and contest mainstream narratives. Akoo-o creates soundscapes that thematise contemporary topics and play with the naturalised auditory perception of space. Akoo-o (meaning 'to hear' in Greek) sets in

motion an active process of hearing, or rather a process of ‘active listening’ in urban space. Sounds can set your brain in motion – to return back to the braindance argument we developed earlier.

As my relationship with Akoo-o members grew, we decided to collaborate and organise a few open workshops inviting people to experiment with locative media. The first workshop took place in the context of ‘sound acts’, a festival that focuses on gender, sound art and performance in May 2015. In the workshop I had my first contact with the Echoes platform. Echoes, unlike noTours, was very easy to navigate, offering an online platform that allows the user to upload their own media files and then stream them through the echoes application (which is available both for android and iOS devices). Echoes was developed by Josh Kopeček, a composer and programmer with a strong interest in the intersections between sound art and technology. During the workshop we had a Skype call with Josh and he presented his vision around creating an accessible locative media platform that could be used in educational and artistic projects.

Echoes, unlike noTours, was more flexible in terms of media it supports. Despite being developed with a main focus on sound, it nevertheless supports text, images and video. When a user creates a new map/project they are invited to add different ‘echoes’ in different locations on the map. Every echo can include different elements depending on what the user wants to create. Admittedly, the prominence of sound in locative media is not incidental. As we have already seen, the main function of locative applications is combining elements of the actual environment with augmented features. Soundscapes allow us to experience the visual aspect of the city while investing it with an extra sensorial layer.

Soundscaping becomes a representation of what we described earlier as the audio unconscious – an unconscious dispersed and non-linguistic, an assemblage of digital and biological elements, a semiotic field of stimuli. The subject is tapping into a stream of free associations. In our new methodological intervention, we seek to provoke new kinds of introspection that are socialised and organised in open spaces; dispersed in urban environments and outdoors expeditions. The introspection, lost in space, allows for an outsourced cartography of the unconscious. Walking as a method of introspection is far from a new invention, nevertheless, in the case of locative applications, we enhance the

experience with additional sensorial stimuli. Words and sounds intercept memories, stain our associations with resonant obstructions, rhythmical structures, unfinished symphonies. We need new languages in order to describe those experiences. My ethnography is stained, broken and mediated through those obstructions. An ethnography of the unconscious requires a poetic language, *détournements* and deviations.

But as we stressed earlier in our analysis of the drive, the Lacanian real is not conceived as an a-historical and depoliticised terrain of operation. Accordingly, the post-linguistic understanding of the unconscious we presented in our analysis of the *hikikomori* does not go beyond an analysis of power relations. Our analysis does not aim to a fetishisation of the unconscious as a fundamentally revolutionary force. Both the city and our subjectivity are still governed by power structures. Locative media often attempt to thematise, uncover and disrupt these power structures. Jason Farman (2015), for example, uses locative narratives in orders to disrupt mainstream understandings of space. Space is always narrativised through established power regimes, the histories that we perceive as a place's history are the ones that kyriarchal models has allowed to exist. For Farman, locative media can be grassroots-organised and antagonistic to mainstream narratives around space. He proposes a guerrilla digital colonisation of space with what he considers marginalised narratives. In one of his locative research projects, for example, he located stories of disabled students in places within his university campus where accessibility was limited. In a way, he allowed the able-bodied users of the locative application to experience space in a way that is normally invisible to them.

In the Pokémon Poetry Go, we also intended upsetting normative power structures and kyriarchal narratives. First, we wanted to disrupt a series of orthodoxies around the distinction between private and public space. The poems are often auto-biographical, personal, intimate. By placing them in different spots in the city, we disrupt the permissible way of self-expression in public. At the same time, due to the hybridic nature of the medium, our 'vandalism' is not visible to everyone, and thus it operates in a different way to a stencil / public poster; the medium itself obscures the distinction between public and private. The urban poetry of our project does not raise social issues

in a direct way, as Farman's project does, but it still uncovers an affective aspect of the city that is often hidden. By humanising the city, by exposing the bare bones of the inhabitant memories, intimate stories, fears and even nonsensical deliriums, we disrupt the normative function of the city as a well-organised and efficient machine.

In Pokémon Poetry Go, the hosts' poems varied both in their writing style and their relation to space. The ten writers who responded to my initial call for submissions, contributed 21 different site-specific poems. In the coming section, we will examine some of the poems and their relation to the places they were installed in and then we will examine the actual experience of someone 'visiting' and consuming the poems.

Pokémon Poetry Go

Pokémon Poetry is a project that evolved over the years. Initially, it was a collection of online poems that was created in *ta tetxoia* (meaning: the such), an experimental poetry forum that started in 2009. A common practice in 'ta tetxoia' was the collective writing of poems, with a user offering the beginning of a poem/text and other users expanding it. In the forum – of which I was a core member – users' poetry often incorporated internet lingo, *greeklish* (writing Greek using the Latin alphabet, a usual practice in Greek online communities) and neologisms that were developed within the forum. It is worth saying that using greeklish and internet colloquialisms in poetry was at the time extremely uncommon. In addition to that, *ta tetxoia*, unlike more traditional poetry websites was very much invested in incorporating humour and playfulness into the produced discourse and poems, often including references to contemporary and internet-based phenomena.

In that sense, when I first started the 'Pokémon Poetry' thread I was operating within a framework that was very open to this kind of unholy couplings. The initial inspiration for Pokémon Poetry came when I heard an older writer saying something like: 'can the Pokémon generation really write any poetry?' This rhetorical question insinuated that my generation has lost touch with the 'true' emotions that are essential in poetry writing. Pokémon for him seemed to represent a post-modern disruption to what he understood as authentic expression, pointing to an approach of creativity and poetry which is rather different to those mentioned in previous chapters. Following James Joyce (and Lacan's reading of his work), we can reflect on the relationship between language and technology

and aspire for a poetry that goes beyond tradition and facilitates self-making and singularity.

Pokémon Poetry opens up the opportunity for creating poetry that goes beyond the name of the father, a poetry that - similarly to braindance music - merges the virtual and the physical, bridges the digital and the biological. Pokémon are sinthomatic inventions; they are the rootless subject that yearns to connect to the symbolic order. Nevertheless, the first collection of Pokémon Poetry – developed in *ta tetxoia* forum – deliberately incorporated forms and narrative structures borrowed from old-school lyrical poetry. In that sense, Pokémon Poetry created a strange contemporaneous co-existence of past, present and future. The Pokémon generation responds to the poet's accusation of being an a-social and autistic group of people by appropriating lyricism and hyper-romanticism in order to present a paradoxical and disorienting hybrid poetics.

After the initial development of the poems, Pokémon Poetry was transformed into a series of music lieder (a type of German song of the Romantic period, typically for solo voice and piano accompaniment) by composer Fil Ieropoulos. Ieropoulos followed the lyrical tone of the poems and adapted them into (semi)classical songs. The final result was recorded with the voice of Ioanna Forti, a mezzo-soprano, and Alexandros Drosos playing the piano. The work was presented live in 2015 at sound acts festival in Athens.



The operatic singing further underlined the paradoxical aspect of the project, with a soprano essentially singing the stories of Pokémon characters.

Central in this project is the concept of transmediality. As transmediality we define the constant crossing of boundaries and blurring of the lines between rigid media disciplines. Pokémon Poetry is inter-or-trans/disciplinary in its very conception: making music out of poems that were created as a response to a video game. Discourse gets imbued with images, is codified, deconstructed and re-constructed in a different medium.

Transmediality as a methodological priority answers our earlier question around the limitations of psychoanalytic theorisation of contemporary media realities. We are essentially describing a form of translation that goes beyond the symbolic production of meaning and opens up to the unexpected and multi-sensorial, constantly changing and transforming modes of expression.

Translation is a concept that occupies a central position in the thought of contemporary post-structuralist theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin. Derrida, through examining the impossibilities of absolute translation, finds a way to discuss the discursive limitations of language as such. Unlike Derrida, who emphasises the impossibility of translation, Benjamin provides a more positive account in his paper 'The task of the translator' (Benjamin, 2004), initially published in 1923. For Benjamin, translation is a future-oriented process, with translatability being a quality that certain texts carry, allowing them to survive in time. A work of art only survives through its capacity to keep being translated. That is why a translation is always a gesture towards the future and translatability is essentially the quality of a cultural object to dynamically position itself towards the future. We have to develop translatable pieces and in order to achieve that – and to bridge with the Derridean position – we have to allow the impossibility of absolute translation to change, disrupt, and network our produced creative work; we have to allow and trust the intersubjective alienating force of misunderstanding. Our future and the future of our work are essentially relying on translatability and the effective capacity to be misunderstood.

Transmediality and intertextuality call for an expansive network of references. Connecting thoughts and territories, linking images and sounds, text and games, memories and fantasies. Following the 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' future-oriented question,

we ask: 'can Pokémon write poetry?' Our post-human poetry emerges after the death of the author as proclaimed by Roland Barthes and after the death of the father as described in the *sinthome* seminar. As we saw earlier in Donna Haraway's essay, the concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, notably those separating 'human' from 'animal' and 'human' from 'machine.' Haraway writes: 'the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognise the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust' (Haraway, 1999, p. 273). The cyborg poet is a de-centralised, half machine, half human creature that causes a braindance of flashing lights and letters.

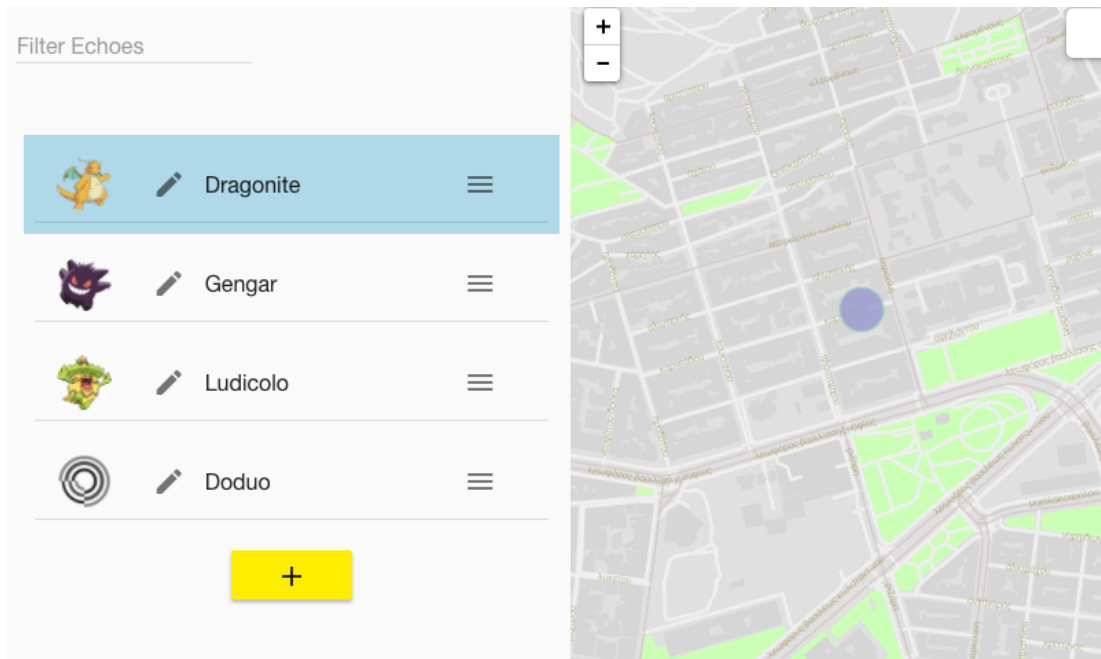
In Pokémon Poetry Go (PPG), we take Pokémon Poetry a step further by constructing a poetic video game. The Pokémon-poems in PPG become localised elements in an augmented reality environment. Katherine Hayles, one of the founding voices of post-human studies, theorises human bodies as assemblages of flesh and information. According to Hayles (1999), the body, in the information era is being transposed into data, and our embodied experiences encompass networked and virtual elements. Following our earlier argument on translatability, we could claim that the process of transforming bodies into data is a process of translation. Selfhood is changing both in terms of the building blocks it consists of, and in the terrain it operates within. We encounter a re-codification of what we understand as a self-contained agency. In contemporary reality, technology becomes intrinsic in the process of subjectification. While traditional founding myths of selfhood such as the paternal metaphor subside, we invent new ways of articulating ourselves and our relation to the Other. The new selfhood, partly virtual and partly physical, half-biological and half-machinic, is based on a hybrid openness.

Pokémon-poems are small gadgets of self-creation. They bind autobiography, poetic language, images, places and emotions. With Pokémon Poetry we aspire to open a discussion on creativity in times of augmented reality and to reflect on the future of media consumption in general. In PPG we take a traditional form of expression (poetry) and apply it to a very contemporary technological framework (augmented reality mobile media). Digital platforms allow the creation of art that combines different media: text, images, sounds, and interactive elements. We re-examine our relation to poetry, a

traditional literary mode, in a digital context. Poetry in this context transgresses textual limitations and becomes a methodology of creative transmediality.

The poetics of PPG is not textual but rather embodied experiences, localised in space and time. I argue that the poetics of PPG become what I call 'poetics of self'. Following the analysis of the *sinthome*, I invited the participating artists to create personal traits that re-configure not only their relationship to space, but also the relationship of space to themselves and others. Pokémon-poems, are deeply personal, yet anonymised and socialised in a shared platform. The psyche becomes a map, and the application's map showcases a series of open ended, fragmented, exposed egos. The 'homosexual subject' we encountered in the previous chapter is constantly looking for their pieces in the world; in the case of PPG those pieces are organised in space in a way that allows for an inter-subjective sense of belonging.

Ten poets submitted their work after the initial call for participation. The poems were all initially submitted in Greek and were translated to English by me for the needs of this dissertation. An essential aspect of the project is that all poems are anonymised on the map and the user can never know who wrote what. In that sense the poems become part of a collective fragmented subjectivity. Every poem creates a triangle of meaning between the image (Pokémon character chosen by each contributor) the submitted text and a specific location. Younger writers that knew Pokémon better (as they grew up with them) put more effort in including the Pokémon's actual qualities and back stories into the text whereas older contributors focused more on the location and then picked a Pokémon that somewhat synesthetically fit into the narrative they developed in their poem. In our first example, P., a young poet, writes a Pokémon about Dragonite, a fat dragon Pokémon.



Dragonite

I move comfortably, most of the time
the world recognises me from afar
like a mustard, winged lil' ball
with a beer belly lifting my weights,
postmodern postal pigeon.
I was once inversely invisible, truth be told;
shadowy guardian, causing terror,
hallowing in the sea.
I have lamented and responded to injuries
with my eye-headlights;
I was crying in code-words, always out of tune;
feeding their mysticism splendidly.

In his poem, the actual Pokémon is implicated and described. The Pokémon-poem uses a first-person narrative. In a sense, we hear the voice of Dragonite as it strolls down a narrow street in Kolonaki, a central and posh neighbourhood of Athens. The poem stresses some specificities of the medium. The main character is presented as inversely invisible. This double negation implies a hyper-visibility, nevertheless, the poetic discourse allows for a stressing of the imaginary aspect of the character. It is hyper-(in)visible exactly as an imaginary beast would be. In the second poem of the same poet we encounter the same motif: the character speaks of their history.

Gengar

I occurred,

with a sticky evil grin,

Colgate ad.

deadly fearsome

with a long history

in the ghostly world;

ominous and jagged

and with a great tongue;

the banality of evil

embodied perfectly;

half shade,

half negative-image of my friends.

I cool the atmosphere down

I grow a third eye

This poem takes place next to the most prestigious and centrally located cemetery of Athens. Gengar, the Pokémon character of the poem, represents the so-called 'ghost' Pokémon. Ghost Pokémon are a dark element of the original game as they are created

after someone has died. Following the metaphors elucidated by this poem we could claim that Pokémon-poems in a sense haunt the city. They are semi-visible, semi-present; they bring past stories into a contemporaneous level of existence. PPG is in a way a hauntological project. Hauntology is a portmanteau of the words haunting and ontology; a term coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his article 'Spectres of Marx' (Derrida, 1993). For Derrida, 'the figure of the ghost is that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive'. Derrida, in his attempt to deconstruct western logocentric metaphysics, claims that all meaning production relies in a retroactively constructed mythical origin. Thus, meaning production is a process fundamentally trapped in its own vision of the past. In this context, the ghost is the figure that emerges underneath all attempts to identify a historical fact or identity of meaning.

The term hauntology was introduced to cultural analysis through Mark Fisher's (2014) analysis of contemporary electronic music projects that used retro-sounding elements in their composition. Fisher discusses projects such as Burial, Belbury Poly, The Focus Group, and the Advisory Circle, all of which incorporate lo-fi elements such as crackles, tape hiss and samplings of analogue effects. Following Mark Fisher's definition of hauntology as 'nostalgia for lost futures' we could identify Pokémon Poetry as a hauntological project. The Pokémon-poems bring childhood nostalgia into a futuristic augmented environment. The Gengar poem, maintains the melancholy of the original character transposed into a poetic present. The Pokémon are located within a matrix of meaning. Meaning extracted both from their relationship but also the relationship of the different points on the map. The ways the user chooses to connect those points create different routes within the city, different walking patterns and in fact a different city.

We have extensively analysed the different relations the subject has to the symbolic order through the *sinthome*. The *sinthome* allows for a conceptualisation of poetic language that potentially escapes the patriarchal rules of the paternal law. Feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva also attempted a theorisation of poetic language as a disruption of the primacy of the symbolic order in her seminal work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (2006). Kristeva, presents in this book her conception of the 'semiotic chora.' She focuses her critique on the Lacanian concept of castration. As we have seen earlier, according to Lacan, the infant has to give up on the 'oceanic' feeling of enjoyment it

experiences in its unmediated relationship with the maternal body in order to acquire the capacity of language. Through the process of castration, the paternal law is introduced and operates as a model for all patriarchal social rules. The initial psychic imprint of the law comes as a negation of the female's phantasmatic ability to satisfy all needs.

According to Kristeva, there is a field of signification that emerges before castration; a pre-linguistic form of signification that is extremely important for the psycho-social development of the infant. This field is what she names the semiotic and she juxtaposes it to the Lacanian symbolic order. The semiotic is an embodied field of communication between the mother and the child that emerges as a field of bodily tensions and fluctuation of libidinal energy. Both the maternal body and the body of the infant become a realm of tension, circulation of energy and of pulses. The touch, the pre-linguistic vocal sounds, the act of looking; all small gestures create areas of tension and significance. For Kristeva, this plurality and liquidity of communication is repressed in order for proper language to emerge. But this function does not completely disappear in adult life as it re-emerges in discourse through poetic language. Thus, poetic language carries the capacity to disrupt and destabilise everyday language.

The problematic of the 'resonant' signifier also troubled Lacan in his conceptualisation of the *sinthome*. There seems to be something in poetic language that carries an irreducible materiality, a materiality that does not lead back to the chain of signifiers. Following Kristeva's analysis of the semiotic and Lacan's *sinthome*, I consider poetry central in my analysis of subjectivity. The semiotic chora in the case of locative poetry does not emerge between a subject and the maternal body but rather takes place within the urban environment. The subject produces resonant signifiers in order to 'communicate' and connect with the pulses of the city. Words imitate the rhythms of urban life, abrupt stops become crevices of the asphalt, quotidian every-day expressions become fragments of discussions one hears while strolling downtown, confessional narratives are the secrets the city could not digest. The 'semiotic chora' becomes the 'city of the drive.' A city unravelling as the desiring urban bodies realise its polymorphous perversity. The semiotic chora emerges through the circulation and stasis of bodily drives, shaped by an inter-subjective play of presence and absence, excitation and inaction, pleasure and displeasure. I consider the semiotic chora an appropriate analytic model for PPG as it is

essentially a cartography of the drive connecting and disconnecting fragmented body parts to external objects.

After I installed all poems in the intended spots on the map, it was time to actually try and see how the application works. We did a test run with a friend and we decided to visit each and every Pokémon-poem driving around Athens. We decided to use a car to reach the further placed Pokémon-poems but also to walk through the central locations where there is a greater concentration of poems. We started our trip in the evening as it was mid-august and we wanted to avoid walking under the sun. My friend A. who came with me was very worried she would not 'get it' as she is 36 years old and did not watch or play Pokémon as a kid. Soon, she realised that one does not need to know Pokémon in order to be able to enjoy Pokémon Poetry. We started our Pokémon adventure in Patisia, a working class neighbourhood in central Athens. The first Pokémon-poem we encounter is porygon.

i go where i am loved
far away from here
in the warmth of cables
and whispering of electrons
i go where i am loved
to waves of photons
streams of liquid crystals
far away from here
to tears of keyboards
and orbits of lost digits
i go where i am loved
where corners make space
excellent space

so that i can button

my head

Porygon is the Pokémon that was featured in the cartoon episode we discussed earlier, the one causing epilepsy to over 600 hundred children in Japan. The braindance of the polygon explosion here is transformed into a melancholic narrative. Porygon is a great starting point for reflecting on our project as the character appears in the video game as a 'virtual' Pokémon. According to the game narrative, unlike other Pokémon that are actual biological organisms, Porygon is the result of programming, and thus it is the 'first digital Pokémon'. Since its only appearance on the cartoon is linked to 600 children getting seizures, Porygon was never featured again in the show as it was a reminder of the 'braindance' episode. The poem seems to echo this story as the Porygon laments its exile. It goes away, hiding in cables and streams of liquid crystals. The Porygon of the poem, just like the *hikikomori* we discussed earlier, finds peace in the virtual world where it can button its head.

Here we encounter once again the post-human hybrid of the techno-organism. The Porygon-poem uses the words of the technological world in order to describe human feelings. Love turns into hardware, loneliness gets diluted in binary digits. The metaphors around energy remind us of theories of the drive. Indeed in Freud, libido is often discussed in metaphors of energy circulation. According to Kristeva, the energy movement that is characteristic of the semiotic chora is something that can never be properly represented within discourse. Once again, we have to deal with the problem of translatability: translating energy into words, pulses into sentences. Kristeva uses in her analysis examples from French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé according to Kristeva provides verse that is 'indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but retrained by a single guarantee: syntax.' (Kristeva, 2006).

The syntactic rules of rhythm and resonance allow for a construction of poetic discourse that imitates the structures of the symbolic but instead of meaning, Kristeva's poetic mimesis dissolves subjectivity into a primitive polymorphous perversity. One of the

poems we encountered with A. during our big Pokémon Poetry summer expedition was hidden behind Iera Odos, next to the botanical garden of Athens. Cacnea, is a Pokémon that looks like a cactus, the image conveys strong emotions as it carries a series of synthetic associations. The poem is formed in minimalist, haiku-esque verse. The words are prickly like the cactus character.

Cacnea

1.

on the seedbed, a howl:

botanic collections

take some rest

2.

tainted glass

hundreds of thorny weeds

in search of meaning

3.

the bedrock drains well

screaming DE-SPA-CI-TO

summer abandonment

4.

thorny-elbows

bloody wrists, bloody fruits

our struggles in vain

5.

open gates:

desire for scent

of those lost

6.

golden flowers

the desert of the real

an invitation to doom

7.

thirty days

a delay to the wrinkling

silent fungi

The narrative is cryptic yet generates a strong affective reaction to both of us. As A. said when we read the poem: 'we are playing a treasure-hunt, but the more clues we find, the more we lose'. She was playful in that remark but it was nevertheless correct. Most of the poems carried a dire melancholy, which, combined with the Athenian derelict urban environment, created a suffocating dialectics. The melancholy and nostalgia of the project affected the way we consumed it. I asked A. what does this project reminded her of. She retrieved a memory of early mobile phone use:

It was when we first got mobile phones and we were really excited, and there was this anticipation in hearing back, and then the message would be something stupid and small.

(I ask) you think the poems are stupid? (we laugh)

No, No! they are fine, I just remember this anticipation and then the text message on the screen, I don't know...

Mobile media throughout my research are often discussed in relation to anxiety. The anxiety of the selfie, the anxiety of the phone not ringing, the anxiety of the dead battery. In our Pokémon Poetry Go treasure hunt, anxiety comes during the process of searching. What could the next Pokémon-poem be, how can it affect our sensitive souls? What if it sucks? The poems in this version of the platform are about 20 so they are not really that many. We reflected on the possibility of many more poems being dispersed everywhere. A. told me:

I like to imagine there are many more poems to find. I really like the idea, you know, hidden behind trashcans, inside the metro. I like the idea of poems floating around.

We envisage a public space that is open to an extra layer of meaning. In the actual consumption of the project we were able to fantasise about its potential expansion. That was definitely encouraging in thinking of this project as a model for future experimentations. Another element that came up during our expedition had to do with the fact that we shared it. Similarly to the ethnographic notes from the actual Pokémon GO game, we formed an urban pack that went playing in the city. The poems were shared between us. On the topic of ownership, A. asked me at some point:

now that I read the poem, can other people still find it or did I 'get' it?

(I respond) Other people can still find it.

Oh that sucks (we laugh)

The intimate moments we get through 'collecting' poems feel so personalised that led A. thinking she is the only one that can find them. The intimacy feeling was especially strong when poems resonated with particular personal memories. Risking banal experimentalism, I have to record my own strong emotional reaction towards a poem that was placed near a hospital building in the northern suburbs of Athens.

Bromzong

Receiving video signals

transmitted half a century ago

sudden condensation of sense:

I never know what time it is

signals bouncing off

inverse lunar lacunae

folded inside my head:

the creation of a new map

replete with gaps and stop signs

points of infection:

I will always remember
the specific amount of time
it took me to realise I could feel
not
a
single
thing
anymore
reciting albas of
being ported off:
are we not drawn onward to a new era?
a problematic inflection point:
aibohphobia as an emerging possibility
A Santa at Nasa.
I could wake up screaming
in a body that is no longer mine.
(in fact,
this has already happened)

Again, similarly to Kristeva's theorisation of the semiotic, it is hard to locate any affective reaction towards this poem as stemming from a sort of narrative. Often the wordplays and sentences are non-sensical and confusing. Nevertheless, there is a syntactic organisation of sounds, pictures and space that moved me. The notion of syntactic organisation is expanded here to include the extra elements that locative poetry brings into play. Me having been hospitalised in that particular building had strongly influenced

the effect of what I was reading. In that moment, I completely identified with the anonymous poem, I even identified with the bell-shaped Pokémon.

The last poem we visited that night was placed really far from Athens. We had to drive for about an hour in order to arrive to a beach in Loutsa. There was a little church there and we sat to reflect on the Pokémon-ridden night we had just spend. The poem was this:

Doduo

excavating the marble, making a place to rest

excavating my chest, somewhere to lean on

constantly looking for something

if only Margarita had brought us an ashtray

I would cut off your head so you'd look like,

but she didn't – she was barely there

she was a convenient invention to battle our awkwardness

unfortunately, I'm bad with jokes

it's my downfall

yet I keep good company – come and try

I unravel gracefully – you would not expect

notwithstanding, I am

and I might have other advantages too

let's leave them unspoken of – a mystery so you want me more

I've arranged everything nicely

the only thing missing is a small church by the sea so we seal

the excavated marble,

I saw the perfect one, next to Loutsa

you won't like it – i'm afraid

we need to compromise – that's a relationship

I swear

This love poem reminds us of the loving carvings of initials one finds on the benches of romantic sea-side beaches. The poem is loving but not necessarily romantic as it rather carries a cruel ending/realisation presenting all relationships as compromises. The Pokémon-poem hunting has left us a bitter-sweet taste. It definitely allowed us to see Athens through a different lens. We visited places we have never seen before and we re-lived moments and memories of other people. Those memories were rarely explicit but rather emerged as hauntological traces. We walked, following other people's steps, but we could only grasp abstract bits of their stories.

Conclusion

In his later work, Freud wrote of the ego as an agency constantly subject to the impulses of the id and the demands of the external world: two 'severe masters'. In 'gay spatialisation – towards a real imaginary', I looked at how the ego image is implicated at the level of desire and drive or, in Freudian terms, what we might think of as id impulses. In 'poetics of the self, geographies of the real', I turn my attention to the ego's relation to the external world. Rather than considering this in terms of social norms around behaviour, I chose instead to look at how the self is augmented perceptually to engage in new ways of being with the world, whether through the perceptive cocoon created by the Walkman or through the disruptive effects of sound, as in braindance. I argue that these modifications of the self can be considered 'cyborgian' and suggest that the smartphone has a similar function, inasmuch as it opens new modes for the subject to engage with the world. Pokémon Go is exemplary of this – combining non-traditional narrative with the external world to create a new practice that we might, I argue, consider *sinthomatic*. In this final chapter, I focus on a novel media category, that of locative media. The potential use of this technology to create site-specific media experiences and in adding new layers of meaning onto the city through augmented reality, opens up a series of new questions with regard to technology and the psyche.

In this chapter we revisit the concept of the sinthome. Here I use the sinthome analytically in a case study context. One of the biggest challenges of my research design was in finding a framework where the sinthome could be elucidated, in order to allow me to ground my analysis in examples from everyday reality. Inspired by Lacan's analysis of James Joyce, I re-approached the city as a laboratory of sinthomatic endeavours, through developing a creative methodology that situates poems within the city's streets. Lacan reads Joyce's Dublin as a city of the drive, a city that becomes an amalgamation of fluxes and tensions, bodily excitations and fleeting ideas. The body is reflected in the city just as much as the city operates as a terrain for subjective contemplation. In this chapter, I re-create this dimension of sinthomatic writing of and within the city, by utilising locative media and poetry. The final product of this endeavour is Pokémon Poetry Go, a poetic game I constructed with the help of ten fellow poets, which merges the idea of the Pokémon Go video game with autobiographical locative poetry.

In this chapter, I emphasise the difference between mobile media and traditional forms of media consumption, particularly in the portability and subsequently the omnipresence of the former in the public sphere. Mobile media create hybrid spaces by blurring the limits between the private and the public; these perceptive cocoons allow the subject to relate to their urban environment in novel ways. By listening to music while walking in the streets, for example, you add an extra layer of aesthetic stimuli to the experience. By bringing familiar songs into the streets as an individual soundtrack, I suggest that the subject can achieve a sense of belong in an alienating urban environment. Locative media are, then, the perfect tool for sinthomatic engagement with the city.

In this chapter I also revisited the idea of the cyborg, as conceptualised in Donna Haraway's 1984 Cyborg Manifesto. Haraway's thought is considered foundational to post-human studies, as it offered a new understanding of the technological future that goes beyond technophobic generalisations. In the context of my research, the cyborg is discussed in relation to the sinthome, as both theoretical concepts refer to new modes of subjectivity that go beyond the Oedipus complex and the logic of castration. Both the cyborg and the sinthome appear as illegitimate children of late capitalism, alternative ways of being, emerging at a time when the paternal function loses its authoritarian role

as the guarantor of meaning.

The video game Pokémon Go is one of the main focus points of the chapter. In my research I focused on the ways in which Pokémon Go and other locative applications operate but also on how we can develop new site-specific media interventions in order to create unique auto-cartographies of the cities we live in. According to my analysis, Pokémon Go is a very good example of both the cyborgian and the sinthomatic subjectification process. First of all, in the very foundational myth of the video-game, an important plot point is the complete absence of the father figure, who is never encountered in the game or mentioned in the narrative. This sets the tone for a bizarre narrative that revolves not around conventional storytelling tropes but rather around the protagonist collecting as many Pokémon as possible.

Similarly to Joyce's strange relationship to language, the Pokémon universe has its own rules and mechanisms. But what is fascinating is that the unorthodox worlds created by Joyce and the creators of Pokémon offer alternative structures that are not completely incompatible with the symbolic order and, as a result, the audience can still connect with these fantastic universes, relate to them, inhabit them. Taking a step forward, Pokémon Go re-produces this reality for mobile platforms and layers it on top of real spaces. As a result it creates an augmented version of the city.

The biggest innovation of this chapter comes from the adoption of a creative methodology. Inspired by Pokémon Go but also by existing fringe artistic locative projects, I decided to set forward a small experiment. I invited ten writers to contribute a single or a series of poems related to specific Pokémon characters and to place them somewhere in the city, with the help of the locative platform Echoes. Each contributor approached the association between space, poem and Pokémon character differently. This unique experimentation, taking the name Pokémon Poetry Go, allowed me to expand my fieldwork in two unique ways. First of all, it enabled me to introduce a series of artists to the new tools that locative media has to offer to their practice. Through a series of workshops I had the opportunity to invite young artist to experiment and play with what was at the time one of my primary areas of interest. In that way I created a new field of research, as these people engaged with the locative tools and produced original work. Secondly, through the involvement of the invited artists, I was able to develop a

whole network of poems that spread throughout Athens creating a unique collective poetic cartography of the city. Each one of the participants offered fragments of their own personal story and putting them together allowed me to create this augmented city that incorporates the intimate thoughts of its inhabitants and wears them as poetic ornaments.

Pokémon Poetry Go, the end result of this experimentation took the form of an artwork, something one could consume through the hosting application, Echoes. At the same time, I was able to use the consumption of this artwork as a new fieldwork opportunity. By taking people to the spots where poems were located and by consuming the poem with them on the allocated location, I was able to observe first-hand how this locative media experience affects its audience, how it frustrates or satisfies them, how it is moving or boring, how it is profound or funny. I developed a three-fold research design which produced rich material in all of its aspects. The data produced by this hybrid methodology, combining practice-based methods such as poetry, writing and ethnographic observation is something that I would like to revisit in the future and expand both on its methodological complexities and its potentially unexplored findings.

Concluding thoughts

In the previous chapters we examined the different ways new technologies not only shape our understanding of ourselves, but also how they are used in the creation of selfhood. Contrary to critical media analyses that focus on the problems of new media technologies in relation to issues like surveillance and bio-politics, we focused on moments of potential emancipation or disruption of normative regimes of power. Our three main case studies offer different responses to the question of subversive politics within technological advances in consumer cultures. The important starting point comes from the contradiction inherent in the paradigm within which those case studies emerge: consumer culture does not aim at emancipating the subjects and obviously does not aim at disrupting itself. This contradiction is in fact very important in our analysis of the phenomena I describe. In order to theorise the possibility of disruption of patriarchal power regimes, for example, in the 'narcissism' chapter I had to re-examine the epistemological framework of feminist critiques of the cinematic screen. By criticising Foucauldian conceptualisations of power as an all-encompassing force that shapes all aspects of social and psychic life I was able to envision the possibility of resistance and subversion within the current political reality. That is not only useful analytically but moreover it is essential in order to create a politically useful knowledge.

Throughout my work I present examples that deliberately come from consumer products and applications. A question arises: doesn't that obfuscate the larger structural inequalities that give rise to this exact consumer culture my examples ostensibly subvert? How can I ignore the problematic context that gave rise to these technologies and structures? It is quite obvious for example that selfies were not delivered to assist a process of radical narcissism, Grindr was not designed taking in account the psychoanalytic drive and Pokémon GO was not a psychogeographical exercise on Sinthomatic self-creation. This exact tension is thematised by Donna Haraway in her Cyborg Manifesto which I used extensively in my work. The cyborg, Haraway tells us is the ultimate result of advanced techno-capitalism but due to its hybrid nature was able to erase its lineage and envision itself in a fatherless horizon. This is the reason I chose to

engage with the concept of the *sinthome* a concept that is connected to the diminishing importance of what Lacan names the 'paternal law' in late capitalist societies.

My work engaged with a plethora of different theoretical traditions. I recognise this as a shortcoming of my research project as some of the discussions needed more space and attention. At the same time I see how the multiplicity of my analysis reflects on the fragmentation of the phenomena I focus on. My desire to use concepts such as the *sinthome* required that I was able to introduce many fundamental psychoanalytic concepts that precede it in order to allow for a better understanding of the context. That might have led to quick overview of certain concepts and might have made my text difficult to follow for those who have no experience with the psychoanalytic discourse. My attempt to bridge media and consumer studies with Lacanian psychoanalysis was challenging both methodologically and theoretically. I hope, that in the future of my research will allow for smoother theoretical encounters. As observed in my literature review there is a growing interest from different disciplines—including critical marketing—to engage with psychoanalytic theories and methodologies. I aspire to continue this work towards making this bridging possible. Despite the difficulties I phased in my present attempts I strongly believe that there are lots of applications and insights to be extracted by the use of psychoanalysis in consumer studies and I would like to discuss some of them here.

While writing on new media from a psychoanalytic point of view I felt the need to engage with the current debate around narcissism in new media cultures. While reading the Freudian analysis of the phenomenon I realised that contemporary takes on narcissism often brush out the nuances of the theory in order to promote a very simplistic condemnation of narcissism. In these accounts narcissism is a symptom of our era, with social media exaggerating a problem already prevalent in capitalist consumerist societies. What I found troublesome in this critique is its totalising and pathologising aspect. And indeed while tracing these theories back to Christopher Lasch's theory of the 'society of narcissism' it became obvious to me that the anti-narcissistic rhetoric can easily slip to reactionary and primitivist positions. For Lasch the antidote to narcissism was the return to traditional family structures. For contemporary critics of narcissism the social media seem to signify a radical evil that should be fought at all costs. In that

context I offered an reluctant defence of narcissism by approaching it as a necessary pre-condition for the ego formation. I was then able to re-define the politics of narcissistic identification by connecting my theorisation to examples from feminist art history. Key to this exploration was Amelia Jones' conception of radical narcissism. By understanding radical narcissism as a feminist strategy we can see how a potentially problematic or essentialist project –such as a defence of narcissism– can become politically poignant in the right context. Without claiming all selfies, or selfie culture is necessarily a project of radical narcissism I focused my analysis on the work of Amalia Ulman, an artist who uses selfies as means of her artistic work. My discussion of narcissism as a more complex phenomenon that does not necessarily obstruct intersubjectivity allowed me to substantiate a model of the ego that is open-ended rather than closed and fixed to an identity.

By examining the relationship between the ego and its image I was able to discuss the relationship between ego and technology, as technology plays a central role in the construction of our self-image. This phenomenological question of how we relate to our body and how we construct our body through a mediated apprehension of it, was also central in my discussion of Grindr. The interface of Grindr offers some remarkable features that created thought-provoking dialogues with psychoanalytic theory. There is something striking in the homepage of the application with the wall of different bodies one next to the other constructing a mosaic of desire. And it is the element of sexuality that makes this mosaic so interesting: the fact that these body parts are all there motivated by the same drive. If my second chapter was particularly focused on the idea of the body image and the effects of narcissism, my third chapter attempted to tackle the complex problematic of the drive. Sexuality in the psychoanalytic context is a category that upsets certainties and identities and this was definitely observable in the case-study of dating applications. In order to address the effects of sexuality on subjectivity I followed Leo Bersani's argumentation around the concept of sociability: a concept that praises the homosexual ethics of sameness in opposition to the antagonistic modes of relationality that the sexual economy of difference produces.

I also followed Bersani in his queer re-examination of the classical Oedipus complex theory. Bersani suggested that the supposed failure of Oedipus complex that leads to the

homosexual subject position is a very welcome failure, as ‘successful’ Oedipus complex resolution creates alienated subjects that can never overcome the violence of the conflict with their same sex parent. Oedipus complex is a highly contested concept both within psychoanalysis and of course for its critics. A frequent feminist criticism for example focuses on the prioritisation of the penis in the Freudian narrative. In my third chapter I engaged with the post-Oedipal theorisation of Deleuze and Guattari and most importantly with Lacan’s response to the criticism as developed in his twenty-third seminar. The concept of the *sinthome* introduced by Lacan in that seminar proposes a ground-breaking re-conceptualisation of the human psyche. Once again we are discussing a case of a ‘failed’ Oedipus complex, a case where the subject cannot obey to the totalising effects of the paternal law and the have to create their own mode of relationality to the symbolic order. While in earlier conceptions of subjectivity it is always the externally imposed law that shapes the subject, the *sinthome* seems to introduce the possibility of a self-made construction that goes beyond that limitation.

This argument makes perfect sense in the context of late capitalism where new communication technologies play an increasingly central role in the construction of subjectivity allowing for a multiplicity that defies the totalising effects of law. I argue in my thesis that we are moving away from a reality that is primarily organised by the regulatory function of the signifier and we are moving towards a paradigm where reality is primarily organised through images. Lacan anticipated this shift in his analysis of the *sinthome* where he prioritised artistic expression over textual analysis in the understanding of reality. I was particularly impressed by Lacan’s analysis of Japanese culture as the paradigmatic example of this shift. For Lacan the reason Japanese culture is like that is due to the fact that their writing system combines both words and ideogrammatic symbols. The image enters the domain of language disrupting the function of metonymy. I drew parallels between that phenomenon and the adoption of emoji in mobile media communications. Emojis are a good example of the introduction of images in the domain of language. Similarly to the Japanese writing system, the language of chatting mixes words made of letters and ideogrammatic symbols.

My engagement with the *sinthome* continued in my fourth chapter. The *sinthome* is a concept that Lacan developed while he was analysing James Joyce’s work. For Lacan,

Joyce was not subject to the paternal law, as his father was absent during his upbringing and he generally grew up in a tough environment. Besides that, Joyce's writing, according to Lacan also showcases a strange relationship to the symbolic. Lacan argues that Joyce, not subjected to castration –the process that would have made him part of the symbolic order– he had to invent his own way to relate to language. Joyce's discourse is in that sense an invention, a psychic device that goes beyond castration. Inspired by that idea I decided I would like to engage more with the poetic function of language. In my fourth chapter I invited a series of poets to work alongside me in producing a poetic mapping of Athens.

The innovation of the project was the medium we chose to present it in. Instead of making a publication or a spoken-word performance, we used the Echoes smartphone application which allows the user to place upon the map different media elements (texts, images, sounds). Then other users can visit the actual physical locations and access the material. The inspiration to develop this project came from the augmented reality game, Pokémon GO which became a sensation a year ago. Pokémon GO was the first instance of a transmedia location-based platform becoming mainstream. The hybridisation of space in augmented reality was a topic I was interested in since the beginning of this research project, and Pokémon GO resonated with many of my earlier arguments. And it was not only the medium that was relevant to my methodological ambitions; it was Pokémon as universe that attracted me. I found significant parallelism in discourses around the *sinthome* and the Pokémon games. If my generation was closer to the end of the paternal law and the emergence of the *sinthome*, then our childhood fascination with Pokémon could not be incidental. I challenged the poets to write about Pokémon, and most of them were more than happy as they grew up with Pokémon and were able to challenge memories and personal experiences. This triangulation of poems, Pokémon and specific location in the city produced a rich material for analysis and reflection. Pokémon Poetry Go (as the project was named) was also important for another reason: setting a locative project in Athens in the particular time period is yet another intervention in a highly-contested space. Athens during the past decade of the financial crisis, experienced a series of shocking changes. The city is linked to images of political violence in and extreme poverty at the same time it becomes a hip arty destination and

cultural hub. Athens is more than ever a contested space with many trying to form a narrative about it. The clashing narratives allow for creative interventions, street art and in our case locative narrativization,

The methodology I developed in my fourth chapter is something I plan on revisiting in my future work. Having a practice based component, while something not uncommon in art related research projects it is still innovative in the current disciplinary context of my research. My main incentive to develop this methodological approach came from my own involvement with the arts, which grew significantly while I was developing my research project. In 2010 when I met Fil Ieropoulos, we started together the 'audio-textual' duo FYTA. Due to my participation in FYTA I started reflecting on the different artistic methodologies not only as means of expression but also as tools for socio-political commentary. The work we produced with FYTA takes different forms but almost always addresses contemporary social issues. After I was exposed to the potency and multiplying effects of artistic methodologies it was hard for me to return to a traditional academic writing approach, especially since the context I wanted to investigate was in itself a multimedia and rapidly changing field. I was very hesitant when I first initiated the experimentation of Pokémon Poetry Go, as I was worried about the kind of 'data' that this intervention would produce. First, there was the poetry, which included lots of information. Second hand there was the ethnography of setting up such a project: getting in touch with people who had the know-how, sharing this knowledge with more people, brainstorming on the final format of the platform etc. And then there was the consumer analysis of people actually using the application which produced rich results too: my interview with the first person who visited all the poems using the application was crucial in understanding the experience of new media environments. I plan on re-visiting this research material in order to expand on this methodological intervention and give more space to the different aspects of the project.

The title I chose for my dissertation is 'New media poetics as a strategy for political subversion' and I would like to conclude with a few words on that. My research questions throughout this research orientate themselves towards praxis and social change. I look for the subversive in the social because I want to see the social reality subverted, changed, transformed. The discussion I was mostly interested in engaging with was the

relationship between politics and poetics, seeing how aesthetic experiences can produce meaningful socio-political critiques. My focus on new media was deliberate too, as there is a suspicion with regards to their emancipatory potential. Without offering a utopian alternative, I wanted to examine the 'resonant' signifiers and their capacity to change a dysfunctional system not by understanding and explaining what it lacks but by shaking it up.

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Appendix: Pokémon Go Poetry

1. Cubone (KET theatre)

the skull of my mother
is a jewel and a reminder
even if i usually
forget about its existence; i forget
it's there mostly so that the rest of the world remembers
and niches filter out the pitfalls,
no marrow will ever meet
a better moment
than this mystical union

2. Porygon (Karaiskaki Square)

i go where i am loved
far away from here
in the warmth of cables
and whispering of electrons
i go where i am loved
to waves of photons
streams of liquid crystals
far away from here
to tears of keyboards
and orbits of lost digits
i go where i am loved
where corners make space
excellent space
so that i can button i can button i can button
i can button my head

3. Lickitung (Kanella Restaurant)

disgust towards the world

is sometimes the most unexpected gift
because it hides within it a sort of naive love
a love of a taste connoisseur of change

a change that is not easily swallowed
but leaves a gentle aftertaste

4. Sunflora (Exarcheia Square)

no dope can substitute what has been lost
and the more you say that the more you alienate me in this discussion
no dope can substitute what has been lost
cos it seems you don't understand
what i see when i gaze upwards
i see it when the light burns my eyes
what i see when i gaze upwards
i see it when i m teary and asleep
i am asleep in my own urine
i am asleep in my own urine
no gaze can bring back what peels away from my skin
and no matter how hard you try to convince me
you're just wasting your time
no gaze can bring back what peels away from my skin
and when you water me with acid rain
i taste the floor

5. Mr Mime (Zapeio)

of all your demands
the one i could truly
never figure out
was that "i shouldn't be alike"
i still can't get it
but now you're not here

to control all that

6. Scyther (Petalona Square)

if we hug
we will inevitably
cut each other
best case scenario
we'll turn into small squares
and blood perhaps – before we're cut
i dont know what else
what else could our love mean

... chatting somewhat
about our problems
chatting somewhat
in those final moments
chatting somewhat
about our problems
and cutting them into bits

7. Wailord (Niarchos Foundation)

my submersion allows
that my belly touches
a warm rock
in a single breath i manage
a three-hour dive
in total darkness
every time i decide
not to return to the surface
but something in my crooked
construction
causes

undesired buoyancy
when consciousness
fades away
my withdrawal does not permit
that i keep my promises to othes
in a single breath
i forget everything
i forget that i
fundamentally exist

8. Vanillux (Asteroskopio, Filopapos Hill)

one day
when i'm really
happy
i'll take a
big drag
of liquid nitrogen
so that i can keep forever
the snowy imprinting
of an incomparable happiness

9. Doduo (Vravrona Church)

excavating the marble, making a place to rest
excavating my chest, somewhere to lean on
constantly looking for something
if only Margarita had brought us an ashtray
I would cut off your head so you'd look like,
but she didn't – she was barely there
she was a convenient invention to battle our awkwardness
unfortunately, I'm bad with jokes
it's my downfall
yet I keep good company – come and try

I unravel gracefully – you would not expect
notwithstanding, I am
and I might have other advantages too
let's leave them unspoken of – a mystery so you want me more
I've arranged everything nicely
the only thing missing is a small church by the sea so we seal
the excavated marble,
I saw the perfect one, next to Loutsa
you won't like it – i'm afraid
we need to compromise – that's a relationship
I swear

10. Bronzong (Alexandra Hospital)

Receiving video signals
transmitted half a century ago
sudden condensation of sense:
I never know what time it is
signals bouncing off

inverse lunar lacunae
folded inside my head:
the creation of a new map
replete with gaps and stop signs
points of infection:
I will always remember
the specific amount of time
it took me to realise I could feel
not
a
single
thing

anymore
reciting albas of
being ported off:
are we not drawn onward to a new era?
a problematic inflection point:
aibohphobia as an emerging possibility
A Santa at Nasa.

I could wake up screaming
in a body that is no longer mine.

(in fact,
this has already happened)

11. Gengar (First Cemetery of Athens)

I occurred,
with a sticky evil grin,
Colgate ad.
deadly fearsome
with a long history
in the ghostly world;
ominous and jagged
and with a great tongue;
the banality of evil
embodied perfectly;
half shade,
half negative-image of my friends.
I cool the atmosphere down
I grow a third eye

12. Dragonite (Kolonaki)

I move comfortably, most of the time
the world recognises me from afar
like a mustard, winged lil' ball
with a beer belly lifting my weights,
postmodern postal pigeon.
I was once inversely invisible, truth be told;
shadowy guardian, causing terror,
hallowing in the sea.
I have lamented and responded to injuries
with my eye-headlights;
I was crying in code-words, always out of tune;
feeding their mysticism splendidly.

13. Ludicolo (Vas. Amalias 133)

Crowned king of the game,
Ridiculous!
the moving joy of the child,
I would like to live in yellowish green
blessed and depressed
on a tree house in Fortree City.

14. Cacnea (Geoponiki Scholi)

1.
on the seedbed, a howl:
botanic collections
take some rest
2.
tainted glass
hundreds of thorny weeds
in search of meaning
3.
the bedrock drains well

screaming DE-SPA- CI-TO

summer abandonment

4.

thorny-elbows

bloody wrists, bloody fruits

our struggles in vain

5.

open gates:

desire for scent

of those lost

6.

golden flowers

the desert of the real

an invitation to doom

7.

thirty days

a delay to the wrinkling

silent fungi

15. MissingNo (Kato Patisia Station)

how can you hear his screams?

how can he speak

whispering for the first time,

his name?

16. Ninetails (Megalou Vasileiou 22)

In the thousands mutations of femininity

I grow new spears

to protect myself

my juiciest spots

And the world from my wrath

Until a day

In my final evolution
I will become a tail
meow little kitty
Kill! Kill!

17. Metapod (Damokleous 2)

I look around
I scroll down
and I see you
I recognize you
despite the costume
the list now has seven
I found Porigon Zi!
I spent so much thinking of him as Scyther
but it doesn't matter
I still think of you
let it be an re-appropriation
it's better like that
we can't live here
there are no supermarkets nearby
I want it to be in walking distance
but I ended up on my first choice
I'm a meta-bug
you are a bird
I change my mind
I'm torn

saliva during the day
bug during the night
thank god you like them both

that saves me.

18. Rotom (Metaxourgio)

Current flowing within colourful cables in random frequencies.

Change me.

Put me inside the washing machine, inside the fan, in the lawnmower, in the microwave within devices.

in your computer

And fuck it.

lick the texture of the screen

from front to the little apple on the back

in all its length

press my keyboard

rim my stream and cares my corners.

Put it inside your electrical appliances then drag me out.

19. SandyGust (Vravrona Beach)

No shape

no comfort

no sooner

no food

Without it

no wounds

no clothes

no return

No later

Only ashes of the dead

Only little stones

Only today

Only fish houses

Only peaches

Only today

Only seaweed and rhinestones
Only sharpened shovel
Only today

20 Trubbish (Sismanoglio Hospital)

I open my mouth.
to swallow all of you
swallow
All your plastic wrappers,
all the garbage,
doctor prescriptions and used contact lenses, cigarette butts and teeth
feet and teeth.
I will fill all my bags with pieces from you.
And you will count 4 minutes
for each one of them
and I will have to pay

21. Komala (Victoria Square)

touching my cold limbs
on your warm body
pushing you, turning you, spinning you around
You are still and resilient.
the only sign of life is the light between your wooden glasses
the light that is reflected on your eyes
and makes the world turn
And while the world is turning
you turn around
and I can finally stay still.
And I watch
And I do not want to
And I cannot sleep

And at least I drag you with me
so I can have you with me and you can be a burden.
And I use you.

22. Cosmog (Start of 3 Septemvriou)

made of darkness
A mixture of jealousy and weakness
Emotional and compressed violence
Beautifully shaped with sweet characteristics.
I radiate small rays of darkness all around me.
each of them hides millions of universes for exploration.
Countless attempts at big banging
And a continuous, relentless end.
A mouth without ears.
I'm the best fit for you.
Teach me.

23. Magearna (Chaidari)

Chaidari has no pokémon