

entangled bodies

a collection of thoughts
on the materiality of limits

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In view of the deep state of fragmentation the planet finds itself in, they are asking: how should we remember it, that is, put back together its different parts, reassemble it and reconstitute it as an integrated system in which humans and non-humans, physical, chemical and biological components, oceans, atmosphere and land-surface are all interlinked in a grand gesture of mutuality?

- Achille Mbembe

For what it finds, in going beyond the periphery of the skin, is not a culinary paradise but a magical continuity with the other living organisms that populate the earth: the bodies of humans and the not-humans, the trees, the rivers, the sea, the stars. This is the image of a body that reunites what capitalism has divided, a body no longer constituted as a Leibnizian monad, without windows and without doors, but moving instead in harmony with cosmos, in a world where diversity is a wealth for all and a ground of commoning rather than a source of divisions and antagonisms.

- Silvia Federici

Abstract

Journeying through the mingling mess of materialist entanglement, I am looking at bodies; bodies of any kind. This thesis resembles a gathering of observations and speculations about bodily materiality. It is questioning a body's beginnings and its endings while observing points of segregation and surfaces of intersection. Where are the limits, boundaries and borders of a body? And do they actually exist? I am investigating mechanisms of separation that divide, categorise, marginalise, and oppress our bodies. Simultaneously, I am wondering how, instead, we could acknowledge, allow, and create a space for bodily fusion, transition, transformation, and, finally, entanglement.

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Preface

Riding my bike through the sunshine. Moments of liberation. Somewhere, floating around me, yellow striped pants sparkling, your bumblebee hums circling, carried by the wind to my ear. A lonely tree in the sandy landscape that we see from afar. On y va! Looking for a place to be, a temporary home. Endlessly straight, the street in front of us, a wall, a border. Is it the summer holidays? Escaping the tourism of apocalyptic times, a sharp turn to the left, entering our own little universe between the windy grass and the oily water, like an image of the Dead Sea, somewhere lost in the Dutch desert. Nature's caress and plurilingual storytelling. The surroundings melting in one. Entangled within a pink wonderland, a hand on the liquid linen sheets, cloudy juice and melting skin. Inextricably dissolving with the world. My body pours into yours, no beginning and no end. Words hanging loosely in the air, uncatchable, language the only barrier between our entities. Questioning reality and virtuality. Bodies dancing on the earth's skin. Sweat, rain, tears, all the same. Pulsating together through the world's nostrils, we are breathing rhythms, entangling moments and movements. There is skin and leaves and grass and flesh. So many bodies, becoming one. Energies capturing us in the wild. A 3D Render? Looking up, a sparkling twitch in the matrix and I think: apparently reality is that simple, unbelievable! The sun on my left, the moon on my right and an entire planet of being in between. The cyber web of stars appearing. Feeling so small and so big. A nature arm of extension, my wand to the world. Magic everywhere. The fact that I am a part of this whole mystery and am one myself. Glowing shadows in the moonlight, this is us and this is the universe. Do you see it? Merged, liquid, aglow. Diving into frameless jacuzzis. Goggles off, I see without shape and form; fluid, faceless, genderless, bodiless. A fleshy fortress, a human home, a borderless being. Following the moon along eternal pavements; surfing through the curvy curves of bricks and concrete.

Introducing entangled bodies

One could say that the skin symbolises the border of the body. A fleshy surface that separates the individual entity from its surroundings, a thin line that divides the “me” from the rest.

My research begins at this crossing and aims to put this physical border, this bodily fragmentation, into question. How can we define the beginning or end of what we call a *body*? Does this *body* actually stay within the physical borders of its own skin, or does it extend beyond those corporeal peripheries¹? The following text embodies an investigation of bodily entanglements; it examines the porosities of corporeal surfaces and eventually questions the actuality of our bodies' borders.

This written creation was developed like a spiralling dance². A continuous interweaving of conscious and unconscious neural processes, almost four years of I/M/D experiences and silent background CPU circuitries were rendering this body a *becoming* thesis. Our mutual cognitive understanding of the English language, its concepts and our shared ideology, acts like a transparent skin. It binds and holds this body together: we recognise a text. Thus, many bodies become one body, yet only temporarily. While your eyes recognise the words in front of you and your brain processes their meanings, your body, thoughts and existence become part of this thesis as much as it momentarily becomes a part of you. Skin to skin, bodies are touching each other.

This work is a body consisting of many other bodies: a collage, a mosaic, an assemblage³ of thoughts, ideas, concepts, questions, wonderings, doubts and hopes, many of them of different origin and of diverse matter. One can view it as a wild intermixture, a strange recipe, a unique composition of words and loose thoughts. Some of them are my own, many of them are based on other's previous speculations. Due to their fleeting and generative nature, many of the ideas introduced here are only beginnings waiting for further development, while other theoretical components will evolve into new constellations.

This body is moving; it is an ongoing process of thought. Therefore, this sequence of text has to be viewed within its respective context. Nevertheless, the individual body parts will transform. They will mature, gain relevance or grow outdated and eventually die, but it may be that something or somebody will stay and continue to live on.

Throughout this thesis, one will encounter different concepts, an intentionally and thoughtfully hand-picked collection from diverse backgrounds. These concepts meaningfully support and articulate a conceptual framework regarding the entanglement of bodies. Dedicatedly knitted together, they represent an interwoven web of bodies themselves.

During the writing process, this thesis joined the discourse on the philosophy of language, yet it is not my aim to analyse linguistic ontology itself but rather its consequences towards corporeality. One could say that the bodies I speak of are equally contextualised and textualised. I am wondering how the linguistic bodies of concepts influence physical bodies of matter. How do words and language shape, regulate, frame, confine and limit our bodies? And at the same time how do they extend, elaborate, imagine, fantasise and liberate our bodies?

If I do not specifically use the term “human” in a section, then I refer to bodies of any kind, be it human, animal, bacterial, literal or virtual. My approach is to embrace interspecies kinship and to distance myself from a solely anthropocentric dialogue. Nonetheless, the human body can be seen as the initial locus of research and represents the common thread throughout the following chapters. This is not because the human body takes priority, but rather because I am aware of my subjective point of view and that I can solely share perspectives from my own corporeality. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the author's positionality as an influential component within this literary anatomy. My views, understandings, upbringing, privileges, rights and personal experiences shape the skeletal framework that I base these presented theories and thoughts upon.

¹ This question is inspired by Silvia Federici's book *On the Periphery of the Skin* which served as one of the main inspirations and references for this thesis.

² Reference to neo pagan ecofeminist Starhawk who published a book under the name *The Spiral Dance*. The spiral dance was developed as Reclaiming Ritual in the Pagan community to emphasize "community and rebirth".

³ Reference to the concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *One Thousand Plateaus* which I will introduce later in the text.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge my Northern-European heritage and privileges which permit my body to move within a wide range of spaces. Being a white, abled, cis⁴ woman,⁵ I experience advantages that people of colour, trans*⁶ people, differently abled people and many more people with less opportunities and social class benefits might not experience. Nonetheless, I want to raise my voice in order to question the disadvantages that still restrict my body.

Considering that technology and the internet enable wider accessibility and a certain overcoming of physical borders, I position my artistic practice in between cyberspace and the tangible world. As a tEckhnO⁷ artist, designer, performer and questioner, I am intrigued to find ways to deconstruct and reconstruct existing structures, translating my observations into physical-virtual experiences and performances. This thesis was created in parallel to ongoing research of the boundaries of human materiality; my own body becomes the subject and object of artistic interventions and explorations. This artistic research is intrinsically interwoven in the following chapters.

Throughout this body of work, one will come across many universalised dichotomies that this body itself wants to repel against. The aim is to find the in-betweenness of those binaries and celebrate the radical diversity and specificity which so often succumbs to the many dualisms. Therefore, I would like to embrace all those entanglements that do not hold at physical borders, material boundaries, conceptual limitations, or linguistic separations but, instead, invite to a journey of intermingled speculations. I desire to create a discursive space without borders, boundaries, barriers. Everything that follows simply functions as a conversation starter, a thought provoker.

Shedding my skin, this body is curious to open up and unite, morph, coalesce, consolidate, conflate, conglomerate, amalgamate, affiliate with other bodies, exploring my own corporeality in context with many others, mainly raising questions and perhaps answering some.

⁴ Cis or cisgender is a term for people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

⁵ I decided to use the word “woman”, instead of adopting an alternating spelling variation like “womyn” or “womxn”. Even though, I recognise the intersectional feminist approach to reclaim the term through removal of the “man/men” at the end of the word, I prefer to use the term “woman” out of inclusivity reasons. Trans* women and women of colour are women and I view them already included in this term. If I speak specifically about cis women, trans* women or women of colour, I will mark this in the text.

⁶ Throughout the thesis, I am adding an asterisk at the end of the word trans* to be inclusive towards the variety of people who identify with this umbrella term, such as people who are bigender, agender, genderfluid and many more. All of these identities have one shared denominator: a trans* person is not a cisgender man or cisgender woman.

⁷ tEckhnO is a term created by my friend, artist and collaborator Pamela Varela. It references *techno*, without diminishing *eco*. The spelling with *k* references the idea of political and anarchistic activism. Inspirations were drawn from the Spanish squatting scene *OKUPA* (misspelling of *OCUPA*) and the term *magick* which differentiates the occult from performance magic.

Bodies that connect, interact, relate, collaborate, and horizontalise

In order to understand the human body's borders and non-borders, it is of importance to look beyond the peripheries of its corporeal outline and instead understand it as a surface of porosities. As part of a bigger body, this body stands constantly in interaction with its context. Its pure being is centred on the relational and continuous exchange between itself and its surrounding environment. Just like the guts within it, the human body itself functions like an organ and the world as its membrane.

Throughout the anthropocene (predominantly white, male, cisgender), humans have tried and tried with more and more effort to mistakenly validate and secure their position at the top of some sort of hierarchical order of entities. Christianity, among many things, legitimised the belief in this hierarchical "Great Chain of Being"⁸. Hence, the human body has looked down at flora, fauna or any other species, substances, matter and, consequently, also at other bodies for a long time. However, by extracting and isolating the human from its environmental context in order to be able to superordinate and maintain this prevailing "top-position" in the supposedly chain of beings, it generates and upholds a continuously growing gap and dissonance between various kinds of bodies, human and non-human. The following encounter changed and challenged my perspective towards interactions with non-humans, especially so-called inanimate bodies.

Throughout the research for my graduation project, I found myself experimenting with clay. Not having previously worked with ceramics in my mainly digitally-based artistic development, it felt like an exciting encounter of graspability. Volumes, outlines, forms were morphing between my fingers; an endless spectrum of transforming bodies of clay exposed themselves to me. However, a more surprising encounter was actually the effect the clay itself had on my body. While I was modifying the material with my hands, at one point I began noticing how my physical movements – from my fingertips, along the spine, down to my feet's position – were adapting to the material. My body readjusted to another body. I realised I was not in control, dominating the encounter of our bodies, as I would have naturally expected, but instead, that we together, as a unit, began transforming and transmuting, influencing and impacting each other, dancing together.

Drawing on this experience, I aim to distance myself from the hierarchic conceptions that position the human at the top and rather investigate the relationship of the body in all its regards with all types of matters. In *Vibrant Matter*, philosopher and political theorist Jane Bennet poses a profound investigation of the agency of non-human forces and formulates the concept of *vital materiality*, which she grounds on theories by, among others, Deleuze and Guattari. She aims to cultivate a way of thinking that enforces collaboration, instead of individualism or autonomy:

[A]n actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces. A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonomous but as vital materialities.⁹

Human action does not simply take place but has to be viewed as an interaction with its surroundings, as Donna Haraway formulates in her theory of *sympoiesis*, or in other words, "making with".¹⁰ It is my intention to actively accentuate this collaborative aspect within my artistic practise. To oppose the art world's hierarchical structure, which commonly worships the individual artist, our collective *sWitches* is founded with an emphasis on collaboration. Pamela Varela, Ines DeRu and I come together in order to create and "make with" each other, our human bodies, and a plurality of other actants. We entangle our diverse backgrounds, creative approaches, and multitude of artistic mediums as a symbiotic interplay. Technological, virtual, visual, audible, sensorial, tangible, human and non-human bodies are composing the collage-like character of our projects, which I will further elaborate on later.

Nothing is created whilst not being actively engaged within its context. Coming back to the example of the clay and my body's movements, it highlights that both of our bodies were making and creating together in interaction. From this viewpoint, a hierarchical structure of beings seems irrelevant and not applicable since all actants are involved in this collaboration of being. However, each actant, be it the clay between my fingers, the air molecules in the room or the bacteria on my skin, is differently involved in this process. From the human perspective, it may be hard to recognise the active involvement or importance of other entities because of their generally different matter and being.

⁸ The Great Chain of Being or *scala naturae* is a hierarchical structure developed by medieval Christianity that arranged all matter and life in order of "perfection", rising through fossils to plants, animals, humans, celestial beings, and ultimately, God.

⁹ Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, (Duke University Press, 2010), 21

¹⁰ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, (Duke University Press, 2016), 34

To provide a new experience of embodying other beings, David O'Reilly developed *Everything*, a game which is “nestled somewhere between art piece and walking simulator”.¹¹ One can endlessly and continuously transform from being “everything”, such as a meadow daisy, a cluster of zebras or an assemblage of atoms. The game aims to playfully decrease the corporeal gap between entities, enabling the player to easily jump from body to body. It visualises that our human bodies are not as isolated from the rest of the universe as we may think, but that we are inevitably implicated in the cosmological mixture of living and being. It is urgently necessary to recognise the importance of ecology in our contemporary world and its entanglement within. Again we can draw on Haraway's theory of *sympoiesis* and her conception of humans and all other beings as so-called *critters*, which

interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages.¹²

Speaking of *assemblages*, I would like to refer to Deleuze and Guattari's influential concept of *assemblages* and their philosophical approaches in regard to ontological entanglement. They define an assemblage as a constellation of components which emphasise fluidity, exchangeability and multiple functionalities. Feminist theorist and philosopher Elisabeth Grosz, who strives to reconfigure theories of sexed corporeality, draws on some of Deleuze and Guattari's theories on the body and views them as a useful foundation to rethink the affiliations of bodies outside binaries. She elaborates:

Their notion of the body as a discontinuous, non totalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations, may be of great value to feminists attempting to reconcile bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object, and interior/exterior oppositions.¹³

It becomes clear that those culturally created dualisms have played an influential role in the human's understanding of the universe's enmeshment. When we begin to rethink our human bodies in relation to other entities, it is mandatory to question those imposed binaries that not only divide and categorise human bodies themselves (eg. woman/man), but also their relation to other species and types of matter (eg. nature/culture). I think it is of urgency to overcome these dichotomies to be able to recognise the interconnectivity of matter and the entanglement of all kinds of bodies, and so to grasp how all those bodies shape and create our environment co-dependently together.

An artwork that emphasises this co-creational and “making with” process between multiple elements is Pierre Huyghe's *After A Life Ahead*, which he created for the last edition of Skulptur Projekte Münster in 2017. The biotopic installation consists of an artificial landscape, which is inhabited by diverse entities like peacocks, bee colonies, algae, bacteria, and incubated cancer cells, as well as an openly available virtual-reality app. All components influence each other, thus enabling a continuously evolving symbiosis or *sympoiesis*. In an interview, Huyghe explains that the ambition of the work was

to complexify where one thing is supposed to stop and where another begins. [...] Each pattern has its own capacity and potential for change, its own unintentional variations. Because there are so many in proximity, they affect each other; they deregulate or re-regulate. They synchronize as well as engage in conflicts or dilemmas. This conditional setup is one way to shift from the centrality of the human position—whether as maker or receptor.¹⁴

The work found refuge in a time-worn ice rink which was meant to be demolished. Coincidentally, this specific ice rink was distanced only 1.5km away from my parent's house in my hometown, Münster, and is therefore ingrained into my childhood memories. In a way, this place, its matter as well as my relationship towards it, transformed throughout my life. At first a space for ice skating and children's birthday parties, it transformed into a piece of art that I would encounter as a spectator, an outsider maybe, but then, before its final destruction, I found myself dancing on the mutated landscape of the left-over ice rink/art piece for a New

¹¹ 'Everything Review: A Joyfully Expansive Dream of a Game', the Guardian, 24 March 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/24/everything-review-david-oreilly-game>.

¹² Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, (Duke University Press, 2016), 161

¹³ Elisabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 155

¹⁴ 'Pierre Huyghe: Indiscernible, Unpredictable, Irrational', ELEPHANT, 20 December 2018, <https://elephant.art/pierre-huyghe-indiscernible-unpredictable-irrational/>.

Year's rave in 2018. Throughout this transition, my body, its movement and the space were morphing between the different encounters and relationships, forming continuously new connections towards each other. The place itself, its soil and metal structure, became vibrant and animate, entangled with my own body and life story, an assemblage that endlessly regenerated itself shifting from context to context. Viewing this experience in reference to Bennet's *vital materiality*, I believe that we need to aim to *re-member* the matter of bodies of any kind.

“[T]he ethical aim becomes to distribute value more generously, to bodies as such. Such a newfound attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem of human exploitation or oppression, but it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations.”¹⁵

In order to overcome hierarchisation, as well as to disestablish a world constructed through borders, we need to recognise the actant's intersections. We should celebrate our physical permeabilities that entangle us with each other and that interweave us into our surroundings. Instead of focusing on the borders that might separate our bodies, I encourage to focus on the interfaces that connect and conjoin us.

¹⁵ Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, (Duke University Press, 2010), ...

Bodies that are encountered, invaded, mapped, borderised, and divided

When regarding the human body beyond the borders of its skinned surface, it becomes a transformational, amorphous subject, melted and mingled into its fleeting context. Yet, what happens when this subjective entity merges with an environment which in itself is dissected into singular, invaded, delimited, claimed and possessed spaces? In what ways do the cultural, socioeconomic, and political territorialisation of our surroundings influence and impact the materiality of our human bodies?

Jacques Derrida founded the concept of *ontopology* which, as political philosopher and artist Erin Manning explains, “allows us at the outset to better understand the implicit connection [...] between ontology (being) and topos (territory, native soil, city, or body).”¹⁶ *Ontopology* can be understood as the intertwinedness of our being and our native environment, our human body in coherence with the environmental body around us. We can view the earth, the lands, the soil, as bodies themselves that our human bodies belong to and are part of.

While emphasising the connectivity between human and environmental bodies, ecofeminists draw more radical comparisons between “female” bodies and the environment. They argue that the domination of women as well as the degradation of nature results from patriarchal and capitalist forces, thus they advocate for activist ecological awareness. However, ecofeminism has been criticised for essentialising gender and its mythologising discourse on femininity. Other feminists have distanced themselves from this movement claiming that it upholds dichotomies, such as those of woman/man and nature/culture, which feminism in itself wants to fight against.

Since my aim is to focus on the bodies’ materiality themselves, I prefer to stay distant from any sort of prevailing binaries and turn to a more intersectional discourse. In her work *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elisabeth Grosz formulates a new theoretical narrative that shifts the human physicality to the center of subjectivity. Opposing prevailing euro- and androcentric body universalities, she advocates for radical diversity and the connotation of each body’s specification. Deconstructing the mind/body dualism, she encourages “a rethinking [of] the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its physical interior and its corporeal exterior”.¹⁷

Materialist feminism finds its place nestled within and upon environmental feminist’s and (linguistic focused) postmodernist feminist’s discourses and strives to “bring the material, specifically the materiality of the human body and the natural world, into the forefront of feminist theory and practice.”¹⁸ This movement is exciting as it focuses on the *corpo-reality*, the real, the tangible, the bodily, the material, the matter itself. An inspiring example of this material-based approach is Stacy Alaimo’s conception of *trans-corporeality* which views the human, the body, ultimately inseparably and intermeshed with the “more-than-human world”, “the environment”.¹⁹ *Transcorporeality* highlights the difficulty to “pose nature as a mere background for the exploits of the human, since “nature” is always as close as one’s own skin”.²⁰

Nonetheless, the anthropocentric conquest, exploitation and territorialisation of bodies of lands during the last centuries has rendered the environment a passive body. A body that has been invaded, penetrated, possessed, claimed, and utilised for human’s need. The atrocious history of colonialism shows, moreover, that certain prevailing humans are not only responsible for the exploitation, appropriation and oppression of the bodies of land but also for those of many indigenous populations. With the start of the European colonial period dating back to the 15th century, colonists and settlers began to build a hegemonic system based on patriarchal, capitalist, and imperialist oppression.

In order to foster their questionable structures of power, colonists initiated the fragmentation of their claimed spaces while at the same time bordering them from each other. The concepts of territorial statehood and national borders are therefore largely inspired by the division of the European empire and its colonies. “With the rise of Europe to global predominance, [...] an idealized European territorial state became the global archetype”.²¹ Borders were created as means to facilitate the prevalent exercise of power and to

¹⁶ Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada* (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003), xvi.

¹⁷ *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* by Elisabeth Grosz, p. xii

¹⁸ Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 1.

¹⁹ Michael Hames-Garcia, *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Illustrated edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 238.

²⁰ Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 238.

²¹ *Ibid.* this is smth else

enable an acting out of certain economic, political, capitalistic, and national interests. In his paper *Borders on the mind: re-framing border thinking*, John Agnew explains that

From one viewpoint, borders are simple 'facts on the ground' (or, more radically, lines on the map). Borders exist for a variety of practical reasons and can be classified according to the purposes they serve and how they serve them. They enable a whole host of important political, social, and economic activities. From a very different perspective, borders are artefacts of dominant discursive processes that have led to the fencing off of chunks of territory and people from one another.²²

A tool that underlies the creation of borders and continuously supports these ambivalent structures of power is cartography and the act of mapping space. Diving into the field of critical cartography, it becomes clear that it is not unusual for maps to incorporate hidden political interests. Simultaneously, they heavily influence and shape the individual's view of reality by simply representing and thus actively making a reality. "Maps are active; they actively construct knowledge, they exercise power and they can be a powerful means of promoting social change."²³

The most commonly used world map is a good example to highlight the rendering of a distorted reality through cartography. The *Mercator projection*, created by Flemish geographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569, is the standard global map projection used nowadays, however it inflates countries further away from the equator and, thus, enlarges Europe and North America.²⁴ To oppose this euro and North America-centric view of the earth, the *Gall-Peters projection* was developed in a way that all areas have the correct sizes relative to each other. Thereby, it depicts a different view on the world and questions our "common" reality.²⁵

Nonetheless, even if this approach alternates our perspective on geographical maps, cartography in general still focuses mainly on political and economical aspects, while excluding many other elements of our multidimensional and sensorial environment as well as lacking a body specific perspective within the cartographic discourse.

Lisa Parks' project *Plotting the personal: Global Positioning Satellites and Interactive Media* gives us a fascinating perspective on subjective mapping, or what she phrases as *plotting the personal*, while drawing relations between global positioning and "an individual's positionality (a set of historically shifting social, economic, cultural and geographic conditions)."²⁶ Her work investigates the now widely commercialised GPS technology, initially a military surveillance tool, in relation to her own body's movement in order to articulate a politics of location. The term *politics of location* was coined in the 1980 as a "feminist method of interrogating and deconstructing the position, identity and privilege of whiteness."²⁷ By investigating an individual's positionality in regard to mapmaking, she invites the so-far missing corporeal viewpoint and "embodied practise" into the discourse of cartography and adds the valuable and necessary component of the subject's bodily position, perception, and linkages in space. Parks concludes her essay with the "reminder that we are both the maps we make and the makers of the world,"²⁸ which again symbolises the power that lies in cartography and, therefore, also in the construction of borders. Additionally, it highlights our personal agency in creating certain realities while at the same time staying critical about those "pregiven" realities.

With her paper *Corporeal Cartography: The Body as a Map of Place-Based Relationships*, Addie Cherice Shrodes contributes to this conversation. She applies critical rethinking of cartography as a tool to shape "alternative futures" by connecting place and body, whilst including the embodied experience of body specific parameters like race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Her theories of corporeal and place-based maps are largely influenced and based on the concept of Deleuze and Guattari's *rhizome* who reinterpret the

²² John Agnew, *Borders on the mind: re-framing border thinking*, (published online: Ethics & Global Politics Volume 1, Pages 175-191, 2008), 175 -181.

²³ Jeremy W. Crampton and John Kryger, *An Introduction to Critical Cartography*, (published online: ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, 4 (1), 11-33, 2006), 15 -18.

²⁴ 'Mercator Projection | Definition, Uses, & Limitations', Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 28 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Mercator-projection>.

²⁵ 'Peters Projection Map, Widely Used in Educational and Business Circles', Oxford Cartographers, accessed 21 February 2021, <https://www.oxfordcartographers.com/our-maps/peters-projection-map/>.

²⁶ Lisa Parks, *Cultural Geographies in Practice: Plotting the personal: Global Positioning Satellites and interactive media*, (Ecumene, Volume: 8 issue: 2, page(s): 209-222, 2001), 211

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Lisa Parks, *Cultural Geographies in Practice: Plotting the personal: Global Positioning Satellites and interactive media*, (Ecumene, Volume: 8 issue: 2, page(s): 209-222, 2001), 221

concept of the map as a non-centralised, ever-changing process of building and growing, instead of a universalised representation of a fixed reality.

Following their conception, territorial borders signify the representation of fixed and rigid lines. If they are two-dimensional lines on a flat surface or three-dimensional walls on the ground, borders oppose any recognition of the entanglement of beings, entities, life, and matter that we are enmeshed with.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed new light on current national and global border politics and its “fluidity”. Under the circumstances of a looming threat and dangerous spread of the virus, we were able to experience a shift from the enclosure of territorial lands to the level of individual bodies, an advanced entanglement of border and body politics. The new frontiers that keep us contained, next to the already established borderlines, manifest now in the walls of our bedrooms, the facades of our apartments, and the masks we wear on our faces. The individual body, the biological human organism itself, has become the new territory, the new border, that needs to be observed, contained, and controlled, in order to face and survive the crisis or to save the “bigger body’s health”, humanity.

However, this pandemic has also shown us ever so clearly that within our emerging cybernetic society, our bodies equate surfaces of porosities. While physical and corporeal separation is reinforced to a new extreme, our media culture, in urgent need of action, developed new standards of cyber-connectivity. Nevertheless, we are all experiencing the bitter insight that the virtual cannot simply replace the physical, but rather that we live in the greyscales in between. Our society is in the painful state of metamorphosis or as trans* activist, philosopher, and writer Paul B. Preciado formulates, “We are still in the throes of the transition from a written to a cyber-oral society, from an industrial to an immaterial economy, from a form of disciplinary and architectural control to forms of micro prosthetic and media-cybernetic control.”²⁹

Nonetheless, this pandemic clearly highlights the shift of borders, their increasing abstraction and advancing virtuality. The borders of today are continuously rendering new realities which extend from two-dimensional lines on a map and three-dimensional fences on a piece of land, to the surfaces of our technological devices and the epidermis of our human bodies. However, due to the decreasing tangibility of these frontiers, it is of more and more importance to focus on the materiality that does surround us. The *ontological* connection of our bodies with the *more-than-human* world is a reality. Yet, we have to actively co-shape this actuality by positioning ourselves and our bodies within. Only from this very physical and embodied standpoint are we able to share narratives that fight for a reconstruction of cartographic discourse and its corporeal implications as well as a deconstruction of borders which enclose the materiality of our bodies, those of human and land.

²⁹ Paul B. Preciado, ‘Learning from the Virus’, accessed 1 February 2021, <https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/paul-b-preciado-82823>.

Bodies that govern, dominate, oppress, marginalise, and separate

A nation can manifest in a place and space based territory. The place of birth functions as the grounding land that the nation can build itself upon. While the nation is a social construct on the basis of a common language, history, ethnicity, culture and shared belief in a community, its physical connection to the ground and soil is realised through the people's attachment and identification to that specific space. Bodies connect to the body of land they are familiar with; however, this can also lead to an idealisation of the land and an oppression of *othered* bodies.

Boundaries, fences, frontiers exist and function as a means to isolate "the same" from "the other", a certain "defence mechanism" that aims to separate specific clusters of bodies from others, a system that sometimes hides itself behind the terms *home* or *belonging*, which aspires to instrumentalise shared beliefs, interest and values for a so-called "common good": the national entity. However, I would like to inquire to what extent nationalism and its romantic idealisation can impact our perception of our own body, as well as of other bodies. In which way, does the concept or ideology of nationalism construct borders that imply physical limitations towards our bodies and can consequently lead to their segregation?

Since the topic of nationalism entails a multitude of phenomena, subjective understandings, political views, and personal meanings, I would like to emphasize the aspect of my own positionality. Therefore, I decided to mainly reference introspections regarding my own heritage.

In some way, I have always struggled with my German heritage, nationality, and hence, identity. The country's historical past is omnipresent and, definitely, involuntarily deeply ingrained within my personal identity. Even though the conditions have considerably evolved from my grandparents/parents' generation to mine, the unconscious hint of a commonly shared collective guilt about the crimes and cruelties associated with the nation's past, as for example, the genocide of millions of Jewish, Roma, black, homosexual, and disabled people, can still be noticed among the younger population of Germany today. It sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable in my own body. For me, this struggle is specifically located in the in-betweenness of, on the one hand, guilt about the country's history, its committed cruelties and atrocious segregation of people and their bodies, and on the other hand, of the privileges that the country's strong economic force and global status as a first world nation enable me personally to live out a certain freedom. However, besides being inextricably interwoven with my identity, and thus the voice of this thesis, in this context it also functions as a reference of mediating to what an extreme magnitude idealised nationalism can act out on the physicality of human bodies. As a horrifying example, we can remind ourselves of the images depicting the masses of dead humans and their inanimate bodies overfilling the graves of the second world war, a result of Germany's National socialist ideology and their terrorizing hegemony.

During my research for previous projects, I looked at the etymology of the word "German", wondering where the term that refers to this nationality actually derives from. Curiously, there are altogether many different linguistic origins in different languages for the word *German*, which can be majorly rooted back to seven different groups of word derivations.³⁰ Here, I will focus mainly on the derivation of the terms "German" and "Deutsch" (which is the German term for "German").

The word "Deutsch" derives from the Proto-Germanic stem **peudō* / **theudō*, meaning "people", "nation", or "folk".³¹ Translated to modern German, one would refer to the term *Volk*. It becomes clear that the word itself already inhabits a notion of nationalism and can be associated with the distinction between a certain group of people from another. On the other side, the term "German," deriving from the Latin word *germanus*, can possibly be linked to the Proto-Indo-European root **gene-*, which means "give birth, beget".³² Interestingly, the word *nation* (in German "Nation") coming from the Latin *nationem* shares the same root with *germanus*, **gene-*, and literally translated stands for "birth".³³ ³⁴ What I find striking about this is that the definition of *Deutschland*/Germany is not only linguistically grounded on the concept of a nation or a *Volk* but,

³⁰ The seven main groups can be categorised according to their origin of the word into the following: 1. From Old High German *diutisc* or similar, 2. From the Latin *Germania* or Greek *Γερμανία*, 3. From the name of the Alamanni tribe, 4. From the name of the Saxon tribe, 5. From the Proto-Slavic *němьсь*, 6. From the name of Prussia, 7. Unclear origin. 'Names of Germany', in *Wikipedia*, 21 January 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Names_of_Germany&oldid=1001719370.

³¹ 'Names of Germany'.

³² 'German | Origin and Meaning of German by Online Etymology Dictionary', accessed 23 January 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/german>.

³³ 'Nation | Search Online Etymology Dictionary', accessed 23 January 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=nation>.

³⁴ 'Nation', in *Wikipedia*, 16 January 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nation&oldid=1000805436>.

at the same time, interlaces with the notion of something as deeply carnal as the act of giving birth. In a way, it establishes a very physical and corporeal association to the image of the nation or the (German) *Volk* and thus determines not solely a terminological concept but, at the same time, the visualisation of a body of people, a nation that has been collectively given birth to.

This shows how language can be used as a tool to connect the concept of the nation with the imagery of the body. Many bodies become one body, however, only under a certain set of conditions. Often only a specific selection of bodies are *incorporated* into the bigger body, while others are excluded and marginalised. Language symbolises and can function as a tool for this differentiation between certain bodies. As Erin Manning explains,

the vocabulary of the nation can be understood as the structuring of a language that produces the distinction between qualified and unqualified bodies [...] This language of the nation is characterized, alternately, by a desire to naturalize a cohesive sense of identity and territory through official cultural and political texts that depict the nation as a harmonious entity [...].³⁵

Since language represents a large part of our socialisation, it has an immense impact on our world views and belief systems. It is an apparatus of power which on the one hand can enable communication, create interaction, and facilitate mutual understanding for each other while, at the same time, can be utilised in order to create differentiation, discrimination, and segregation. On the basis of the *body-state* metaphor, it becomes visible how linguistic distinction can lead to a corporeal partition that can result in horrendous physical consequences.

Coming back to the etymologies of Germany, I would like to add that nowadays the term *Volk* is highly stigmatized and not frequently used in everyday language. This is because of its close associations with the national socialist governance during the 20th century and the application of the term for their dogmatic and fascistic ideologies. Instead of simply referring to a population of people, due to the Nazi's frequent usage of the word, its connotation shifted to the belongingness to the same descent and/or "race".³⁶

The previously commonly used expression *Volkskörper* consists of the two German words *Volk* and *Körper* ("body"), which can be translated to "nation's body" and undermines my analyses of linguistic and corporeal cohesion. The *Volkskörper* or *body-state* metaphor can be seen as "an analogy between an individual body and a social body of a community"³⁷ and is based on the belief of creating a homogeneous, racialised unity of bodies to maintain the population's health.³⁸ The nation's territory was seen as a body that had to defend its exterior from intruders - metaphorically along its outlines, its borders, its skin - while, simultaneously, actively "healing" itself from the inside by externalising and abolishing so-called *Fremdkörper*, "alien bodies" or "foreign bodies", from within. Even though the Nazis were not the first to make use of the body metaphor within political language,³⁹ it can be said that they translated their linguistic body-based discourse in a uniquely extreme and literal way. The genocide, abuse, and violence that was done to millions of humans and their bodies, justified by this "national healing", unavoidably exceeds my ability of wording, summarising, or even comprehending.

The example of the *Volkskörper* expression highlights "the role that body-based metaphors generally play in current racist discourse and thought".⁴⁰ The abuse of these linguistic expressions leads to the support of a system based on segregation, while instrumentalising the body as an entity that has to be delimited and isolated from other bodies. Psychological and physical boundaries, borders and fences, are being erected to dissect, exclude, remove parts of the population from other parts. Philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe coins the term *borderization* as "the process by which certain spaces are transformed into uncrossable places for certain classes of populations".⁴¹ Not only through the physical construction of walls

³⁵ Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada* (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003), xv.

³⁶ 'GRIN - "Völkisch". Wird man das noch sagen dürfen? Historische und semantische Wortstudie zu einem umstrittenen Begriff', accessed 26 January 2021, <https://www.grin.com/document/886260>.

³⁷ Sandra Maß, 'The "Volkskörper" in Fear: Gender, Race and Sexuality in the Weimar Republic', 2010, 234–35.

³⁸ Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust: The Concept of the Body Politic*, Routledge Critical Studies in Discourse 3 (New York: Routledge, 2010).

³⁹ For more elaborate explanation on the development and usage of body metaphors within political discourse see *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust* by Andreas Musolff.

⁴⁰ Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust*, 7.

⁴¹ Achille Mbembe, 'Bodies as Borders', *European South Journal*, 4 (2019): 5–18, <http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it/journal/2019-4/2.Mbembe.pdf>.

and frontiers but also through the mental creation of borders and categorisations, certain groups of humans and body types are being hierarchised, controlled, and oppressed through the apparatus of nationalist thought.

Even though Germany's National Socialism movement and the Nazi's despicable differentiation between bodies as, for example, the "Aryan" or "Jewish", can be viewed as an extreme example of segregation, the act of borderization is still very much present in our contemporary culture. The peak of the European "refugee crisis" in 2015 revealed what inhumane strategies the European Union, including Germany, would draw on in order to protect its "sacred" borders from the threatening "invasion" of *the others*, *the foreigners*. Mediterranean islands were turned into open air detention camps; unwanted bodies were and still are being deported and held captive on the very peripheries of the European Union.

Coincidentally, philosopher Franco 'Bifo' Berardi wrote a piece about this exact correlation, comparing the stranded refugees on the Mediterranean beaches with the events of the Holocaust. However, the work created a fiery scandal which was not directly sparked by the content itself but rather by the provocative use of language in the title. Bifo's poem was planned to be exhibited in form of a performance at the prestigious German art exhibition Documenta under the name *Auschwitz on the beach*. However, the title initiated a controversial debate in Germany and within the Jewish community about the implications and misuse of the word "Auschwitz" in this specific artistic context, concluding in the cancellation of the performance.⁴² What I find interesting about this is the role of language here and the consensual connotation of the seriousness associated with the term "Auschwitz" and the almost mutual understanding that it cannot be brought into context with the word "beach".⁴³ Similar to the word "Volk", yet bearing an even more weighty connotation, the word "Auschwitz" implies past horrors associated with radical nationalism. Language acts here as a severe reminder of atrocities implicated with the physicality of human bodies.

However, not to disregard art's position of critical thinking, the performance was replaced with a reading and open discussion about the emergence of fascism in Europe and its migration policy. The event was hosted by the so-called *Parliament of Bodies*, which portrayed the Public Programs of Documenta 14 under the curation of Paul B. Preciado. In an open statement, he justified in the name of the *Parliament of Bodies* that it itself "can't be a space where the performative power of language can be used for violence".⁴⁴

What I find intriguing about the *Parliament of Bodies* is how it materialises the struggle of the art world and its institutions to find a voice for an affiliation of bodies, while simultaneously staying critically alert about potential marginalisations of individual opinions or viewpoints, and even bodies. The *Parliament of Bodies* refers to itself as an actor "against the individualization of bodies but also against the transformation of bodies into a mass" and as "neither a bank nor a collection of data, neither 'folk' nor a corporation."⁴⁵

I see resemblances between nationalism and *The Body of Parliament* in the sense that they both aim to unite bodies, creating a body of bodies. However, the significant difference between the two lies in the second's goal to join forces beyond the act of *bordering* other bodies. Idealised nationalism, though, can run into danger of facilitating corporeal segregation. It can create exclusive spaces that can not only lead to the marginalisation but also to the domination and oppression of bodies that are not considered to "belong".

⁴² Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), 'Documenta Cancels "Auschwitz on the Beach" Performance after Hefty Criticism | DW | 22.08.2017', DW.COM, accessed 3 February 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/documenta-cancels-auschwitz-on-the-beach-performance-after-hefty-criticism/a-40193224>.

⁴³ Srećko Horvat, *Poetry from the Future* (UK: Allen Lane, 2019).

⁴⁴ 'Shame on Us: A Reading and Discussion', accessed 3 February 2021, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/24356/shame-on-us-a-reading-and-discussion>.

⁴⁵ 'The Parliament of Bodies', accessed 3 February 2021, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs/927/the-parliament-of-bodies>.

Bodies that flow, fuse, transition, touch, fuck, and dance

Bodies fuse; they can merge, intertwine, unite, entangle, in various and endless ways. Nonetheless, for human bodies these possibilities are under certain restrictions. Culturally established rules and codes regulate bodily interaction; sexual interplay is constrained and sexual bodies are categorised. Thus, social and cultural boundaries contain corporeal fluidity. However, to enable a diversity and multitude of bodily entanglement, I am wondering how we can change our perception of the sexual body.

Reproduction is still being idealised as many governments “continue to present fertility as national prosperity”.⁴⁶ Extreme nationalism still feeds the dubious belief of utilising individual bodies not only to maintain the nation’s wellbeing, but also to nurture its growth. The Nazis even appropriated Mother’s Day to advocate for high birthing rates. They glorified child-rich cis women as they provided “Aryan offspring” and therefore supported the reproduction, workforce and thus the “nation’s health”.⁴⁷

With the latest resurgence of conservative, right-winged politics across Europe and other parts of the world, it becomes clear that nationalism still plays a dominant and threatening role in the discourse of today’s body politics. The recent tightening of the abortion law in Poland, for example, now one of the strictest in Europe, accentuates the danger of far-right nationalist governments controlling the bodies of their populations, especially those of women and gender minorities.⁴⁸

If procreation is continued to be (systemically) glorified and sexual interaction is solely validated through the lens of reproduction, we not only continue the oppression of women and their reproductive rights, but we also dangerously reduce the spectrum of sexual expression and corporeal liberty. Generations of feminist thinkers, rebels, and revolutionaries have shown us that this standardised perception of human sexuality is far from being fair or equal. Patriarchy still lingers in the bones of our societal framework.

Therefore, one’s own sexuality can still be experienced as a border; a border which can be hard to overcome. Mainly based on presumptions of our genital areas, our bodies are being categorised into one of two clearly defined boxes. These two gender archetypes are constantly socially demonstrated and reproduced, and thereby, continuously segregated from each other. In her book *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler focuses on the materiality of the body itself and offers an elaborative exploration on how heterosexual hegemony shapes the “matter” of bodies, sex, and gender.⁴⁹ From her viewpoint,

“sex” [...] is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled.⁵⁰

In order to overcome this forced materialisation of “sex”, we need to rethink those norms that are imposed on our bodies. Judith Butler’s famous theory on gender performativity depicts performative speech acts and non-verbal communication as the actuator and maintainer of those gender roles. Language plays a crucial part in this pre-categorisation process of the body’s matter. It pre-defines bodies; it denies the body what it can potentially become because of its linguistic pre-interpretation.

Erin Manning advocates for a *Politics of Touch* which, grounded on Butler’s work, theorises this thematic under the concept of “engendering”. She explains that to engender is “to reach toward bodies that are not pre-defined as gendered, not pre-constituted within static representations that befit the systems in which they operate.”⁵¹ She perceives touch as the performative element that can alter our predefined assumptions towards another body. When reaching out to touch someone else, one does not touch a pre-defined body fixed in space but rather a body that will become this body in response to one’s reaching

⁴⁶ Eva Modebadze, ‘Re-Patriarchisation of Female Bodies: Nationalism and Abortion Crisis in Poland’, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.13095/UZH.FSW.FB.265>.

⁴⁷ tagesschau.de, ‘Muttertag - Eine Erfindung der Nationalsozialisten?’, tagesschau.de, accessed 8 February 2021, <https://www.tagesschau.de/faktenfinder/muttertag-101.html>.

⁴⁸ Eva Modebadze, ‘Re-Patriarchisation of Female Bodies: Nationalism and Abortion Crisis in Poland’, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.13095/UZH.FSW.FB.265>.

⁴⁹ The terms “sex” and “gender” are often used interchangeably, however for clarification I would like to point out that “sex” refers to a set of biological attributes (the anatomy of an individual’s reproductive system) and “gender” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities.

⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20.

⁵¹ Erin Manning, *Manning, E: Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, Illustrated edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 90.

towards. Thus, the body is always in movement and in the process of *becoming*. When I touch another body, human or not, I realise my own body's limitations, while at the same time expanding them: "We share our surface in the moment of touch, we interrupt our-selves."⁵²

By rethinking the way we touch each other, we will be able to escape the imprisoning binaries that dictate our physical interaction towards one another. It is urgent to think beyond normative ways of relating to another and to re-invite *touch* into our sensorial everyday communication. For that to happen, we need to reconfigure our approach to sexuality and expand on the spectrum of bodily interactions and diverse forms of intercourse.

Artist, film-maker, and initiator of the *Skinship - a touch based place for kinship*, Melanie Bonajo creates their work around the topics of intimacy, sexuality, and human relationships towards each other, technology, and nature. Their work *TouchmeTell* is a sensual video piece documenting children exploring their physical contact with each other. Bonajo aims to open up a dialogue about relearning our behaviour towards sexuality, gender roles, and physical autonomy.⁵³ The documentary gives view to alternative forms of intimacy and body awareness. Seeing these kids open-mindedly sharing their experiences on feelings, physical sensations, and boundaries gives me hope that we can reconstruct the discourse about sexuality, sex, and gender.

Language itself can maintain dichotomous and restrictive patterns of thought, therefore it is important to allow it to alter, transform, and modify. A great example of linguistic reconsideration is Bini Adamczak's proposition of the term *circlusion*. The word aims to represent the antonym of penetration. It means to push something onto something else, rendering, let's say, the vulva, anus, or mouth as the active part in sexual acts.⁵⁴ Adding to our vocabulary and regarding language as a metamorphosing body itself can help us see the world from new angles. In the case of *circlusion*, it might enable us to create a less phallogocentric perspective on sexuality, intercourse, and intimacy.

The term could also be applied in different contexts. When holding a piece of clay in my hand, I am tempted to poke my finger inside it. Slowly, I push forward, progressively going deeper and deeper, entering the clay entity. Even though my finger is actively infiltrating the material, I let the clay guide this encounter as well. We are two volumes of matter exploring each other, penetrating *and* circluding. I experience a similar sensation when I sit in front of my laptop and the virtual sphere of digitality begins to absorb my body. The device, its softwares and internet access engage with me in a vital and vibrant interplay of collaboration. Together we shape a dialogue of interaction, we compose a rhythm, choreograph a dance.

Linguistic awareness can help us understand these encounters differently, hence, this attentiveness can give us the possibility to render not only a less androcentric but also a less anthropocentric view on bodies and their (inter)activity. All bodies in the scenarios described, alternate between activity and passivity. It is this vital entanglement between various kinds of bodies which I aim to demonstrate in this thesis as well as with my graduation piece.

I find it intriguing how art can visualise these interlacings of various corporeal materialities. The performance *Vessel* by choreographer Damien Jalet illustrates these bodily fusions of human and matter. The dancers appear as almost bodiless, humanless entities merging with their environment and each other. They seem to morph with the clay-like material that is surrounding them. They turn into non-human sculptures that continuously evolve through choreographic moments of movement.

Dance has the fascinating ability to bring the body's complexity and simplicity to the surface, highlighting the phenomenality of our bodies being able to move, to touch, to sense, to feel, to communicate, to interact, to become. Body movements can be viewed as relational performances, sculptures that repeatedly develop into new sculptures only to break away to *re-evolve*. Perhaps one could go so far and say that bodies are generators of continuous performances. With every new moment and every new movement, we have the potentiality to reinvent our bodies, ourselves, to create "endless art". In Silvia Federici's words:

The act of dancing is an exploration and invention of what a body can do: of its capacities, its languages, its articulations of the strivings of our being. I have come to believe that there is a philosophy in dancing, for dance

⁵² Erin Manning, *Manning, E: Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, Illustrated edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 13.

⁵³ Grrr.nl, 'Rabo Lab: TouchmeTell', accessed 8 February 2021, <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/events/rabo-lab-touchmetell>.

⁵⁴ Bini Adamczak Mon and Jul 18 2016, 'On "Circlusion"', *Mask Magazine*, accessed 5 January 2021, <http://www.maskmagazine.com/the-mommy-issue/sex/circlusion>.

mimics the processes by which we relate to the world, connect with other bodies, transform ourselves and the space around us.⁵⁵

We are always transitioning. Borders are problematic as they restrict this fluidity and flow of being in many different ways. Queer theory challenges those boundaries that are imposed on our bodies. Fortunately, gender transitioning is more recognised, accepted, and tolerated in more places than a short time ago. However, many trans* people still face extreme challenges in their everyday life because of their bodies' deviations from the "norm". At the same time, it becomes visible that gender transitions are much more culturally accepted when aimed towards the assimilation of the other gender. Once the transition is performed, the person can be re-classified into one of the two socially accepted categories. However, when a body stays in the "transitioning" state, within the non-binary, this in-betweenness seems to raise cultural insecurities and is received as a provoking or attacking act towards the rigid gender structure. Regarded as a threat to the ruling *cis-tem*,⁵⁶ these bodies suffer from marginalisation and displacement to the cultural peripheries. It becomes visible that gender still constitutes a border that is not easily crossed and, even less easily, deconstructed.

"Gender hacker" Paul B. Preciado highlights the entangled interlocking of body and border politics. Drawing on his personal experiences, he recognises the parallels between the treatment of trans* bodies and those of refugees. Followingly, he elaborates that

The trans person is represented as a kind of exile who has left behind the gender that was assigned to him/her at birth (the way you'd abandon your nation) and who is now seeking recognition as a potential citizen of another gender. In politico-legal terms, the status of the trans person is comparable to that of the migrant, the exile or the refugee [...]. In the case of trans people as in that of migrant bodies, what is being requested is a biopolitical refuge: to be the subject of a system of semiotic assemblage that gives meaning to life.⁵⁷

The movement of many individual bodies is controlled and limited because of prevalent cultural constructions, be that in the case of the deported migrant or the trans* person whose identity is not accepted at a border control. By identifying our bodies through cultural institutions, like gender or nationality, we construct categorisations that consequently borderise our bodies from others. I believe that we need to distance ourselves from those categorisations to enable free movement for bodies of all kinds, human or not. By reinventing our bodies as sexual beings free from pre-definitions, we can reintegrate fluidity within our bodily togetherness and recognise that we all are intrepidly entangled with each other.

⁵⁵ Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, 123.

⁵⁶ The term *cis-tem* is derived from the words cis (cisgender) and system and refers to a cultural structure that privileges cisgender people while marginalising and oppressing other gender minorities.

⁵⁷ Paul B Preciado, Virginie Despentes, and Charlotte Mandell, *An apartment on Uranus: chronicles of the crossing*, 2020, 174.

Bodies that produce, reproduce, transform, modify, and upgrade

In her essay *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, Silvia Federici, a feminist writer known for her research on witch-hunts, introduces the contemporary human body as an apparatus for labor: “Capitalism has treated our bodies as work-machines because it is the social system that most systematically has made of human labor the essence of the accumulation of wealth and has most needed to maximize its exploitation.”⁵⁸ She argues that throughout the development of colonisation and capitalism, not only the lands, but also the bodies that inhabit those, have been claimed and confined; although, this process was majorly different for men and women. Besides mechanizing their bodies into labor forces, paid and unpaid, women’s bodies have additionally been transformed into “sexual objects” and “breeding machines” (especially those woman bodies with uteruses).⁵⁹ Their reproductive abilities have been appropriated by national forces and, as discussed earlier, women’s bodies are still today governmentally controlled.

Especially, the cruel history of slavery highlights the exploitation of bodies for their capacity to produce but also to *re-produce*. Human bodies were more and more subverted to the assimilation of a machine. Women’s enslaved bodies and reproduction capabilities were utilised to maximise the capital, to reproduce and to generate workforce.⁶⁰

During an online lecture series on the thematic of *Wxtch Craft* given at my school, the Royal Academy of Art The Hague, Silvia Federici claimed that “women function like a colony that can be exploited”.⁶¹ This statement struck me and resonated with me. It kept lingering in the back of my head while I was conducting research for my graduation project. After the discovery of the clay, I moved on to the exploration of the electronic pottery wheel, integrating a technological element into my creative process. I was intrigued by its mechanics and curious about the electronic iteration of my clay-body research.

While exploring movement-based sculpting, at first I was tempted to create a collection of those sculptures. Due to the wheel’s “efficiency” it seemed easier to create this larger body of bodies, a *colony* to rephrase Silvia Federici, that would represent the ongoing and wide range of corporeal interactions between my body’s, the machine’s, and the clay’s movement. However, the resemblance to the famous *TerraCotta Army* by Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China,⁶² and its underlying patriarchal and military character made me stay critical about the involvement of the pottery wheel. It was not my intention to articulate a work that would be brought into context with any type of army or military force. Instead, my focus shifted towards the synergy between my human body and the mechanic. A foot on the pedal and hands on the clay, my body’s movement was whirling in synchronisation with the wheel’s endless spinning flow. In a sort of symbiotic trance and absorbed in the meditative process of creation, I was unable to tell where the machine began and my body ended, morphing clay sculptures swirling in between us.

Sensing my body assimilating the machine, I began to wonder what role technology plays in the process of bodily appropriation for labor. The conception of the human machine already exists for a long time. We can look back at the times when slavery was still legal or remember the Nazis’ forced labor camps, both occurrences abusing human bodies for their work force in atrocious ways. Yet, during the Industrial Revolution our behaviour towards technology significantly changed and, therefore, also the human body’s involvement in the economy’s manufacturing processes. In that sense, I am curious in which way technology is contributing to the development of our bodies into human working machines. To what extent is it reinforcing corporeal exploitation or, on the other hand, perhaps simplifying and even substituting human labor?

In so many ways, technology has already become a part of us, an expansion of our human bodies and its physicality. Like the common example of the smartphone, extending our hands and brains, technology begins to diffuse the borders of our biological corporeality, advancing this corporeal reality into virtual reality. Technology reveals the porosities of the human body and its ability to fusion. Yet, performance artist Stelarc

⁵⁸ Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*, Kairos Books (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2020), 11.

⁵⁹ Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*, Kairos Books (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2020), 14.

⁶⁰ Federici, 23–24.

⁶¹ ‘Online Studium Generale lecture Silvia Federici’, KABK, accessed 2 February 2021, <https://www.kabk.nl/agenda/online-studium-generale-lecture-silvia-federici>.

⁶² ‘Terracotta Army’, in *Wikipedia*, 4 January 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Terracotta_Army&oldid=998279968.

goes one step further with his famous claim that the human body is “obsolete”. He perceives the human body itself as the concept that has to be iterated, or as Brian Massumi puts it frankly: “If [Stelarc] is a body artist whose medium is also ideas, then he is not content with his medium.”⁶³ Throughout his transgressive performances, Stelarc converts and evolutionalises his body, exploring it as a human-machine symbiosis. However, he does not view the body in need for artificial substitution but rather uses different kinds of prosthetics as means of extension and potential human evolution.⁶⁴ Through his art, he weaves his body into the cybernetic web, blurring the boundaries between human and non-human body parts, between corporeality and virtuality.

Intrigued by techno-human synergies and cyborgism, our collective *sWitches* dedicates itself to the exploration of our human bodies as technologised controllers. During the performance *1n1t1@t10n*,⁶⁵ we displayed the collective’s manifesto through the electronic utilisation of our bodies. We applied conductive ink to our skin, thereby creating electronic circuits on our bodies surfaces, which would then manipulate the audio-visual environment. By entangling and wiring our bodies together, while simultaneously interweaving them into a cybernetic structure, we became part of a network that would extend our bodies beyond their physical outlines. Our skins mutated into trans bordering interfaces controlled through human *and* machine.

A crucial aspect of this performance piece was the feminist notion of reclaiming space and positionality within cyberspace and technological territory. We as *sWitches* want to boycott the facilitation of gender hierarchisation and marginalisation of bodies through the usage of technology. The aim is to interrupt the androcentric implementation of machinery into our society and instead to hack these patriarchal structures and mechanisms by reclaiming technology as our own tool of power, as our magic. We refer to the symbol of the witch because she is “seen by second-wave feminists as an exemplar of repressed knowledges and appropriated expertise,”⁶⁶ while “upgrading” her to antagonise our contemporary techno-capitalist context.

During the creation of our own manifesto, we were not only inspired by Donna Haraway’s famous *A Cyborg Manifesto* but also by the VNS matrix’s *The Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* and by Laboria Cuboniks’ *XF Manifesto*. These are all powerful literature references that call attention to the intricate entanglement of patriarchy and technology and, thus, the oppression and borderisation of bodies within tangible *and* cyber spaces.

In the book *Xenofeminism*, Helen Hester elaborates how their techno-materialist, anti-naturalist, and gender abolitionist form of feminism acknowledges technology “as one potential sphere of activist intervention”.⁶⁷ Opposing the so-called “natural” world, the members of Laboria Cuboniks, ironically calling themselves “Haraway’s disobedient daughters”, view the technological development of birth control and artificial reproduction as a way to overthrow oppressive “natural” conditions and their cultural reinforcements. Even though technology can be considered as a “double-edged sword” and can further the control and domination of labouring bodies, at the same time, one can see reproductive technologies as a potential liberation for people with uterus from the role as child bearers.⁶⁸ This could possibly enable a horizontalisation between the genders as well as an development of trans* and multi genderism. By reappropriating institutionalised medical technologies, Xenofeminism’s “radical amateur tools” encourage the emergence of communities of difference instead of replicating the same existent hierarchies.⁶⁹

From this viewpoint, technology transforms into an emancipatory self-help tool for bodily liberation. At the same time, it permits a blurring of borders in regard to the human body. This is not only demonstrated by Stelarc’s prosthetics and bodily evolutionism but also manifested in Paul B. Preciado’s craft of “gender hacking”. With his experimentations with testosterone and the documentation of that in *Testo Junkie*, he visualises how technology enables a corporeal border crossing. Thereby, he is not only diffusing and overthrowing the dualistic concept of human-machine but, simultaneously, that of man-woman. In that sense,

⁶³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation, Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 97.

⁶⁴ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation, Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 126.

⁶⁵ *1n1t1@t10n*, performed by *sWitches*, The Grey Space in the Middle, The Hague, December 14, 2019.

⁶⁶ Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism, Theory Redux* (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), 142.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ ‘Genderhacking an Alien Future: On Helen Hester’s Xenofeminism | The Mantle’, accessed 19 February 2021, <https://thementle.com/philosophy/genderhacking-alien-future-helen-hesters-xenofeminism>.

he acknowledges his cyborgism for the means of his own corporeal rebellion, while taking advantage of the techno-capitalist structures we are voluntarily and involuntarily entangled in. As Preciado observes,

The changes in capitalism that we are witnessing are characterized not only by the transformation of “gender”, “sex”, “sexuality”, “sexual identity,” and “pleasure” into objects of the political management of living [...], but also by the fact that this management itself is carried out through the new dynamics of advanced technocapitalism, global media, and biotechnologies.⁷⁰

These developments, he mentions, also greatly influence the perception of sex work. In homage and under the title of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, feminist porn artist Vex Ashley released “a visual essay and a personal exploration of a life spent online.”⁷¹ With this video piece, she highlights the integration of technology into the field of sex labor and thus the transformation of the porn industry and its influence on the individual sex worker. Nowadays, human bodies are not only physically exploited for labor and reproduction but also for their data. However, instead of simply regarding porn as a medium for exploitation and objectification of (mainly cis woman) bodies, ethical organisations like Vex Ashley’s artistic porn platform *Four Chambers* create pornographic content from a new perspective. They reclaim the porn actor’s bodies and determine the techno-sexual discourse in which they are implicated in. As she concludes in regard to her online experience, “We exist in a system that commodifies our personhood, our images, our data, and our lives online, to harness that isn’t freedom from it but it can be control.”⁷²

From any perspective, it is undeniable that technology does shape the narrative of our labouring bodies. It can be seen as an apparatus for furthered control and enslavement within a capitalist structure that continues to exploit our bodies, especially those of women and gender minorities, for reproductive workforce, among others. On the other hand, technology renders the possibility of a lifestyle beyond corporeal restrictions and limitations. It can potentialise a new space of borderlessness, while celebrating bodily fluidity of all kinds within our physical and virtual reality, or even within a fusion of both.

⁷⁰ Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013), 25.

⁷¹ ‘A Cyborg Manifesto | Cinema | Four Chambers | a Four Chambered Heart’, accessed 6 February 2021, <https://afourchamberedheart.com/cinema/a-cyborg-manifesto>.

⁷² ‘A Cyborg Manifesto | Cinema | Four Chambers | a Four Chambered Heart’, accessed 6 February 2021, <https://afourchamberedheart.com/cinema/a-cyborg-manifesto>.

Concluding on entangled bodies

Throughout this thesis, I have been exploring various conceptions of bodily outlines, boundaries, and borders trying to understand where a body begins, where a body ends, and where bodies eventually fuse. The human body constituted the central object/subject of this investigation.

Its skin—the dermis, hypodermis, epidermis, the fleshy coating, the meaty wrapper—is the largest organ of this body. It is its surface which provides protection for the inside, while simultaneously interfacing with the outside. Instead of representing a limit of impermeability, the skin can visualise a plane based on porosity. We can regard a body's skin as a surface of connection and as a space of communication, translating and exchanging information.

A body's surface acts as a facilitator of conversations; it is weaving storylines of bodily interaction together. Donna Harway's theory of *sympoiesis* and Jane Bennet's concept of *vital materiality* highlight these material interplays. Beyond corporeal boundaries, bodies of any kind are entangled into narratives of creating together, "making with" each other. Opposing speciesist hierarchisation and the nature/culture binary, the importance of ecology comes to the fore. In a *more-than-human* world, materialist feminists advocate for bodily horizontalisation and an escape from oppressive power structures that hierarchise, categorise, and borderise.

Nonetheless, borders are still part of our everyday life. They materialise in the division of the bodies of land we inhabit. Maps function here as facilitators of oppressive power mechanisms, rendering universal realities. However, the discourse on critical cartography points out the importance of an individual's positionality and the crucial necessity for an embodied mapping practice.

From certain angles, the body's borders are viewed as planes of separation. The focus shifts towards the distinction and disparity of different kinds of bodies, consequencing in their categorisation, hierarchisation, marginalisation, and oppression. Extreme and idealised nationalism can result in the segregation of those *othered bodies*, while institutionalised language can support these beliefs. The metaphor of the German *Volkskörper* visualises to what extreme consequences this discrimination can lead.

Language acts as a maintainer of normative structures as it pre-defines the body. This thematic is also strongly debated within gender politics. Judith Butler underlines how discursive formations create and uphold binary gender roles, while Erin Manning advocates for a *Politic of Touch*, which detaches the body from any pre-constituted interpretations. Instead, the body is regarded as a transformational subject, always in movement and continuously engaged in the act of touching, dancing, and *becoming*.

Technology extends the body's possibilities for transformation, as Stelarc's techno-evolution points out. While converting our bodies into machines and our machines into bodies, technology symbolises a tool of critical ambiguity. It reveals the blurring of our corporeal boundaries, expanding our bodies beyond physical and material limitations. The progressing decay of borders' tangibility through cyber, techno, and even viral developments, highlights their increasing abstraction, as well as their surreality.

The human body's skin is converting into a virtualised interface amplifying our capabilities of dialogue and interaction. Bodies and their skins are active narrators, sharing stories of living and being, stories of touching and embracing. Due to their ever transforming nature, the stories that skins tell never end. They continuously and endlessly mutate, rewrite, and retell.

With the creation of this thesis and my graduation project, I weave my own narrative into the discourse of entanglement. Sticking my fingers into the clay, I am exposing my own skin in the aspiring hope for touch. Touch, in this sense, symbolises the warm embrace and gentle encouragement for the co-creation of a more tolerant, horizontal, and intertwined togetherness. As an emerging young artist, designer, dancer, and question raiser, I consider it my responsibility to contribute to this movement. I see it as an urgency to deconstruct the need of *bordyrising*⁷³ our world and, instead, to celebrate the non-borders, the in-betweenness, the colourful gradients of bodily entanglement. Only then, in a post-species, post-nation, post-gender, post-capitalism, *post-border* world, our bodies will be able to freely connect, interact, relate, collaborate, horizontalise, encounter, flow, fuse, transition, touch, fuck, dance, produce, reproduce, modify, transform, upgrade, and *entangle*.

⁷³ The word play *bordyrising* is an invention and co-creation by Robinou and me. It describes the act of borderising the body.

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