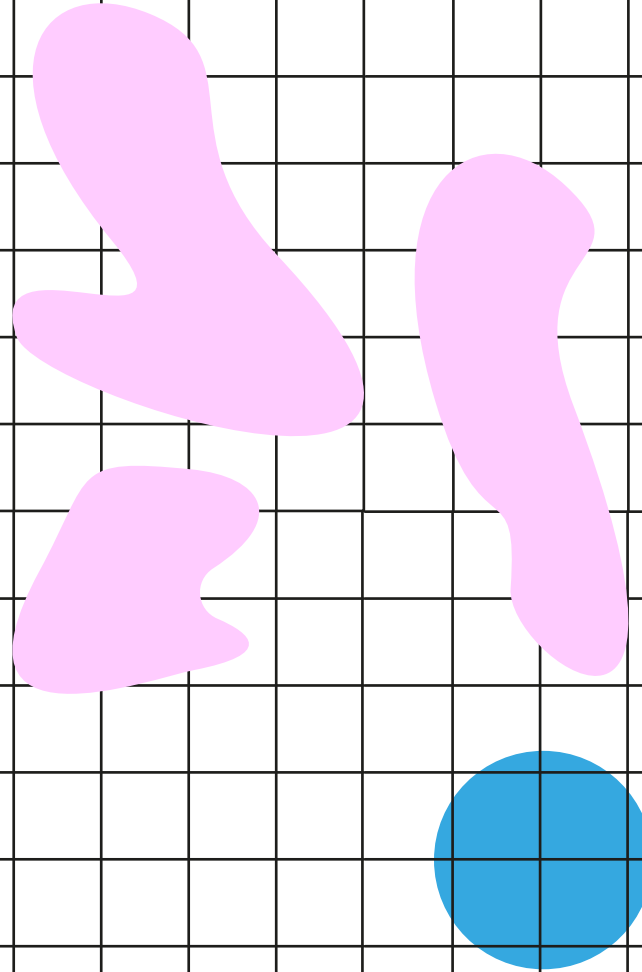


BULLETIN #20

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FIBERS
Voice,
skin and
earth

Renata Zas



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FIBERS. Voice, skin and earth

by Renata Zas

*Possibility lies beyond the rational version of reality*¹

This paper is aimed to invoke a different direction to the crisis that digital life and the Anthropocene are forcing us to face as humanity: instead of a speculative imagination about egress,² it will propose an intense recuperation of the potency of our sense of being nature, an extension of Earth, in our most immediate present. It seems as if the shift that Western theory is making in order to think of an alternative to the irreversible damage we have provoked to our mother Earth over the last century, and the highly unstable and tormenting damage that adapting to the rhythm of the algorithm has caused to our lives, is to imagine a world-without-us:³ «How would it be, a world in which capitalism accelerates until total collapse, cancelling the possibility of our existence?»

¹ Quote from the video *Parasitic Possitivation* (2018) by artist Sky Miriam J. Carranza, vimeo.com/289182415.

² I am referring specifically to the open-call proposal «on the hypothesis of a collapse of the IT infrastructure, and so, of a post-digital collapse», as an asphyxiation that the «omnipresence of computers» and the acknowledgement of the «predatory impact of humanity» towards our home, Earth, and to ourselves has had. A collateral reflection might be related to what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui introduces in her

My thesis is that non-human speculation of a world without us reinforces the dematerialization of our bodies, expanding the gap between our cognitive capacities and the sensitive container through which we experience life, our bodies.⁴ In this sense, this essay will raise the urgency of compounding new perceptions as an open door for new potentials. By understanding, as Gabrielle Dufour-Kowalska writes, that «Sensibility is the faculty of the real»,⁵ I would like to emphasize, on the one hand, the importance of introspection, attention, eroticism and affection which come along with the reconnection to our sensitive and empathic capacities. Understanding *erotica* as «the comprehension of the relation of the in-between of two bodies»,⁶ the ambiguity of what is left unsaid, through communication signs which cannot be equalized to binary codification.⁷ This understanding of complex and ambiguous signs can only take place through the experience of observation, in which time is not measured in terms of productivity.⁸ On the other hand, it will also propose the urgency to acknowledge the massive artificiality of the world we are living in, in which technological artifacts have stopped functioning as *techné* and have become an escape and, at the same time, a drag of cognitive forces. Being the smartphone the principal technological tool of the present, distant from its utility, the gadget has become a permanent source of desensitization, which deprives us of «looking to the stars»,⁹ and of reminding ourselves which is our own breath's frequency and time.¹⁰

In this sense, would it be possible to imagine ways to avoid leaving our bodies, and instead to think, live, feel and process through them? This is a proposal for recovering the sensitivity of our flesh – our «epidermal intuition»?¹¹ Why are we speculating about egress if there is still plenty of time?¹²

last book, *A Chi'xi World is Possible. Essays About a Present in Crisis* (see footnote 9): instead of a rational disconnection from Earth, an absolute realization and union with her.

³ «Denying the anthropological view means considering the world as not simply the world-for-us or the world-in-itself, but as the world-without-us». Eugene Thacker (2011). *In the Dust of this Planet*. Winchester: Zero Books.

⁴ I call our body sensitive mobile or sensitive container, through which we process experience.

⁵ Gabrielle Dufour-Kowalska (1996). *L'Art et la sensibilité de Kant à Michel Henry*. Paris: Vrin, 11-12. Quoted in Franco «Bifo» Berardi (2015). *And: Phenomenology of the End*. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 37.

⁶ I am using the concept of *erotica* in the sense that Byung-Chul Han and Franco «Bifo» Berardi propose, as an indecipherable secret (Han) and «the comprehension of the relation of the in-between of two bodies» (Berardi). Amador Fernández-Savater (2018). «Volver a aburrirnos es la última aventura posible: entrevista con Franco Berardi, Bifo». *EIDiario.es*, www.eldiario.es/interferencias/Volver-aburrirnos-Franco-Berardi-Bifo_6_826677345.html.

Byung-Chul Han (2015). *La salvación de lo bello*. Barcelona: Herder. [My translations.]

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Here I am specifically thinking about dating apps, in which the time and space to meet new people is optimized within the conditions of neoliberal capitalism: you can measure how successful an encounter was if you accomplish something you aimed to do. For example: having sex, meeting someone you like, etc. There are also people who can book two dates in the same day, like a medical appointment or a work meeting. Notwithstanding, the process of really understanding if you like a person or not sometimes requires more than one conversation, more than one lunch, a walk, a random encounter; a time that is non-productive in economic terms.

⁹ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018). *Un mundo chi'xi es posible. Ensayos sobre un presente en crisis*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 90–91 [my translation]. Complete quote: «Here, a parenthesis: I believe that when the Earth snoozes, for example when the tsunami that took place in Japan in 2004, in April 2016 in Ecuador, or the most recent one which desolated Mexico City in 2017, we realized the tremendous artificiality of this world in ruins which has deprived us of looking to the stars; the world of modern technological artifacts. The Earth shakes and we discover the fragility of everything we take for granted: water, light, gas connections. Everything cracks if the planet scratches its nose and snoozes. This dynamic of acknowledging is highlighted and raised as discussion by the effects of climate change; we are living with tragic evidences, which have made of the indigenous paradigm an effectively alternative one».

¹⁰ When we practice things like meditation, yoga, RPG, or we just look at the stars or lay on the grass while listening to the birds, we remember our bodies and our existence as an extension of nature, our mother Earth. Thinkers as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui are proposing «to breath thought» (in Spanish, «respirar el pensamiento»). See Javiera Naranjo and Sofía Bensadon, «Respirar el pensamiento» (2018). *Oficios varios*, oficios-varios.cl/respirar-el-pensamiento. This metaphor implicates an immediate deceleration: a disconnection from the demand of the digital and the neoliberal acceleration fixed to its system (the «digital or attention economy»), and the recognition and reencounter with the perception of our own rhythm of breathing, which is individually unique. In the Darwinian process of adaptation, we have unconsciously adapted to the rhythm of the machine (in contemporary societies: the computer, the smartphone, the tablet), and have forgotten our own. Adaptation is part of the Darwinian evolutionary explanation which, in the latest and current phase of capitalism, has reached to unparalleled consequences reflected in all the psychopathologies, and their subsequent pharmacologization: we take anxiolytics to cope with the speed in which responses are demanded from us, far from a healthy and natural cooperation. If the world won't collapse tomorrow, if digital *techné* will still be one of the main mediators of communication and a source for working, we need to «reeducate our bodies, within processes of attention, gesture, and also of tranquility», as Cusicanqui explains. In a similar way, in his latest interviews and his most recent book, Berardi is calling to «breath together», highlighting breathing and poetry as modes of resistance to virtual acceleration. Ramiro Sanchiz (2018). «Respirar juntos: Franco "Bifo" Berardi en Montevideo». *La Diaria*. Franco «Bifo» Berardi (2019). «Breathing. Chaos and Poetry». London: Semiotext(e).

¹¹ Berardi (2015), 40.

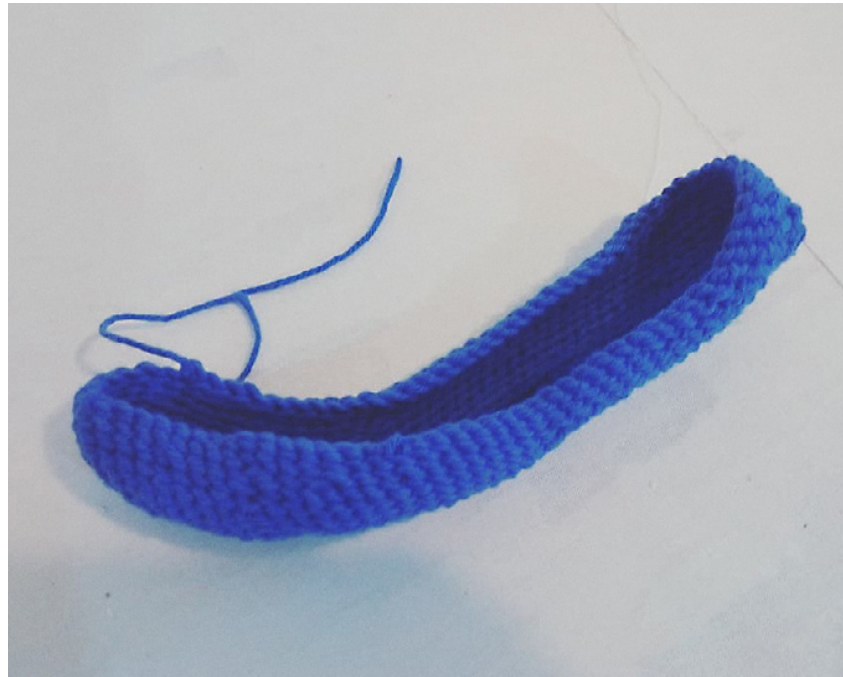
¹² The purpose of this essay will be to stand as a counterproposal written in the geographical crossroad of a Latin-American city like Buenos Aires.

Ways of recovering our «Epidermal Intuition»

I - Volver al tejido (back to knitting)

For the past month I've been taking part in a knitting club powered by Argentinian artist Florencia Caiazza,¹³ with whom I've been collaborating since 2015. In 2016, Florencia and I started a dialogue departing from a new series of works we named «binary drawings». In these series of black and white knitting, the act of sewing wool is conceived as an action of drawing, and mistakes as glitches.

¹³ Florencia Caiazza was born in 1982 in Buenos Aires. She lives and works between Buenos Aires and Dublin. www.florenciaciazza.com



Knitting samples during Florencia Caiazza's knitting circle at her studio in Buenos Aires (2019).

The series kept on going as a work-in-progress, affected by different contexts in which the artist developed new parts of the project. Each phase took place in different cities – Hamburg, Buenos Aires city, Bolougne (a neighborhood in Buenos Aires’s suburbs) – as well as in different kinds of places: residencies, the studio, a municipal building. Two months ago, Caiazza and I presented a project for an open call, in which the knitting club became a workshop inside the exhibition, as a place to meet and learn together. After sending this application, the artist decided to start a trial version of it in Buenos Aires. I signed up and participated very actively from the beginning. Myself, who had never done anything with my hands except for cooking, and who always accompany the work-in-process as an actively mental observer (pretty much involved in the theoretical side), started MAKING.



Knitting samples during Florencia Caiazza’s knitting circle at her studio in Buenos Aires (2019).



Horse eating grass at Mike's house, San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina.

Knitting teaches you, it is not constant acceleration, but constant movement that engineers the whole procedure. Even if slow, even if you knit in the wrong hole and have to go backwards and knit again. While embracing pace, the continuing movement of that action is what builds great and unexpected forms. Knitting trains another dimension of brain activity, bringing fresh air to cognitive exhaustion or what I am now referring to as «epidermal intuition». When hands are involved, the body is involved. Knitting embodies a step-by-step process, which necessarily implies the exercise of deceleration, that does not mean to «stop», but – on the contrary – to persist in time, opposing the rush of anxiety.

*«Happiness lies in the body. In having a body, using a body». He flexes his bicep. «We are as free as our bodies are strong, and we will use this strength to strengthen the ties with our ancestors».*¹⁴

Similar to what the act of contemplating fire or water moving enables us to understand, knitting is not only contemplation, but action itself.

II – The time of the countryside

The current state of the Human Condition, what Luciano Floridi calls *HyperHistory*,¹⁵ is a time in which we sit more and more in information and communication infrastructures marked by speed and the constant need of stimulation. This paradigm has shaped society within a constant search for new «highs of intensity» in drugs, changing relationships,¹⁶ marketing products, etc. It is in this meditation and spinning speed in which sensitivity mutates, detaching from the body, and therefore, from the biorhythm.

¹⁴ Cally Spooner (2014). *Collapsing in Parts*. Milan: Mousse Editions, 76.

¹⁵ Luciano Floridi (2014). *The 4th Revolution. How the infosphere is reshaping human reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 30: «With the appearance of third-order technologies all the in-betweenness becomes internal to the technologies, no longer our business. We shall see that such a process of technological internalization has raised concern that ICTS may end up shaping or even controlling human life». 40: «On the one hand, by shaping and influencing our interactions with the world, first-and second-order ICTS invite us to interpret the world in ICT-friendly terms, that is, informationally. On the other hand, by creating entirely new environments, which we then inhabit (the out of the loop experience, functionally invisible by design), third-order ICTS invite us to consider the intrinsic nature of increasing portions of our world as being inherently informational».

¹⁶ As Byung-Chul Han exposes, the tactic now is diversification, similar to what happens in the financial market. Divide and win. «Sensitivity is vulnerability [...] It is not possible to see in a different way without

One of the simplest and most complete experiences of coming back to the understanding of what it is to be human is confronting ourselves with a context in which we cannot accelerate, nor impose other rhythms than its own, like what happens while spending time in the countryside. It is in the experience of consequent sunrises, sunsets, rains, sunrises, sunsets, rains; in the smell of mood; a system of life and work pace guided by nature and daylight, when the body surrenders to deceleration. A feeling in which nature takes us in, neither happy or in ecstasy, nor sad; but infused in wisdom. This is when the acknowledgment of the truly human condition takes place: ***we-are-nature***.

«Epidermal Intuition» – What is it

As a reconfiguration of the epidermis, recovering from the obnoxious state of contemporary hypercomplexity¹⁷ requires a state of consciousness and awareness that I trust can be found more easily away from the overflow of images and information than closer to it.

More contemporary art, more cinema, more books, and more of all the kinds of information we usually take in, may not be the way to overcome the state of impotency invading our new generations.¹⁸ As curator Omar Kholeh ironizes in his popular book *Goodbye, World! Looking at Art in the Digital Age*, art may have become «a special addiction [...] reclaimed from elites and rearticulated as a funfair, a tourist attraction, and a public commodity». In pursuit of «**the idea of “liveliness”, we have become veracious globe trotters who are suffering from perpetual artworld ADHD**».¹⁹ In the same line, we can suffer of an information ADHD, when we achieve more and more data without

exposing oneself to infringement. To see presupposes vulnerability. If not, the same is repeated once and again [...] Moreover, the current positive society eliminates the negative side of the wound. And that can also be said of love. Any highly costly intervention that could conduct an infringement is avoided. Like capital investments, libidinous energies are dispersed among many objects, avoiding total loss». Han (2015). «Estética de la Vulneración», 53-54.

¹⁷ Hyper-complex is a term used by Franco «Bifo» Berardi for the period in which the stimuli of information accelerate at a speed that makes it difficult for the mind to process and understand critically. This happens in a context in which the density of information generated by users and bots saturates the capacity of the receptive brain to process; translated into a misadjustment between the «bio-rhythm» and the algorithm. Berardi (2015), 27, 231.

¹⁸ Franco «Bifo» Berardi (2017). *Futurability. The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*. London: Verso. Byung-Chul Han (2018). «Ahora uno se explota a sí mismo y cree que está realizándose». *El país*, elpais.com/cultura/2018/02/07/actualidad/1517989873_086219.html.

allowing enough time for that content to breath –busy with our jobs, our duties, and our personal investigations.

In a way, this is what Franco «Bifo» Berardi has defined as the new a-critical generation whose time to develop a critical analysis has been cancelled: «Modern political discourse was essentially aimed to persuasion and consensus building, while the present info-flood leads to pervasion, to saturation of the attention time, and finally to the disablement of the critical faculty, the ability to discriminate between true and false, between good and evil».²⁰

Epidermis is *trace and body*

«... the world only becomes part of our experience when our skin enters into contact with the body of the other, whether human or non-human, and warmth can flow from one organism to the other [...] *Noli me tangere* (touch me not) seems to be the rule of behavior of modern society, where the hygienic obsession has joined and reinforces the religious one».²¹

So then, may we ask: *which modes of living allow us to be aware of emotionality, of epidermis, and of intuition? Is breathing together and being with others where the real joy of living life and being human relies?*

I will now attempt to risk that it is through physical contact and experience and not through intellectuality that the ways of recovering our epidermal intuition may lay. In this sense, I propose that it is urgent we act to reconnect with that vibration. Primary reactions, such as playing an African drum and feeling the resonance of the leather with our hands: that concatenated vibration between one's hands,

¹⁹ Omar Kholeh (2018). *Good-bye, World! Looking at Art in the Digital Age*. Berlin: Stenberg Press, 97, 99.

²⁰ Quote from Berardi's review of Angela Nagle's book *Kill All Normies*, titled «In the shit storm»: Franco «Bifo» Berardi (2018). «Nella tempesta di merda». Wu Ming Foundation, www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2018/06/kill-all-normies.

²¹ Berardi (2015), 49.

plus the instrument and the pulse of one's heart, could be another experiential example we suggest to the list.

It is not only with your ears, hands or arms; it is a connection with our inner intensities and bodies as a whole – a place where that intuition can be rediscovered.

The answer is with others

To round up, I go ahead again, and ask ourselves: which are the affective collectivities where vulnerabilities are exposed today? And, in what ways can we reenforce them?



Renata Zas (Buenos Aires, 1990) is an art researcher and curator based in Buenos Aires and other places. Between 2003 and 2008, she completed her secondary studies at Escuela Superior de Comercio Carlos Pellegrini, University of Buenos Aires. In 2009, she started contemporary art and management studies at ESEADE – Instituto Filadelfia (Buenos Aires). She was fellow of the Artists' Program at Torcuato Di Tella's University Art Department (Buenos Aires, 2015) and of Art and the Poetics of Praxis in Cognitive Capitalism at Saas Fee Summer School (Berlin, 2018). She also holds an MA in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths University (London, 2017). Renata has recently received the scholarship BECAR Fondo Nacional de las Artes (Argentina) to travel to Italy for a month on a field research trip (2018). She is interested in horizontal practice as a work methodology and is currently researching the last and ever-expanding technological revolution whose effects are sensed both in human sensitivity and empathy. Renata has worked in Buenos Aires as assistant curator; coordinator, producer and programmer of artistic workshops for Centro Cultural Kirchner; assistant for contemporary art galleries, art editorials and art residencies. She also assisted artists and curators in different projects. Renata's practice is influenced by curator and writer Rafael Cippolini, philosopher and media theorist Franco «Bifo» Berardi, and therapist Daiana Dominguez, among many others.