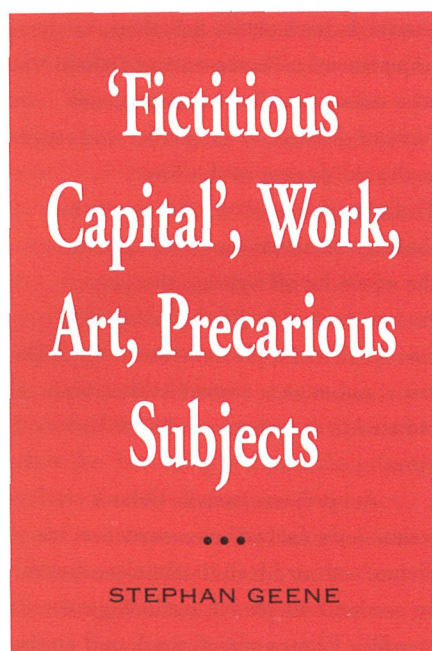


TRANSFORMATIONS

Virtual Insanity, the title of the 1996 hit single by Jamiroquai, nicely indicates the perfidies of the term 'virtuality.' Either you are sick, you pretend to be sick or you are trying to make yourself believe you are sick. And this is hypochondria, which is 'really sick.' Is the 'virtual' best understood as a virtual space, a virtual capitalism, or a virtual state of mind? If that which is 'virtual' still has anything to do with that which is 'possible' or with that which is 'to come,' what does this mean for cyberspace or the internet, which are already installed?

Since 'virtual' can be applied to a wide range of phenomena that are important in contemporary society (production, sex or space), it has to be taken seriously. It might seem somewhat paradoxical to connect a 'possible' space (like the sketch of a building) and an actual one (like the animated space of a movie or the 'room' of an internet-meeting) so as to create something existing. But this happens. Maybe this is what promise has become in the advanced marketplaces of consumer society: something which is yet to come (*after the commodity is bought*), something which, however, will not come, and is not supposed to come. As much as the promise of the commodity fetish, virtuality aims at a specific receptability on behalf of the 'user.' A specific consciousness, mentality or subjectivity is required by both. Virtuality then, might describe those phenomena which are used to 'mediate' consumption in a techno-culture; it is something of a 'strange attractor' in the modeling of impulse, motivation, lust and attraction. Is there 'Virtual Ecstasy'? Maybe such experience is to be found at a rave event or by means of a pill. But the thing that serves as 'ecstasyfier,' that which money is spent on, is not the 'pure' techno-rave or the dose of



MDMA/XTC. There is always something 'more,' some X around the X's of techno-aesthetics, synthetic pleasure and hybrid substances. Commodity fetishism is involved - along with the reified promise which performs its mental-technicality (the suggestive sound iterations of techno music and the chemical mind drugs). Advanced capitalism in general, is a fireworks of packaging and displays, of distanced and self-critical operations of empty promise, of the fun of being aware of constructions. Putting the promises of the commodity under investigation, does not imply the opposite: that is, go for the real thing - do battle with animals or have sex, since everybody knows that sexuality is no guarantee for happiness or ecstasy, but can be a rather complicated issue. The expression 'have sex' is telling: there is no escape from fetishism, even while performing the 'real.'

Buttons + Rhetoric

The internet, the talk of the town, is the virtual in use. To click on the discourse button labeled 'enter

cyberspace/internet,' is to open up a well known and rather homogeneous set of beliefs, images, tastes and sentiments. Cyberspace - Virtual Reality - is associated with movement, 'lightness,' a strange category of bodily and bodyfree feelings, vague sentiments of globalization, unlimited access and ability. It hints at emancipation from the restraints of class, tradition and matter, waxing lyrical about 'new democratic utopias' and 'new spiritual citizenships.' Its adherence to the tradition of the enlightenment project of capitalism is obvious. The button 'enter cyberspace' works as a rhetorical figure, organizing discourse, destabilizing traditional structures in economic and social life, urging companies all over the world to revamp their enterprises, changing learning schedules at schools and universities. This figure is active in tackling the preset conditions of the ego and its self-images. It enforces a transition from the image of the human subject as a rather sociological or psychoanalytical type (the individual as having a 'role' in society or, as an ensemble of instincts) to an image of the subject whose self-reflexivity or mirror-reflection is rather like a pilot, navigating through the night of the real/cyberspace, detached from bodily needs.

This rhetorical figure is ideological in the foremost sense of 'ideology' as something that makes something else invisible. Cyberspace talk hides actual transitions in the economic field and in the status of the nation state. Fun, consumerism, flexible identities, voluntarism, technological reasoning, low-cost progress, access for all and internationalism are the topics on the agenda. These are the new cartographies of abandoned zones (detached from world trade economies and from data highway infrastructures): the precarious

nature of work (enormous unemployment rates in Europe, new quick jobs in the US), and new forms of computer-assisted euthanasia. The ideology effect makes this development appear as a necessary and automatic process of differentiation in the means of production. The rhetoric hides the agents of global and national capital, the agents who have, since the early '70s, pushed governments to loosen restrictions on money and currency. Therefore, monetary deregulation became one political answer to the crisis of Fordist production.

Involuntary Actors

To enter cyberspace is therefore a political act - even if you are just playing. That does not mean that play in cyberspace should be politicized: it does mean that the assumptions and alleged promises which are reproduced in mainstream and critical discourse have their serious sides. All the internet verbal amplifiers, that is, press such as *Wired*, critics like Mark Dery, or activist organizations like the 'Next 5 Minutes' in Amsterdam, are political actors. Notwithstanding their different political positions, they are part of a struggle to make virtual reality indispensable, either by means of tautological processes (new technologies are heralded as the new paradigm, because they say they are) or just as self-fulfilling prophecy. Certain segments of the art world were, if not decisively avant-garde, still sufficiently ahead of the public in discovering cyber technology as a 'new' aesthetic paradigm in which to reestablish the myth of the avant-garde, in its techno-cultural manifestation. Artists and curators became active in the most diverse levels of cultural production. Peter Weibel's arts and science shows in Linz (*Ars Electronica*) and Jeffrey Deitch's exhibition 'Posthuman,' are prominent examples. These exhibitions are sometimes incredibly naive, like Weibel's "*Genetische Kunst - Künstliches Leben*"

("Genetic Art - Artificial Life") in 1993, which gave genetic engineering total credit for being able to solve every remaining problem on earth. In other instances, such shows have been impertinent, as in the case of Deitch, who subsumes all the emancipatory force of discussions on gender and race under the project of the New Technologies, as if 'Act Up' were the same as the techno-medical apparatus, the whole lot all fighting the same enemy. And with this figure of ONE enemy, a social phenomenon - the AIDS crisis, as activists named it - has been reduced to a coding/recoding killer-virus.

Art projects such as Orlan's techno-surgical 'self-reconstruction' or Stelarc's absurd techno-extensions, add an aesthetic surplus to technological progress. These projects are based on the premise that bio-technology makes the total construction of reality (including differences of gender and race) de facto and materially possible and true. This discourse is ridiculously void of any insight into the real state of medical arts. As astonishing as cloned animals might be, they are effects of trial and error experiments and not the result of an easy 'steering' of life. The discourse of bio-technological emancipation is furthermore naive in not realizing the stigmatizing character of techno-determinism: the allegedly 'bad' gene is no better a stigma than the color of skin or eyes. Bio-technics (in the mainframe of a computer-aided conception of the world - of the gene-code as the truth of life) and the naiveté of believing that everything predicted by science will come true, combine to forge a strong ideological determinism. This involves the refusal to see, for example, that the plausibility of the gene code paradigm is restricted, that it might help explain only some, and not all, diseases. The gene code is not for a moment the book of books - as AIDS research painfully indicates. The gene code and, with it, the whole paradigm of the technological,

can be debated. Richard Strohmman attacked "molecular genetic reductionism" in 'Nature Biotechnology' (March, 1997), and the technological paradigm has equally been challenged by critical AIDS groups, who have defied the strong hypothesis 'HIV = Death,' as well as by cultural projects that have tried to "devalue biotechnological suppositions," rather than aestheticizing them (for example, *GameGirl* or the exhibition of different activist groups *Nature™*, both organized in 1994/95 by the Shedhalle in Zürich).

Flexible Agents

The representation of technology plays an important role in the modernization of society. Discourse and art are forceful actors in the process. The plausibility of techno-culture is mediated far more by aesthetics than by science. It has been fabricated through an alliance of consumer gadgetry, new strategies in fashion and advertising, the look of trashy detachment, and the commodity-like phantasms of subject formation. The interaction between aesthetics, the art market and society, is not restricted to symbolic parameters. The average urban artist functions as a role model in another dimension. S/he paradigmatically answers the new demands of the advanced urban work force: s/he is a social being, acting on his/her own account, according to a reflexively stylish and non-determined social identity, and working in all categories at hand. It is not an aesthetic reflex that we see in some slacker films, but social reality. The big cities are crowded with *thirty-something* people, sustaining themselves through simple jobs in order to pursue their interests, which they experience as '*eigentlich:*' self-destination and social/professional agency appear fully distinct. This phenomenon is part of capitalist history. The land worker was long ago forced to find work in the city. As in the case of the Gastarbeiter in Germany in the '60s

and '70s, work was often found in Fordist corporations, amongst members of a stable corporate identity. Today's new 'sub-proletariat' of the urban centers will not end up in a fixed place, but is rather forced to share different jobs and stay beyond any identification of this kind.

The American theorist Donna Haraway describes marginalized workers as those who are thrown out of consistently formulated subjectivity. She cites as her examples, women (often black) who work in the Silicon Valley industry or in the new industrialized telecommunication zones in India. That which defines subjectivity - autonomy and universality - is precisely that which is withheld from these women. They find themselves bodily stigmatized twice - as women and as black. Haraway refers to such subjects as cyborgs, as occupying a subject status that is decentered and connected to outer agents. The cyborg might be connected to machines, to stones, or to animals. In any case, this is a status stripped bare of a strong, universal, white, decision-making, male subjectivity. This 'decentered' status appears to offer the chance of overcoming patriarchal subject fixations. Toni Negri has pointed out, in reference to the notion of the cyborg, the ambivalent nature of work under late capitalism. For Negri, work is a rather repressive phenomenon and its precarious, or even 'hybrid' status, in a toyotaistically organized workplace (with lower hierarchies and work teams on all levels to manage production), is rather liberatory. Neither author negates the repressive character of the New Technologies: both are conscious of its ambivalences and its impact on subject formation.

Cyberspace rhetoric has ideological implications to the extent that it mingles with the process of subject formation in capitalist societies. The French philosopher Althusser described ideology as that which places subjects in the way they regard themselves: as individual,

autonomous, unitary cells. Ideology makes 'you' act like a subject (and therefore you are a subject). Ideology treats you as the proprietor of your property, including all your capabilities and bodily appearances: 'I' plus 'what I am.' This ideological call into social being (interpellation), reappears in the context of New Technologies. It is seen in those theoretical debates on 'techno science' which state an allegedly epochal shift in subjectivity: the digital image (and digital imaginability) are seen as entering the inner core of the subject in formation, 'like a virus.' Lacan has described the mirror stage - the moment when the 'becoming' subject, the infant, realizes its own distinctness from the world and its own individual wholeness through seeing itself in the mirror (an alienating medium), or in another person (for example, the mother). The 'techno-culture' tries to update Lacan's position, by evoking the new technological devices retrojected in the mirror stage as ersatz, as a digitized phantasm (ghost), mirroring human appearance in a 'virtual' gestalt, yet paradoxically ready to lose its identity and shape. Others, more critical towards the emerging new technologies, like the American literary theorist Rowitha Müller, instead detect a purposeful dramatization of absence and 'Schein': "*The blinding light of digital perfection now provides the mirror or recognition or rather mis-recognition, because even an electronic imaginary ceases to exist when the plug is pulled. Therefore the supportive strata of material reality, of bodies, spaces, masses, and by association, of women, must be suppressed and disavowed so as not to disturb the pristine self-reflection of cyberspace.*"

Production of Subjectivity

The production of subjectivity is at the heart of the new technologies. This is for philosophical reasons (technologies claim to work the riddle of both life and

consciousness), but also insofar as they are part of new consumption strategies in a society that produces less through material production than through services and leisure-time gadgetry. "Work isn't working," heralded British Telecom, in large advertising panels of summer, 1997. British Telecom was the first company (in tradition-bound Europe) to be privatized and to go public on the stock-market. Deutsche Telekom followed, starting a gigantic and pretentious media show of making money out of money by investing in the brilliant future of new technologies. This happened during 1997, when official German politics started to acknowledge globalization and the deregulation of social standards as the necessary doctrines for the coming decade. When everyone in a society is urged to go private or become corporate, to give up ideas of collective worker unions, to feel the pressure of economic survival without health care as we know it, we find ourselves determined by a new spirit of being-for-oneself.

Soft - concerns 'ware' - not soft

What is virtual reality actually, and what does it have in common with the internet? The answer is more complicated than it seems. While the internet is an easy thing to refer to - the on-line data telephone complex that everybody knows - virtual reality is not. The internet is communication that creeps through a kind of 'space.' What type of space is this? To name it 'cyberspace' would not be totally on target, because it does not take much computing of space in building up that mediating something that enables connection. Considering the MUDs and MOOs, where actors consensually meet in medieval huts, imaginary streets and certainly in on-line rooms, the case is quite different: the 'space' here is verbal and to a certain extent imaginary, but still not very 'cyber,' that is, there is not much cybernetic technology involved.

While the MUD (the room where the 'action' or conversation takes place) is virtual, this is as virtual as any board-game (Monopoly, for example). The virtual is supposed to be an all-embracing process of reducing material expenditure to a maximal zero. The absurd new buildings furor of investment money in London and Berlin shows that this is somehow not true. There is at least some antagonism inherent here. The phantasms of material reduction might find their extremes in the forms of artificial life, where little animals 'live' inside the computer, needing care and feeding, blurring the subjective factor in an hallucinatory manner. Tamagotchis (little artificial gadget-animals to be taken away) are designed to be fed and looked after. Somebody's got to do fulfill these tasks, in order to keep the little creature alive, to make it exist. In a board game or an internet role-playing game, the actors are still necessary, even if some 'bots' should be involved. Two Tamagotchis caring for one another, or a game in which only 'bots' are participating, is practically senseless, but might well come to happen.

Beyond the contradictory and deeply ideological fixing of terms like 'virtuality' in a techno-cultural normality, there is more to be discussed: *"At the end of the 20th century comes about the long prophesized convergence of the media, the computer and telecommunication to a hypermedium. Once more the untireable longing of capitalism to diversify and to intensify the creative potentials of man is into changing qualitatively the ways we work, play and live together. Via the integration of different technologies through common protocols there is something being produced that is more than the sum of its parts."* This is an excerpt from a text by Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron titled "The Californian Ideology." The text has been widely acknowledged within the net community, for its criticality towards the

community of "computer-enthusiasts, lazy students, innovating capitalists, engaged activists, fancy academics, futuristic bureaucrats, and opportunistic politicians." Barbrook and Cameron trace the contradictory nature of the new alliance that unifies ex-hippies with capitalists, and subcultural activists with old school reactionaries. How has it come to be, they ask, that the new ideology conflates the goals of west coast drug users with the likes of Ronald Reagan, who had the former beaten up by the police in May 1969 in Berkeley's People's Parks, to the ends of controlling and suppressing hippies: *"Who could have seen, that such a contradictory mixture of technological determinism and liberal individualism would become the hybrid orthodoxy of the information age."*

Change, Labeled: Change (Globalization)

That talk of the internet hides transitions in the economic field, is not always evident, since internet culture is about the transition of an era of material production into a so-called era of information, or an information age. Yet, the term 'information age,' with its pseudo-logical appendix of 'friction free capitalism' (Bill Gates), is radically misleading. While the extent of material production has been lowered (for example, Volkswagen now makes more than 50 percent of its profit from finance deals), it remains indispensable. Saskia Sassen rhetorically asks: *"Why do they bother to make cars as they make no profit on the cars?"* Her answer is as follows: *"well, the production of the cars is a mechanism for concentrating a vast amount of money within a time-frame of nine months where you can use it only on a daily basis in your financial division and make money. This has created an enormous distortion. I mentioned the case of manufacturing, because financial capital is, yes, to a large extent, self-referential. It has*

invented circuits for its own circulation, which are fairly autonomous from the rest of economic systems. However, manufacturing matters, not just because we are still consuming, no matter how digitized - we all need clothing, we all need cars and tables - but because manufacturing is one mechanism for bringing enormous liquidity into the system." (Saskia Sassen in an interview in: "3. hilfe;" Munich, 1997).

Money

In 1992, the investment funds manager George Soros made a fortune by investing in the downfall of a currency. That kind of profit-making is effected through signs and numbers; it is 'virtual.' It was powerful enough to endanger the British financial economy. Evidently, it was not just signs and numbers.... The flow of a currency depends on political and industrial parameters, and it can be manipulated through stock market operations at the same time; as Bundes- or Federal Banks prove frequently, by supporting their currencies through interventions on the money market. And yet, the profit made at Wall Street and elsewhere is still astonishing. The ratio between capital used in the material world economy and capital used on financial markets is 1:100 (cf. J. Huffschild, 1995). The link between the sphere of the real (industrial accumulation) and the sphere of the monetary, is constantly under reconsideration. The diffuse future of cyberspace money politics is enforcing this process. Cybermoney is more a catchy word, than anything else. Right now, on-line or off-line money (moneycards which are charged or have to be linked to the bank) are nothing more than extended versions of giral money or credit money, extensions of the so-called dematerialization of money. But a more intricate question is hidden behind the notion of 'cybermoney.' This consists in an ultra-liberal proposal to conceive of money as something that can

be invented, that can be privatized, and can be an object of governmental steering or marketplace deregulation, like any other commodity. The conservative monetarian F.A. von Hayek claimed: "Money does not have to be created legal tender by government: like law, language and morals it can emerge spontaneously. Such private money has often been preferred to governmental money, but government has usually suppressed it" (cf. Friedrich August von Hayek (1978), *Denationalization of Money - The Argument Redefined*, Institute of Economic Affairs, Washington D.C.). Can money - a value-storage device (*wertaufbewahrungsmittel*) - engender value by inventing or creating money? In the first place, this seems to be a contradiction: since you can not have 'Gedankengeld' (Sohn-Rethel), or mental money, and since intersubjectivity is money's precondition, you cannot have 'private money.' The guarantee of a constant value is what the money is about. There can not be more money than purchasable goods, because this causes inflation, according to which money is devalued - inflation prevails until money and goods are equal again. The amount of offered goods (and offered services) is dependent upon demand. That made J.M. Keynes say: 'Money is the drink that stimulates the market.' The postwar years in the west were deeply structured by a Keynesian state-apparatus, that not only governed the quantity of money-circulation, but subsidized the private sector by spending large amounts of public money ('deficit spending'). Schools, hospitals, universities, infra-structures, the military apparatus, research and development are receiving large influxes of governmental capital, to the extent that the German economist Elmar Altvater describes it thus: "Public debt is the wealth of the society."

The situation remains ambivalent. The enormous budget deficits filled up by governmental debts, sum up the

extent to which governments might not be able to pay interest rates. Whether continuous indebtedness is the problem, or a hideous strategy to guarantee a limited solution, is difficult to decide, and remains a major discussion around Europe's unification. Right now, the monetarian logic serves the investment companies, and renders possible continuous accumulation and supranational fusion. The profit made on the financial markets and in monopoly-like companies is not fictitious (even under conditions of constantly enlarging markets, as in the computer industry, only hyperfusions make profit worthwhile, as shown in Apple's bowing before Microsoft during the summer of this year). The profit's genesis through credit and credited credit (which are the only factors in expanding the quantity of money circulation), is just more difficult to recognize. It is not the worker, nor the machine, that is the prototype of contemporary production and wealth. Neither is it the immaterial concept of the computer or of bodiless intelligence. It is, rather, the management of production, the international division of tasks to effect ultra-low salaries, the use of currency differences, and sophisticated and extensive consumption strategies.

Money-Aided EGO Design

Under given conditions, the individual subject finds itself enmeshed in a net of money matters. Housing, life-style, food consumption, ennui, excitement, satisfaction, affection, self-esteem, are all shaped by financial conditions. It is not only at Christmas that the individual household is connected to a flow of earned or credited money! The change in governmental politics concerning welfare and the deregulation of employment restraints, increases the 'stress' that households undergo in sustaining their survival. While the area of production decreases, the area of reproduction becomes more important;

the reproduction less of workers, than of consumers. Post-Fordist production is forced even more to let consumption happen on a large scale and to go for 'revolutionary' speed in renewing consumer goods, with the help of sophisticated design. The promise of use-value, the aesthetics of commodities, a notion invented by post-Marxists like W.F. Haug in the '70s, became the core of production. That makes corporations like Nike or Coca Cola economically gigantic. But while the use of a Cola is easy, the use of its *Gebrauchswertversprechen*, its aesthetics, has to be learned. 'Learned,' in relation to the work that is necessary to stay updated in advertisement-reception, and 'learned' in relation to the individual and fetishistic economy of promise, optionality, ersatz.

The amount of work that has been done on behalf of young, independent cultural producers to develop a technoculture, is enormous, and cannot be gauged economically. It involves encouraging people all over the world to learn computer-programming, to become familiar with the internet, to learn how to write html-protocols, read cyberpunk literature, learn to feel dizzy and techno-esque. Surely that was emancipatory work; there was fun in reversing an authoritative technology into funky gadgetry, and making people feel good. That is true and untrue. It is like falling in love with somebody new.

Object of Desire

In "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture," Laura Mulvey develops a connection between Marx's and Freud's understandings of fetishism. First of all, there is a difference: on the one hand, for Marx, fetishism involves a lack of the inscription of the working process on the commodity's surface, while on the other hand for Freud, "the fetish object acts as a 'sign' in that it substitutes for the thing thought to be

missing.” (cf. p. 11). “There is nothing intrinsically fetishistic, as it were, about the commodity in Marx’s theory,” argues Mulvey. Maybe Marx himself failed to explain why a lack of inscription alone made it possible to make the commodity something ‘magic,’ which he himself felt urged comparison with religious experience. Marx contained himself to the explanation of this psychic ‘surplus’ which conveys the false appearance of the commodity’s autonomy or the ‘life’ that commodities seem to contain. Freud’s account seems necessary to an understanding of some of the implications of Marx’s analysis. Why does the subject feel sufficiently attracted to the commodity, to go on staring at ersatz objects of fetishistic sheen, at the ‘rich sight’ (Mulvey), to go for the abstraction of touch, of experience?

At the height of Hollywood cinema, the dark hole of the movie theater was the space in which the spectator could feel nourished by being fed a “beauty that covers lack,” by witnessing deeds executed on passive objects, that is, a space for somebody, being on the hook of ersatz, on the hook of what the ersatz is about: life. The spectator does not necessarily believe in what s/he sees. S/he is just expected to act as though if s/he does. This is exactly the way Althusser defined ideology. Christian Metz’s conclusions regarding who believes in film’s narration, are interesting not only for his analyses of the cinematic apparatus, but for his further explanation of the impact of ideologies: “In other words (...) since it is ‘accepted’ that the audience is incredulous, who is it who is credulous? (...) This credulous person is, of course, another part of ourselves.” (Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p.72).

This fragment of a person, this alien gadget of subjectivity, can be traced through an array of different theories. Maybe it has to do with the

idealist cogito, that Adorno extracted out of the commodity fetish as *falsches Bewusstsein* (false consciousness), or with what the sociologist Alfred Sohn-Rethel made clear to be an effect of the praxis of money: the *Transzendentsubjekt*. In 1990, Sohn-Rethel claimed to have found transcendental subjectivity in the monetarian coin. He made use of two interrelated ideas. The *‘Realabstraktion’* of market exchange, abstracts the qualities of commodities to what they equal, their value. The moment of exchange fantasizes a pause in the alteration of commodities through time. The goods are conceived of as being beyond time and space, while they have to be transferred from the old owner to the new one. These *‘Realabstraktionen’* are translated into *‘Denkabstraktion’* through the ambivalent character of the coin. The coin introduces a special kind of ‘matter,’ since money usually consists of a substance that does not fade, that does not lose value by being used. The substanceless substance, which becomes common practice in the market-place, is guaranteed through every emitting financial institution, the function of which are to replace ‘used’ coins by new ones. Sohn-Rethel argues that the money owner identifies with money, that is, with its pseudo-transcendental state. While Sohn-Rethel was only interested in proving the descent of idealist philosophy from an historical and economic phenomenon, his proposition can be extended by relating the transcendental subject position to everyday reflexivity: by considering his/her own steps - halting, breathing, trying to make decisions - the subject becomes the self-reflexive owner of his or her own qualities, his or her own money, or possibilities.

To the ends of putting that fragment of a person, that everyday cogito, into action, we might connect it to Pierre Klossowski’s thoughts in *La Monnaie Vivante* (“The Living Money”). Klossowski’s cryptic but

extremely interesting book, starts with the conception of “le support,” the carrier, screen, surface of personal identity. This screen is not due to outer attributions - it is due to the effect of a rejection of pulsate motives. But these pulsions are part of commodity movement, a source of exploitation, as well as an extension of what Rosa Luxemburg, in her reading of Marx, referred to as *“fortgesetzte Akkumulation”* (“ongoing accumulation” - in opposition to Marx’s “ordinary accumulation”). Klossowski calls upon us to imagine: ‘What if we would not get paid by money, but by other people?’ Money would then come close to its own paradoxical core: that is, the real thing, by being the ultimate use-value - on the real media: the sensation.

Klossowski’s book is a *mise en scene* of thinking (akin to Michel Foucault’s “*Theatrum Philosophicum*”), rather than a theoretical approach. But it reveals a certain insufficiency of the conceptualization of consumer society as we know it. It is neither a rational process, nor a management of work and financial options alone. There must be something more to be exploited, to be addressed, to be shaped, to be moved. This is certainly not life in its unalienated state, and yet there is nothing to be alienated (since this presupposes something unalienated, real, pure etc.). But life - being at stake - acts as a precondition, or, psychoanalytically speaking, as a motivation. This is pumped up by fetishism, because the deepest longing does not consist in any experience, not in Genus, pleasure, since this is limited, but in ‘possessing’ motivation (cf. Marjorie Garber). And this is exactly what the ‘screen’ - the fragmented self - is able to feel nourished by.

All the big V’s (Virtual reality, -space, -life, -sex, -capitalism) are the technicalities of putting this subject position into action, existential promises of coded use-values.