



HAMBURG  
MASCHINE

## **Publication**

### **HAMBURG MACHINE – Exploring a different digitality**

(Working Title)

## **Specifications**

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5 interviews, or rather conversations between artists and theoreticians

5 artist contributions on the realised projects designed by the artists

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## **Book Exposé**

### **HAMBURG MASCHINE – Exploring a different digitality**

by Oliver Leistert

The communal initiative project *Stadtkuratorin Hamburg* was centred around the topic of *digitality* in the context of urban public spaces and art, in its second run from 2018 to 2020 under the title “HAMBURG MASCHINE”. The conception of the project came from the city’s curator Dirck Möllmann. He passed away on 21 September 2019, and therefore could not finish his work on the program. Additionally, he had planned a comprehensive publication with contributions on the thematic areas he had outlined. With this publication we intend to pick up those threads once more that were spun in the program of Hamburg Maschine, and add new ones. In this sense, we want to introduce the topical features of this publication.

With the concept of Hamburg Maschine, Dirck Möllmann started a curatorial project that conceives urban space as a machinic assemblage, a machine that consists of interconnections between a.o. techniques, bodies, subjects, and affects, and thereby creates multiple polycentric assemblages. Möllmann borrowed this expanded concept of the machine from the French activist and philosopher Félix Guattari (1930-1992), and thereby carried out a number of definitions, the configuration of which we intend to freely develop in the following.

#### **Open our thinking in order to act**

First of all, the definition of the machinic creates a productive difference to earlier comparisons of urban space as a machine.<sup>1</sup> This machinism disengages from being only a technical understanding of the machine that has defined our thinking since the era of rationalism. In continuation of Félix Guattari, we are

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<sup>1</sup> The motif of the city as a machine became relevant (at the latest) with the development of industry within cities. It is therefore a motif of the Fordist era. However, the motif quickly depletes – at least as a model for analysis – if the city is solely described as a mega-machine that spits out e.g. workers from trains and buses. In this case, the fascination stems simply from the size of this mega machine, its turnover and its pulse (Mumford 1936). Marcel Hénaff also dealt with the concept of the city as a machine in his history, “to the extent that it organises, produces, and transforms” (2019, p. 71, translation by CH).

therefore interested in overcoming the opposition of man and machine, of subject and object, and generally overcoming binaries that define, limit, and seal off Western thought. We are focused on experimental, after-modernist thought processes that can initiate unavoidable action in the face of the irreversible planetary destruction caused by capitalist modernity. This also explicitly concerns Hamburg, as it stands as a mighty North European logistics hub, and thus supports the fatal development of everlasting growth, rather than bravely exploring and experimenting with alternative economies that do not simply create more wealth for those who are already wealthy on the backs of those who are weakest.

That is the Hamburg Machine: The fumbling search for openings for the coming generation. Yet why attempt to make the semantically deeply connoted modernist image of the machine productive?

For Félix Guattari, who was always searching for the diversification and transformations of concepts during his lifetime, it was ironically the machinic that held the power to heave our thinking out of the constrictions of modernity, as it first and foremost refers, in a very elementary and functional manner, to production rather than representation – also in the technical, objectivised form of the machine: In its core, the concept of the machine is creative, inventive, and opening. This opening of the concept of the machine quickly sheds light on why there are never only technical machines: Even in the case of automatised production facilities of serial objects, there must be an assemblage of vast varieties of types and registers in regard to the interplay that the technical machinery answers to and through which it comes into the world. These relationships, the assemblages and entanglements are not as obvious, as they are detached from objectifying language and a thinking based on the rational, reductionist, and calculating. Yet that is precisely the point: Revealing those interrelationships that do not end in the modern image of the subject being subservient to the machine. Especially those currents of the pre- and trans-individual, accessible to us in the realm of the micro-political that allow us to speak and act as individual, normalised subjects in the first place. Machinic assemblages therefore create the underground that allows for the production of subjectivity and objectifying thinking, i.e. the creation of a self-relation.

However, if the machinic precedes the constitution of our subjectivity, and even stands as a condition for it, then this would also hold a possibility of laying a trap for capitalism, since, as Maurizio Lazzarato writes, it is the “machinic enslavement that gives capitalism a sense of omnipotence, by taking a path that goes through the various roles, functions, and significations, through which individuals identify and simultaneously alienate themselves.”<sup>2</sup> It is therefore always too late to try and connect the previously objectified, the fixed, the molar (in the words of Guattari) to an emancipatory practice. The capitalist apparatus of capture operates *before* the rational, and thus *before* an intelligible definition or rather division between subject and object. Therefore, we must also start *before*, before it settles, before it sediments.

It is this machinic enslavement through the apparatus of capture on a molecular level that also makes us accomplices in this toxic formation. This must be broken open. This is the horizon of the term of undetermined machinic assemblages that we intend to encourage with this publication.

This openness is a window to a different future that intends to break free of the destruction by planetary capitalism. In other words: machinic processes they move, are dynamic, they connect and pair off. While they produce, new and other values are being created. Creativity, innovation, and invention are cause for individuations next to the streams of desire. Machinism can open, just like art can open – this is our hope, and simultaneously our proposal.

## **Prisma Digitality**

Machinic assemblages in various registers and intensities polycentrically enrich themselves with the problematic of digitality; the invisible, the strange, seemingly immaterial, only modulated, dispersed across the planet in unique topologies and patterns, and thus steadily subjugates the world programmatically to further abstractions and lifeless temporalities. Digitality is a vector that goes beyond calculation and the simulated worlds it creates. Digitality supersedes space in a time that takes away the possibility of difference and homogenises it. Today’s programs run globally dispersed without any display of it. Digitality intervenes much more radically in our experienced time than we

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<sup>2</sup> Afterword in Gerald Raunig, 2008, p. 121 [translated by CH].

know. It inserts itself into modes of subjectivation, shifts and establishes a time regime of eternal present by simulating the past and the future through recursion and repetition.

More and more, our modes of subjectivation run aground, they experience a temporal crash. The intensity grows between the histories made and experienced by people, and the modes of time of digitality that interfere with the condition of possibility of experience, with the goal of reducing the time that can be experienced to a resource of calculation and operation. Stress intensifies. Depression intensifies. The ability to differentiate between working and not declines.

However, when the digitality reaches the biopolitical, subjugates the body or makes it an accomplice at a hostile pace, then the inhumane historylessness of digitality is on the brink of structurally spilling over into the organic physical world that shapes our doing and our perception. Thus, digitality structurally determines the realm of possibility of our actions in advance through technical protocols, megabits per second, algorithms, and interfaces. The future of coming generations is sold off on the stock market every nanosecond.

These are all control dispositifs that are established and that work. We have long become accomplices. Yet, it is up to us to bend these fatal vectors, to develop alternatives. This book reacts to that need.

### **Smart City? Machinism Hamburg!**

If we connect the question of the city with the problem of digitality, the internet will first spit out a sketch of a “smart city”: a slogan that the city of Hamburg currently is very keen to adopt. We cannot identify with the song of those trying to sell us digital extractivism, techniques of surveillance, a telos of perpetual optimisation, and the discriminating operations of big data and AI as the only forms and fields of digitality. We declare that another digital world is possible. It is high time to think about a datafication of the city based on democratic principles and general well-being, indeed, to plan that city. This book also intends to give starting points in this direction.

The phantasma of a post-cybernetic city inscribed into the smart city represents the meagre horizon of the imaginary that is the idea of smartness is

based on – similar to what Gilles Deleuze had already anticipated in 1990<sup>3</sup>: The modulation of zones, the access through passwords, the temporary segregation of the city. Truly: Let us think back to Hamburg during the G20 summit in 2017. In this case we can clearly see that our experiences of modulated exclusion from public life and the attempt to silence democratic protest in favour of the reactionary and inhumane politics of the G20 are not things of the distant past: “There are certain hours or even only seconds, during which certain territories may be entered. That the card is invalid may be due to the individual carrying the card, whose signature does not allow certain movements. Yet perhaps the problem of validity is not even due to the identity and number of the individual, but rather to conspicuous movements of single things and multitudes, which cause the temporary closure of a territory”, says Gerald Raunig in regard to control<sup>4</sup>. This is simultaneously an expression of the smartness regime of a city: Being able to switch between different political regimes for different phases<sup>5</sup>.

The type of smartness is offered by IBM and Cisco to representatives and investors of today’s major cities in glossy magazines: Technical sedimentation of authoritarian politics, particularly in regards to poorer people and those without rights. Access and stay can now be modulated from afar. Smartness intends to globalise a logic of zoning that defines itself by permanently renewing insecurities, as well as replacing every social question with infrastructure, sensors, and data analysis that make up for the idea of development and reduce the future to maintaining the status quo. A desire for a future shaped by more social justice is regarded as a fault. The city of Hamburg held the number one spot on the Smart City Index 2019 of the industry association *bitcom* – a fact that makes us more uneasy than proud. With this book we are therefore also searching for cultural theoretical, and ethical aesthetic arguments, processes, experiments, as well as decenterings that we can incorporate into the purely competitive urban marketing, so that Hamburg does not fall victim to the execution of visionless programmed computer consortiums. The IT-strategies of the city of Barcelona are an inspiring example for this, as they declared their

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<sup>3</sup> In „Postscript on the Societies of Control“.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Raunig, „Dividend“, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> The Corona pandemic can currently only be mentioned on a side-note, however it must be said that it also entered into a direct alliance with digitality, and basic rights are being put on hold.

highest goals to be the common well-being, data privacy, and participative and experimental democratic processes, and impressively implemented such measures after the Smart City contracts of the previous government with IBM and Cisco were terminated.

### **Change probabilities, practice diversification**

How is any of this connected to art? Art is the polar opposite of this type of smartness. Because it opens up things, it can institute other prototypes and experiments. These could be from a different, virtual future, one that may seem improbable at the moment, but can suddenly become real. Félix Guattari dealt intensively with questions surrounding new organisations or institutions that help articulate collective desires outside of the state apparatus.

We want to find the trail of urban machinic assemblages in this book, by bringing together various authors, as well as those artists invited by Möllmann, and asking them to share their perspective on the question of openings, thereby increasing the respective probabilities of alternative developments that would otherwise be turned back from and calculated into the improbable by the capitalist regime of digitality. In the context of the problematic surrounding digitality, the diversification in this book mirror those originally conceptualised by Möllmann.

– **Work and reproduction in the digital:** What role can wage labour still play if large parts of production and distribution have either been automated, or solely take place in the digital world. Who profits from such change? What are the alternative concepts to survival in the digital world? How can processes of progressing partition and atomisation of production steps that isolate the worker entirely be stopped? And who will then pay our pensions?

– **Knowledge:** How do we deal with the paradoxical situation of drowning in information? Which types of knowing and forgetting can save us now? What real effects do open licences, open access, as well as open mapping have on urban processes? And what about the questions concerning the relationship between

knowledge and practice, the questions concerning a knowledge that guides actions and has consequences?

– **Ecologies:** How can we move from modernist dualities, such as culture and nature, or emotions and rationality, towards an after-modernist thinking, that overcomes its anthropocentrism? How to make the term techno-ecologies fruitful in regards to the understanding of the city under the pretext of digitality. Is the call for ecologies but compensation for our undecidedness when it comes to our surroundings?

– **Public space:** Commercial social networks have nestled themselves into the function of the creation of public spaces in many different forms. The far-reaching consequences are alarming and go from Brexit to Bolsonaro. What can be seen here is that the production of public space has degenerated into algorithmic operations guided by the market. What happened to the old narratives surrounding the internet that were so full of hope for democratic effects? What will happen *after* the internet, that has become but an individually calculated marketing channel with a credit card function? If the public needs anonymity, how can this be ensured digitally?

– **Infrastructure, logistics, migration:** The harbour in Hamburg is a trading centre of globalised production that was shifted to those places in the world where labour is cheap and workers rights are practically non-existent. From there, more and more people are making their way up north in search for a better life. What would be the infrastructures needed for a just distribution of goods? What would be the *actual* social and economic balance of a globalised production of goods? How can supply chains be made transparent, and what would the value in that be?

These are but a few of the questions that motivate us to publish this book. The goal is to make a positive contribution to a changing city, its assemblages and machinisms that emancipate themselves from the laws of the market. Hamburg is a focal point for us, but we also want to explore further, in order to

help us understand that a city that is simply economically competitive severely restricts the realm of possibilities of its inhabitants, excludes many of them, and turns participation into a PR gag. We believe digitality can open other perspectives. We want to build those political, economic, and aesthetic dispositifs – and even if it is currently only in text form – in which existential changes can be rehearsed. Additionally, the artistic projects that have already taken place have been documented through photographs, and are complemented by interviews.

### **The editors**

Oliver Leistert investigates the effects and turbulences that media technologies have on subjectivation processes and greater social structures in his research on media and technologies. His investigations focus on commercial social media platforms, new technologies such as Blockchains, but also the problem of surveillance of protests in times of the digital.

Isabella Kohlhuber is a media artist and communications designer. Her work particularly focuses on the role that writing plays and the meaning of knowledge in these digital times. As the partner of Dirck Möllmann, she has accompanied the entire project Hamburg Maschine from its conception to its implementation.

(Translation by Christopher Hütmannsberger)