**"The property-less sensorium": Following the subject in crisis times[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

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**Introduction**

The contemporary landscape is reshaped and remade daily by fluctuations in the flow of money and goods. This process of transformation can take many forms. Where the specialist jargon of financial trading diversifies into the speech environments of everyday life, the transformation is *discursive*; where movements in interest rates induce banks to foreclose on their clients’ mortgages, the transformation is *material*. It’s not hard to find evidence for the influence of the abstract and systemic forces of financial exchange on the discursive and material elements of social life, yet the role of those forces in creating subjects compelled to speak with such abstract concepts or to experience the resulting material conditions is much harder to bring into view. The human subject is not the sum of her language and environment but an active entity who *works through* them, and thereby makes herself. (Though, it goes without saying, she does not do this in conditions of her own choosing.)

The system defines the subject, but subjects also define the system. Subjective formation comes to pass in subjugation to a system logic that, although it acquires materiality through exchange practices between people, stands over and against those people. Capitalism is another word for the choreography of their daily life to its ends. This process takes precedence in such a way that capital’s system of reproduction is today one of the only aspects of this life that is repeated and not subject to change. Despite the escalating demands of the total system of capital on social relations, people today still manage to fit more neatly into its needs than ever before.

By moving through a tangled dialectic of contemporary subjects and practices of abstraction, the intent of this essay to understand how current shifts in the material relations of money, commodities, and social abstraction in general, shape contemporary social relations. Furthermore, through discussion of salient subject positions of the present, we will try to better understand the social and political possibilities which contemporary subjectivity keeps foreclosed.

**Metapreneurship**

We commence from the theme of the present issue - the social and affective profile of the 'entrepreneur’ in its generalization across the cultural horizon. The entrepreneur offers a strikingly useful starting point in its status as an individualized 'meta-subject' of the contemporary capitalist order. The heroic phase of the entrepreneurial figure coincided with the heyday of the creative economy, interrupted by the 2008 economic crisis. Still the prevalent model for workplace practices across the board, the entrepreneur has begun a more abject[[2]](#footnote-2) phase in which it now connotes a type of subject that applies their self-motivated subjecthood to ensuring their survival in qualititively new ways. As with the previous phase, the entrepreneurial figure is defined by a speculative subjectivity - "speculative" both in the sense of a speculative social praxis, and the speculative logic of capital, which are linked to one another by their orientation to the future, or by their ways of modelling futurity. However, even in its “social” variety, entrepreneurial speculation entails a specific dynamic always oriented around reinforcing the survival of the self and its flourishing in opposition to other people. “Social entrepreneurship” mediates this connective logic of the speculative as the non-conflict between economic and social ends, which converge in a progressive, or at least better engineered, future. While speculation is required to reimagine social relations outside the grooves of possessive individualism naturalized by the entrepreneurial model, the adoption of speculation as an attitude is also s an adoption of the speculative logic of capital.

This can broadly be defined as the self-expanding, or self-valorising, dynamic of capital 'as such', i.e. the permutations of the form of value as it unfolds and shapes social life. Marx outlines this dynamic as that of the automatic subject', self-expanding value as a self-actualizing cause of wealth amidst "externalities".(Marx 1990: 255).[[3]](#footnote-3) Speculation as social form - a subset of which can be named as 'the financial industry' – can be seen as an intensification of capital's future-oriented logic of growth. Thus the 'speculative' seeks to encompass both a subjective and an objective mode for capital’s social expression in the ongoing era of neoliberalism. This period has witnessed the subjective qualities of flexibility and innovation become objective factors of workplace productivity, while objective productivity itself shifts to the indeterminacy and risk associated with 'creative financial instruments' as the primary mode of capital accumulation. On a more macro level, financial speculation—as in venture capital buyouts, public-private finance initiatives, international ratings agencies and bond markets—sets the conditions of development for both non-finance capital and state services, as many accounts of financialization have described in great detail (Lapavitsas 2012; McNally 2011; Brenner 2006, 2009; Bryan and Rafferty 2006; Martin 2002).

In this context, we can see speculation as central to entrepreneurialism, deployed both as an identity norm in the labour market and as a path to social “empowerment.” At the same time, the always-latent coercive side of entrepreneurialism comes to the foreground in the era of austerity. We are all entrepreneurs of ourselves and our communities now, a re-jigging which sees this identity not so much idealised as enforced—a survival discipline for disinvested populations while 'wealth-creators' go on accumulating their surplus labour and sweated debt payments. There are then attempts to re-start accumulation on ever more marginal and self-exploiting grounds, from above as from below, at best as the homespun alternatives of crowdsourced medical expenses and volunteer-run libraries ), at worst as 'primitive privatization' rather than organized challenges to the dominance of abstract value.. On the European stage, it is clear how more recent ideologemes such as the 'Big Society' or the 'Participation Society' continue to uphold an older neoliberal doxa about creativity as an economic nostrum, this time in a more socially inflected version. Consequently, policies praising co-operation and self-organization having taken the place of a mytho-poetics of self-reliance in legitimating regressive agendas.The hope is that a co-operative collection of 'selves' can manage austerity better than an atomised one. In the best case scenario, perhaps, these selves form communities which are both too de-politicized to wonder about the upward migration of resources and resilient enough not to cause too much of a fuss about impacts.[[4]](#footnote-4) Here free-acting individuals choose to supplement the provision of absentee governmental structures while effecting a further emancipation of governmental agencies from their role in social welfare. Meanwhile, in job markets plagued by unemployment, capital’s originary reliance on the pressures of the wider system as its best weapon of coercion, while preserving the freedom of choice of individual workers, is turned up a notch. Entrepreneuralism becomes the grey labour discipline of the unemployed caught in the various surveillance and maintenance organs of a dangerously decomposing welfare state. Work-readiness takes the place of waged employment, which is to say, a subjectivity normatively attuned to the experience of work at any price or at no pay at all, driven only by the 'passion' native to the entrepreneur. , the grey labour discipline of the unemployed caught in the various surveillance and maintenance organs of a dangerously decomposing welfare state. Work-readiness takes the place of waged employment, which is to say, a subjectivity normatively attuned to the experience of work at any price or at no pay at all, driven only by the 'passion' native to the entrepreneu

**Follow Your Dream and Share It**

The injunction to be an entrepreneur in a faltering economy is responsible for the growing popularity of services such as Taskrabbit, Fiverr or Uber. These companies, as well as re-structuring in the more 'traditional' ends of the employment market (a process that has led to the rise of zero-hour contracts, among other developments), rely on a 'just-in-time' model which creates unparalleled levels of drudgery and mandatory flexibility for their participants. Such low-overhead, no-accountability service provision is rapidly consolidating into the job profile of the future. As a result, the labour market becomes increasingly unfavourable to anyone lacking an 'entrepreneurial' subjectivity. A species of 'creative destruction' devolves upon individual aspirants, creating the conditions for individuals to internalize and mirror back capital's failure to valorize anything but the thinnest margins, as their own failure.[[5]](#footnote-5) The structural imposition of 'creative destruction' as psychological norm shows that the conflation of personal narratives with the valorisation prospects of capital *in general* implants the entrepreneur as the optimal subjective infrastructure of 'human capital'. This implies a heightened and intimate embodiment of capital's affects as one’s own, a circumstance in which 'human capital' becomes a real abstraction which functions as a necessary index of the social order, and which is also functional to its reproduction (rather than being merely business jargon or an ideological whim coextensive with neoliberal governance).

While management and appropriation of labour-power within capitalism is always shaped according to the most lucrative methods of surplus value extraction, such methods are optimized to the highest degree in sharing economy practices that strip labour of the specificity of workplace or specific time, eliminating everything but the barest social relations needed to reproduce it.'Boss-entrepreneurs' consume the labour of 'employee-entrepreneurs', and absolute flexibility is demanded because all parties involved rely on higher profit margins drawn from labour productivity We can see that the tendential becoming-entrepreneurial of all labour, waged or not, is predicated on structural imperatives to restore profit margins by lowering or displacing the cost of labour as much as possible. The spread of the 'gig' or 'sharing economy', as in companies such as Taskrabbit, also indicates that the algorithmic management of this labour needs to dissimulate it as anything but labour.[[6]](#footnote-6) Such management forestalls any considerations of social and individual justice which might arise in the capitalist labour market with the warm glow of communal exchange and affective ties unmediated by abstractions such as wages, regulations and contracts. The start-up entrepreneurs are, of course, valorised in the usual way, drawing their rewards from the ATM and not from the reputation economy.[[7]](#footnote-7) In other words, while the 'reputation economy' is a vital networked source of cash flow both for enterpreneurs who seek to attract venture capital and those who want to just make a survival income from the work they find on micro-tasking platforms, the class relations at work here, and the different ways they inscribe necessity on these enterpreneurial bodies, are what is at issue. The fact that 'self-employment' is often enough a status imposed on workers by thrifty employers well demonstrates that entrepreneurship exacerbates rather than resolves the asymmetric fallout of capitalist crisis. Evidently, capital needs to break its own baseline conditions – in this case, free labour as a contractual relation between individuals - now as in all times of crisis, in order to valorise itself, rendering the majority, now surplus to those prospects of valorisation, as variantly successful entrepreneurs.

The emergence of the 'sharing economy' is almost *too* symptomatic of crisis economics that transvalue instability into sustainability through a Silicon Valley theodicy of popular entrepreneurialism. conditions of crisis management. [[8]](#footnote-8) The reputation market which codifies the transactions in a sharing economy, sees the abstract discipline of money, and the relative freedom it brings, shift to more personalized forms of affirmation and control. This results in a sort of regression from the abstraction of the 'general equivalent' back into forms of social discipline more characteristic of pre-modern times, albeit one which, unlike in pre-modern times, mediates an ever more powerful rule of abstract value on a systemic level (Marx 1973: 164).[[9]](#footnote-9) In the algorithmic concatenation of sharing economics, the boss-entrepreneurs step back and let the pressure to feed and clothe oneself do the work for them. The “subjugated” entrepreneur has to survive on ever more meagre but still socially necessary scraps with which to reproduce their labour power.[[10]](#footnote-10) This total making-contingent of work encompasses real and formal subsumption – a re-articulation of work conditions mixed with the extension of the working day. Furthermore, the constant shifts in what is “socially necessary” in a society of de-valorisation and techno-depreciation, are no longer considered anyone’s responsibility, but as we have seen, managing their consequences are certainly part of the entrepreneur’s job profile.

**Proper Subjects**

Thus, despite the maximally stretched condition of the contemporary entrepreneur, there is still a sense in which it is the cutting edge (of devalorisation). Where capital directly commodifies subjectivity and social relations as individual capital it aligns the characteristic mode of capital accumulation - self-expanding value - with the self-realization of the subject. 'Speculation as a mode of production' becomes a conceptualization of how we can relate desires for personal and social change to speculative capital as a biopolitical device for the production of subjects who identify with capital *immanently*, rather than *ideologically*. The de-valorisation of labour-power (reflected in escalating unemployment but also cutbacks in the reproductive sphere, such as in public services, sickness benefits or housing) exposes the contradiction between the rigid rule of the value-form over the mode of production and the dogma of 'flexibility' as the template for capital and 'human capital' alike. Labour's material identification with capital intensifies, as credit rather than wages comes to be the main support for obtaining the necessities of life in times of plenty and austerity alike, suturing the interests of capital and labour closer together.

The French sociologist and economist Frederic Lordon develops a framework for

explaining this intersection of working people’s interests with those of capital.[[11]](#footnote-11) Lordon founds his ideas on a Spinozan theorization of the *conatus*, the striving to survive and persevere that defines all things. Lordon departs from the thesis that capital has successfully created conditions in which the conatus of employees comes to align with the desire structure of capital, i.e., its own automatic subjectivity and specific drives. Lordon details ways that workers seek to meet their own needs, a process inevitably mediated through the value form, and in so doing the desires which drive these actions end up in parallel with, and in contribution to, capital’s self-expansion, a process which Lordon calls “co-linearization” (Lordon, 2010: pg. 33, 40). According to Lordon, previous eras saw a loose co-linearization among workers and capital, but in the present the margin of difference between workers’ needs and capital’s desire is decreasing. While striving for money as the sole mode through which all other needs can be met intensifies coercion in an economic crisis, Lordon explains that entrainment to capital’s needs is also effected through its production of joyful affects. Employment mediates the scope of achievement as labourers (made self-reliant and fiercely driven through capital’s new conditions) may take on the challenge to undergo any subjective transformation whatsoever. For example, Lordon cites employment conditions of call center workers in India ,who are compelled to transform themselves into Americans, learning everything from local US news and weather patterns, as well as through forced acculturation via TV shows like *Friends*.

While entrepreneurial drive, self-possession and hard work constitute the moral high-ground of modern individualistic societies, contemporary post-crisis subjects are prevailed upon to deny the acute impact of systemic forces, such as the financial markets, on their sovereignty, even while suffering them. In this situation, it is imperative to determine whether the convergence described above also generates perverse effects that can propagate resistance, or if the tie between subjects and capital can be disentangled in ways which the impacts of the crisis may bring to light. While practice undeniably gives form to subjectivity, there are few means to transform the capitalist practices shaping human needs without in this process absolutely breaking from them. We are faced with a deadlock in which the system of capitalist practices form subjects but subjects will have to find means to diverge from this relation in order to supercede it.

The generalization of individualized entrepreneurial subjecthood in all walks of life-for-capital is a response to changing conditions of labour, as well as of social reproduction. It would, however, be an error to regard this as resulting in an increasingly stark individualism in all aspects of capitalist work. Accompanying a subjective drive toward self-reliance and self-regard is the increasing sway of on-the-job interpersonal dependencies. Emphasis on team building across all areas of business practice indicates this increased focus on group relations. A contemporary model can be found in the collective working regime of computer programmers. These were derived from peer to peer movements (such as FLOSS) upheld through ideals of collective creativity and a social pride in one’s work.[[12]](#footnote-12) Today these lessons have been adapted by many businesses to enhance productivity. Meanwhile, the extension of capital’s tendency to collectivize production, as displayed in the earlier switch to industrial production, and to profit from productivity increases, propels the growth of social media. Developments in social media, such as the evolution of new metrics on response times, condition new habits of behaviour within one’s social life, which then get put to use throughout one’s working life. These and similar developments of performance monitoring (such as co-worker, user and client feedback) increasingly make collective behaviour into a reflexive mode of policing individuals, a process that operates at a level of greater detail and enables deeper scrutiny precisely because it takes place *within* the social, and not outside of it, as it would if the agent were a manager or a boss. This converges with the 'reputation econommy' outlined earlier and in fact appears to be largely continuous with it, given that identity – which is to say: resource - management on social media platforms is an integral part of the 'official' working day at this point.

Philosophers such as Jason Read (Read, 2011, 2014) have written on the significance of this shift, while others in the post-autonomist tradition, such as Antonio Negri (Negri, 2003) and Paolo Virno (Virno, 2001), have popularized notions such as the “general intellect” as human collective capacities through which capital has endured and excelled. Read frequently makes use of philosopher Gilbert Simondon’s concept of the transindividual as a means of conceiving of subjectivation as an ongoing process that intersects wider collective and systemic influences—the impacts of social relations—as well as the pre-individual aspects at work in subjective experience (such as the sensory and physical aspects of perception). The individual is a process of interrelation between these two In Simondon’s words: “this preindividual reality is individualized as a psychic being that goes beyond the limits of the individuated being and incorporates it in a wider system of the world and the subjectt.” [[13]](#footnote-13) Simondon claims that we remain in formation with and by others at all times in our individuation. For the philsopher “individuation in its collective aspect makes a group individual, one that is associated with the group through the preindividual reality it carries within itself, conjoining it to all other individuals; it individuates as a collective unit. [[14]](#footnote-14) Our putative identity as individuals Simondon suggest, result from collective relations and the formation of social systems the evolve from that collective, and he identifies the pre-individual aspects of perception and behaviour as enabling this transindividual dimension.

Read often quotes a passage in Marx to discuss the parameters of individualism today, one that is particularly appropriate in relation to our discussion of entrepreneurialism: "Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relationsSimondon’s conception of subjectivity involves aspects that do not correlate strictly to individual identity, yet capitalist social relations reinforce a means of self-understanding that obscures the transindividual. An analysis of subject positions re-enforced in the present moment of capital, must be accompanied by an acknowledgement that the concept of subjectivity is in its present manifestation constitutively estranged from transindividual potential.

A concept of the transindividual provides suggestive directions for overcoming the age-old opposition between the individual and collective, by understanding the individual *as* collective. Yet, rather than witnessing the development of new theorizations of the transindividual that foster resistance, in the present capitalist practices more frequently monitor and re-engineer the boundaries of individuals through advancements in digital technologies. The management of individual and social desires to meet the needs of capital can then be seen as instances in which transindividual subject formation is managed through a process that operates via solicitation *and* denial. At present, we see tools for better marketing that allow companies to understand consumer response by using metrics that bypass the verbal expressions or conscious awareness of those consumers. The company Affectiva, along with others, has developed ways to measure the reactions of test subjects straight from their faces.The increased development of social interrelation technologies reflects a recomposition of conditions of collective life and work that do not for the most part apply within Marx’s concept of real subsumption within the production process. Instead, the re-configuration of transindividual conditions takes place in processes that surround surplus value extraction, expanding profit margins but not increasing productivity in a Marxist sense.

Since this last example is firmly rooted in the present expansion of Big Data, it is worth elaborating on this trend, which has wide-ranging effects on the ways that the coherence of the capitalist subject is reconstituted in the present. As opposed to transindividual relationality, we see today the rise of the “Quantified Self,” a subject whose biophysical, behavioural and relational data is thoroughly measured, algorithmically analyzed and projected into personally tailored future projections. Practices that quantify the self are not limited to the domain of health, though this is its most common application. Other uses include lifestyle tracking as the wealth of data that people now generate online and with digitial devices gives detailed self-knowledge to proponents of self-tracking as well as other interested parties, as in the now common practice of offering customers discounts on their car insurance if they consent to have their driving monitored. Such metrics when combined with personal statistics yield probabilities (e.g. accident rates) related to driving for various ages, genders and other identity markers. We see then how subjects better defined-for-capital are subjects for whom co-linearization, as Lordon would call it, is not just tightened but predetermined. Moreover, one can see how imperatives to improve one’s human capital within competitive markets could propel the widescale adoption of self-monitoring tools, driving new waves of unpaid self-maintainence work.

While notable accounts already exist of the transindividual impact of technological development[[15]](#footnote-15) we are interested in the transindividual dimension of exchange, especially in its financialized present form. In the present, new exchange abstractions circumscribe our thinking and our behaviour.

Monetary exchange connects. It does not connect people, but creates relations of equivalence between the goods, services and all the other things that serve the needs of people through the mediation of monetary exchange. Alfred Sohn-Rethel calls this connection through exchange “social synthesis”[[16]](#footnote-16) For instance, the relation between people is mediated by marketized relations, e.g., fluctuations in the costs of labour or goods in one sector of the market affect other markets across the world, and so impact people connected to and dependent on markets that might well be physically distant from the initial changes. For Sohn-Rethel, the form of social synthesis of any given historical period will influence the forms of economic and social practice more broadly, and so subjectivation in general. It is important to recognize exchange, its formation of subjects through practice, and the wider “social synthesis” as dominant transindividual processes to which all people are subject today.

Sohn-Rethel examines how monetary exchange, in all of its repetition, emphasizes the separation between one’s individual needs and those of others. He characterizes exchange as delimiting the social practices around the satisfaction of needs and wants: it becomes “not *what* two people need or feel or think, but *whose* need, feeling or thought will prevail.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Because exchange reinforces a separation in what, under other conditions, could have been experienced as a shared need or sensation, such separations come to inhere in social relations. This process happens in material and social practice as “commodity exchange does not depend on language, on what we communicate to each other” but on social processes that re-inforce social relations of ownership.[[18]](#footnote-18) In addition to the co-linearization described by Lordon speaks, capital thus also works through “social synthesis” and its new modes of exchange--for example, all the ways in which the increasing automation of exchange habituates new means of transaction, while it defers and dislocates points of antagonism that might once have been part of the dynamic of social life.

**Collective-for-capital**

Employees must be malleable and reconfigurable as they assert a hypertrophied individualism. In *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, Maurizio Lazzarato (DATE) proposes a way of understanding this phenomenon. Based predominantly on the work of Félix Guattari, Lazzarato argues that while subjects relate to themselves as identities primarily through discursive practices (e.g. linguistic, social and representational systems) their engagement in non-discursive practices within their employment (perception, sense, affects, desire) increasingly enables capital’s functioning. This “de-subjectivation,” Lazzarato claims, comes about through the “functional and operational, non-representational and asignifying... semiotics.” of techological and material processes that are managed and governed as components of technical or social systems in labour today.[[19]](#footnote-19) The most salient examples of this are to be found in the realms of finance and computer technology (practices which today are of course deeply imbricated).[[20]](#footnote-20) Influenced by Simondon’s account of the transindividual, Lazzarato builds his argument around the idea that through such de-subjectivizing practices new forms of group labour emerge. Under these conditions, subjects maintain individual identities through which narrativizations of subjective experience, while the component parts of subjectivity both conscious and unconscious—are in practice no longer unified as an “I”, but are instead dismantled by the operational logics of the technological, operational and bureaucratic apparatus.

Such While perhaps operating from theoretical co-ordinates that are somewhat in conflict with our own, such an argument seems to affirm our suspicion that the ideologeme of 'human capital' comes to embody a truth—the truth of social abstraction as experienced on the most inescapable and prosaic level. The re-invention of labour as 'human capital', a shift that eliminates labour as a separate and potentially antagonistic pole in the capital-labour relation, persists through this smokescreen of entrepreneurial self-belief and willingness to open oneself up to any change in order to survive.

Thus we propose that speculation as a mode of productiion, defined earlier as the connective logic between economic and psychic structures insofar as both focus on financialized forms of value extraction, also implies a becoming-speculative of reproduction as well. Our account traces a general movement which, on the level of the total system of capitalist social relations, tends towards more distributed forms of passive monitoring--that much discussed process of decentralization theorized by Gilles Deleuze, among others, in his writing on the 'society of controll’[[21]](#footnote-21) Ultimately this leads us to see the entrepreneur as a figure that enables the diffusion of relations of production into more networked and distributed forms, through which capital becomes more localized to the social practices it inhabits.

**Questions of (Dis-)organization**

At this point, it might be useful to take a step back and ask whether this analysis, of

contemporary entrepreneurial subjectivity as an increased co-individuation with capital, runs the risk of over-reaching and under-specifying. Is Sohn-Rethel's account of the exchange principle specific enough not only to our current epoch, but also to capitalism more generally, since it symptomatically leaves out an account of the commodification of labour as both key to the capitalist mode of production? For Sohn-Rethel, only entry into markets renders things equivalent; that equivalence—as homegenous quantities of abstract labour—requires a process that gets left out of the equation, so that the double nature of the commodity falls out of view. Yet a recognition of the double nature of labour as simultaneously abstract and concrete is integral to theorising the double nature of the commodity in capitalism, and the abstraction that subtends it and the social synthesis more broadly. As Norbert Trenkle writes, for Sohn-Rethel:

the sphere of labor appears as a presocial space in which private producers create their products, still untouched in any way by any determinate social form. Only afterwards do they throw these products as commodities into the sphere of circulation, where, in the act of exchange, they are abstracted from their material particularities (and thus indirectly from the concrete labor expended in their production) and thus morph into bearers of value. This perception, however [ . . .] tears the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation apart from one another and places them in superficial opposition (Trenkle 2014: 8).

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We draw attention to this point not out of a desire to retain some Marxist orthodoxy in our analysis, but because, in our focus on entrepreneurial subjectivity generalized across labour and life in crisis times, we want to emphasize that this subjectivity is shaped by the conditions of work, even as they blur and slide across the rest of the social field in the merciless injunction to 'self-valorize'. The real abstraction of exchange thus cannot supply the whole of our account, at least not without basing it in the changing relationship between subjects and the social form of abstract labour (Postone 1993: 123-186). Moreover, as we saw with our excursus on the 'sharing economy' and the devalorisation of labour which drives it, the valorisation crisis of capital cannot be dissociated from a crisis of abstract labour. The crisis is rooted in capital's inability to expand when labour is minimized or rendered contingent, not only in minimizing a supposed consumer base, but more basically because labour is the only component of capital capable of generating new value. Judging from this, the prevalence of the entrepreneur as the ruling subjectivity of contemporary work can be seen more as an accommodation with the failure rather than the success of capitalist production.

Hence the place of transindividuality in our analysis is intended to excavate both the existing and emergent properties of the entrepreneurial subjectivity – a subjectivity whose collective conditions of production are foreclosed to it by the *mode* of production in which we live, or as conditions which can only be confronted *as* themselvescommodities under the aegis of monetized sharing or logistically networked forms of labour. Spinoza's *Ethics* has been re-assessed recently by Read (Read 2014) in light of how it might point ways forward for contemporary iterations of transindividuality. Vital to this re-reading is the connection between the transindividual basis of all desire and the opacity of the self. In Read's allusion to Spinoza, it is because we do not grasp the transindividual conditions of our desire that we believe ourselves to be free, and vice versa (Read 2012: 42-60)a, in . A politics of transindividuality could then mean figuring out how to give these conditions priority in a situation where the conditions and the opacity of the isolated individual are mutually constitutive. The constitutive dimension of relationality for comprehending being and action in a time of structurally unmitigated atomization is crucial, as it refutes the ontological primacy of the individual that founds neoliberal crisis capitalism, as well as sturdier structures of individuality (such as law and the wage contract) that are more expansive in capital's time and space. Yet transindividuality can also be seen as a politically neutral concept: it has no intrinsic relation to emancipatory politics. However, it remains open to specific inscriptions in the current conjuncture, when the collective needs to be legitimated as a practical-political no less than ethical entity. Because definite historical junctures produce the individuations necessary to them, it is important to pay closer attention to the forms of distributed, performative and, for the moment, highly quantified subject formations that constitute the entrepreneur as a universal social norm, and to mine them for their perverse—and emancipatory—implications under the torsion of historical events.

The terms of our conversation up until this point emanated from a questioning of entrepreneurialism as the subjectivation of a mode of survival within capitalism. Turning away from individual motivations to collective action today, new conditions opened up by a period of conflict around social reproduction in an era in of increasing surplus populations, compel one to not only question the models for self-realization within capitalism, but also the accepted norms of social struggle. Since the economic crisis of 2008, mass protests and general strikes have occurred internationally. Where the demand of these social movements is that a state resists new austerity conditions, they have come up against rigid economic limits imposed by neoliberal states today. One major obstacle for resistance is that the sites that are most important in maintaining the present configuration of capital are increasingly dispersed, dematerialised, out of reach, intensely guarded and inviolable. Many protests in the past years have been sparked by actual operations of markets themselves—for instance, the attitude that the market took toward the treasury bonds of some European nations during the Euro crisis. Agency exerted through the financial markets in such events is so distributed that it becomes increasingly difficult to direct concrete practices of protest toward specific targets. As capital’s crisis of valorisation pushes national governments into further neoliberal restructuring, one witnesses alongside the planned orchestration of protests movements, the re-emergence today of an older practice, that of the riot. The eruption of struggles in immigrant suburbs in Stockholm, the battles against market-fueled state violence in Greece, or the fight against a repressive state in Turkey are a few examples of such situations in which disenfranchised people found that direct action and, in some cases, anti-state violence was the only option. As state technologies of surveillance and crowd control proliferate, the steady increase of such events in the present amounts to a constant stream of collective action, which in many cases go unrecognized as such.

It is evident from the trajectories of specific struggles[[22]](#footnote-22) that the distinction between protest and riot is not always a clear one and the types of action that constitute one or the other of these poles may arise in either instance depending on circumstances. The causes that create riots range vastly, as do their level of organization. What is common to most riots is that in most cases, the people involved have had to put aside the idea of having their demands heard by the state, as communization group Blaumachen point out.[[23]](#footnote-23)  In the riots wake, those actions are even less frequently understood as forms of struggle. After the London riots of 2011, the actions of the people involved were not seen in relation to the conditions that generated the event: the death of Mark Duggan at the hands of police, the state-sanctioned police violence suffered by many black and brown people, and state violence doled out by massive state cuts to public services. The debate addressing the conditions that gave rise to the riot were quickly shoved aside and riot participants were shamed by right and left liberal pundits alike[[24]](#footnote-24) who judged this behaviour as delinquent and criminal. Often, however, these commentaries drew analogies between the actions of rioters and “banksters” as selfish, antisocial elements at different ends of the class pyramid. Looting was thus pictured as a sort of enterpreneuralism gone wrong.

In an age of mass unemployment propelled by the expulsions of labour has brought about new turns in economic exclusion, some have discussed how the riot is a mode of struggle open to those who are not employed.[[25]](#footnote-25) As collective social relations across capitalist work and personal life are submitted to new restructuring, it is clear that action and behaviour encompassing the means of survival in employment or in unemployment are in transition. Riots can be viewed as a mode of action in which a collective addresses issues that affect their joint condition. Karl Marx grappled with this when he wrote about the Silesian Weavers Riot of 1844**.** Marx commented that “we have seen: a social revolution possesses a total point of view because—even if it is confined to only one factory district—it represents a protest by man against dehumanized life”, going on to credit the logic of Silesian weavers with more insight than the great German philosophers and political vanguard of their time.[[26]](#footnote-26) In riots sparked by decreasing living standards, whether it’s through market or governmental changes, it is precisely the fact that people rely on these entities for their social reproduction that enables situations in which spatially separated people who may have different positions take up arms together. In contrast to this, it is when subjects who resist capital continue to express their formation by it, by, for example, voicing their demands and objections in the form of capitalist categories such as wages or government spending, that we are confronted with the intractable difficulties of imagining social reproduction or subject formation differently. If legal lines are drawn between those forms of political action criminalized as “antisocial”[[27]](#footnote-27) and those deemed acceptable hinges on an adherence to such categories it is clear that struggles may by necessity become increasingly “anti-social”.

The two important categories of analysis we need to develop from this account of social struggles in the present are *contingency* and *reproduction*. Insofar as these struggles throw up the *contingency*, the fragility of the constituted order and the questions of violence and organization necessary for overcoming it, the contingency of social reproduction for so many nowadays becomes a collective, systemic problem. The writer and activist Bue Rubner Hansen has written that:

'[i]n crises, workers who are thrown onto the streets must find other means to survive. When these efforts to solve the reproduction problem outside of capital become more urgent and more powerful, they are faced with the force (*Gewalt*) which sustains capitalist actuality when it is faced with its own contingency. It is from such moments of crisis and contingency–and the deepening crisis of surplus population–that the thinking of proletarian self-organisation must start. (Hansen 2014: 215)

Often this takes the form of violent physical repression by the agencies of the state, but also internally, in the polarization of collectives in revolt around 'the question of violence', a historical pattern that has become well-established from the Red Brigades to the Black Bloc.

The need to sustain a movement and defend it from external and internal (and transversal) forces of pacification emphasizes the need to organize reproduction autonomously. And insofar as the struggles are themselves often about worsening conditions of social reproduction, proposals for self-organizing social reproduction rise to the top of the activist agenda**.** As Hansen notes above, the inability of people to reproduce themselves within existing social relations of capital can have a mobilizing effect. What it cannot do is prescribe the political direction such mobilizations can take, given the greater accessiblity and lived experience of conservative viewpoints on both the Left and Right. This is why the thinking of contingency is helpful, since the contingency of survival on capital's terms is brought home even more starkly in encounters with a state brutally trying to efface the fact of its own contingency through arms and law. Contingency also extends to the agenda of a movement; a defensive struggle may develop propositional characteristics it didn't have before, including strategies that recognize the scale of change necessary even to defend the existing terms, as well as to redefine the terrain (putting into question the division between production and reproduction for example, in ways other than the ones enforced by capital's recompositions). In a social milieu pervaded by the assumption that the conditions of work, solvency, social institutions are all subject to the contingency of profit, a situation of struggle may disclose the rule of those conditions as the most contingent of all.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Given the targeting of social reproduction through the mechanisms of austerity, many have imputed a political centrality to reproduction as a result, taking the view that the present crisis is a crisis of reproduction and will be solved by a politics of reproduction where the production-oriented politics of labour unions and parties have ebbed. Further, reproduction is held to be the main site where transindividuality is practiced and social ties affirmed. Reproduction becomes then the core principle of organization: both of a capital done with labour, and a post-capitalist future. But there are risks here of a 'foreshortened' critique of the 'all that exists', less prefigurative of other forms of collective life than continuous with the social damage inflicted on it. Jasper Bernes and Joshua Clover make an analogous critique when they speak of how 'the *politics of prefiguration* collapses means and ends altogether, insisting that the encampment’s forms of life are a version of the desired future; [...] a hyperbolization of means approaching their own desolate autonomy. This is what building the new world in the shell of the old means today: an assembly ringed by cops' (Clover and Bernes 2014).[[29]](#footnote-29) A trehinking of the subject like that attempted in this essay may prove useful for extending the question of organization from this surrounded assembly to that Moten and Harney call "politics surrounded": the question of the production of subjectivity in the experience of struggle (Moten and Harney 2013: 17-20).

And here we need to reckon with the entrepreneurial subject and its internalisation of the capital relation, as well as its heavily gendered premises (Scholz 2014: 123-142; Endnotes 2013: 56-90). The notion of contingency seems like a generative one since it takes value relations not as a field to be transfigured on its own terms (the terms of of production/reproduction) but rather as a political space where potentialities may be actualized on a transindividual ground. Contingency also marks out a space for politics as a production of subjectivity in its valences of rupture and negation as affects of revolt but also as affects of constitution, and thus strategic for the endurance of struggles.. This may offer itself as a material counter to a politics of reproduction which assumes that radical social transformation can come from affirming *need* rather than desire. This is a common recourse by thinkers of revolutionary change who want to avoid the twin pitfalls of economic determinism and subjectivist pathos, where need presents itself as a self-evident driver of struggle. And yet it may be more salient to look at how need may trigger struggles around reproduction, yet end up producing subjectivities that affirm 'moral economies' not reflected in the current landscape of crisis entrepreneuralism, and developing strategies that confront both structural violence and the physical violence meted out by the state. A good example here would be the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca) in Spain, a very successful anti-eviction group comprised of activists and people who have lost their homes due to bank repossession (both owners and tenants), rather than the former acting on behalf of the latter.[[30]](#footnote-30) The politics of reproduction can also be driven by universalist agendas with women's liberation as their cornerstone, which viewed the question of violence as inextricable from the practice of autonomy at their very core, as we see at present with the women fighters in Kobani. Thus we propose that the politics of reproduction, if read as engaging with questions of composition, strategy, and contingencies of force, can emerge as the most powerful and relevant approach both to countering the nihilism of the entrepreneurial subject and making 'the riot' a more concrete category of insurgency.

If our examination of entrepreneurial subjectivity and its occlusion of the conditions of the production of the collective have led anywhere, it is to the indispensability of analysis of the subjects of these processes, subjects for whom needs and desires are not at all self-evident. Even less self-evident is the proposition that the means of satisfying them lie in refusing rather than participating in the world as it is, however little that participation can offer. Thus, in recent episodes of anti-systemic movements, both the forms of need and the ways of meeting those needs, whether riots or encampments, index the present rather an offering allegories of the future seen from the perspective of transindividuality.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**Desubjectivation Starts Here?**

Here speculation comes back, as departing from the kernel of the present condition of subjectivation. We noted earlier that speculation can be thought of as integral to a social praxis that breaks with its conditions of (re)production (or turns them to unforeseen ends). The characterization of speculation as 'disruptive' is problematic yet unavoidable in a terrain where 'creative destruction' is the main category used to mediate social change—a category usually employed by tech entrepreneurs. And yet the practice, if not the awareness, of transindividuality animates social media platforms even as they amplify general commodification, creating a private consumption of the common as that which is incessantly produced and (re-)captured by capital; for Read, each of us privately appropriates the common through the structural imperative of the commodity form as the sole means of accessing goods, infrastructures and, often, other people. The entrepreneur is this consumer with a business plan, but a consumer who is subject to degrees of scale (the social entrepreneur can morph into a social enterprise) and class relations, as we saw with the boss- and employee entrepreneurs who embody the precarity of work in highly differentiated ways. Is the desire that compels the entrepreneur more or less opaque, in its transindividual relationality to the collective, than it would be for any atomised subject? Earlier we spoke about moments of intransigence and insurrection, moments at different stages of stability and consistency. The collective comes out of the sphere of 'conditions' when it is in movement, while in other circustances it seems inert and creates entrepreneurial subjects who want to flee the vulnerability of the collective by re-fashioning themselves in the image of the only thing that seems to have agency: capital.

We do not intend to position an acknowledgement of the transindividual dimension of subjectivity as an adequate response on its own. What would the acknowledgement that one’s subjectivity is thoroughly contingent and influenced by others and by wider social forces bring about on its own? Will a practical and collective mobilization of this fact ever come about without being driven in that direction somehow through (capitalist) practice? Through the value form, abstract principles (not conceived by particular subjects but rather mobilized within the systemic interplay of capital as a whole) give rise to practices which “posit” capital’s “presuppositions” each day and therefore renew the conditions of its expansion. For this reason our theorization of the subject attempts to straddle the various scales upon which capital operates. In this way, the transindividual could perhaps have a role in mediating the abstract ideal of collectivity and individual subjects, subjects which must find a new collective shape that rivals the systemic scale on which capital operates. Read through the future-oriented yet paradoxically closed universe of the value-form, our argument is intended to highlight the inextricability between collective forms of revolt and the modes by which capital organizes and valorises collectives on the level of affect and habit, and thus expose the one-sidedness of a critique which sees a durable basis for revolt as the negation of those modes on the basis of need, the need of an avowed community in struggle. Lazzarato's focus on the 'non-discursive' as a link to capital's interpellation (or construction, rather) of decisively 'post-' subjects clarifies that the downfall of institutional anti-capitalist politics has not made space for purely negative subjectivities driven to overcome capital as an emptied-out social relation, but opened up new markets, new slave markets of subjection. The violence of the entrepreneur then, as the displacement of social innovation into strictly commodified forms of disruption of the status quo and the violent reproduction of the form of value as a common sense good life, needs to be thought with the violence of imagining or even trying to implement another social synthesis, a social synthesis which would have to carry with it an equally salient formation of subjectivation, both individual and collective, rather than articulate subjectivities which already exist in unhappy detente with the structures that formed them (a banal dramatization perhaps of the pathos of transindividuality foreclosed from actualization). It may only remain to add here that the ambivalence of these forms of subjectivation, shaped as they are by current circumstances or attempts to re-compose beyond or through them, are as, if not more, subject to reactionary terms – what Read calls "negative solidarity"(Read 2014), or, a feeling of unity against abjected Others (from anti-migrant racism at the level of the local or the state to the young white middle class clean-up squads the morning after the 2011 London riots, whose patterns of residence and consumption had already been doing the work of 'cleansing' the 'problem areas'). So long as the 'left' operates in the crawlspace of a desired short circuit between discursive outrage and a gestural adherence to the community of 'need', there is little hope that other subjectivations can arise on a level both abstract and affective enough to turn this around. For now, these subjectivations are dispersed, ephemeral, enduring primarily as material for political desire, though it can also be said that the terrain we have analysed seems to exclude the very possibility of a subject, much less one that is not hooked into its algorithmic mimesis with capital. Yet we hesitate to abolish in our text the forms and terms that historical contingency may yet require. No abolition without realization.

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Abstract:

This paper is part of a larger body of ongoing research and publishing investigating how current shifts in the material relations of money, commodities, and social abstractions shape contemporary subjectivation. By moving through a tangled dialectic of contemporary subjects and practices of abstraction, the intent of this essay is to analyse salient subject positions under current post-crisis conditions starting with that of the entrepreneur and in so doing we will try to better understands the social and political possibilities which contemporary subjectivity keeps foreclosed. If the contemporary subject is a derelict shell housing data bodies, social commodities and quantified selves, we need to develop another materialist understanding of the subject, one which looks to the collective production of affects and rationalities in resistance which both exhibit and forecast the surpassing of the symptoms of our present.

1. See 'Questions for Poets' by Anne Boyer [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We employ the term “abject” here as it was used in a recent article in the journal Endnotes on the London riots of 2011. Endnotes, 2013. “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Crisis Era Struggles in Britain” Endnotes 3. http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-a-rising-tide-lifts-all-boats [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is important that this figure be read dialectically, in that it represents the inner logic of the reproduction of capital reproducing itself as well as an ideological narrative of capital as self-sustaining and the source of all wealth. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Which is why it is telling that some of the earliest indications of the farcical nature of the 'roll-out' of the Big Society agenda was city councils, usually in poorer, post-industrial UK cities, who signed on to the agenda and then publicly withdrew from it once it became clear no new resources were to be made available to implement it. The Cameron government's 'localism' agenda that came after was a meeker and less obtrusive shadow of the fallen heroics of the 'Big Society', which went from being a controversial meme to an embarassment retired from public discourse in the course of a few months, unless it was mentioned in articles about food banks. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Here we would like to introduce *contingency* as a term whose political implications we will explore later but which for now we are interested as a mediation of objective chance as subjective possibility, but also subjective impotence. Contingency is a training in thinking that anything can happen, which also prepares subjects for the fact that anything does happen, more often than not with respect to the condtions of their own livelihood. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. What is Taskrabbit, etc. Taskrabbit is a platform that monetises the performance of errands at different scales (sometimes up to the scale of temp jobs) brokering personal exchanges between an ideal client and an ideal 'rabbit' which models something like a traditional master:servant relationship, albeit on a contingent basis. In this context, there has been an interesting rise of the category "neo-feudalism" to describe a larger trend toward extreme social inequality, of which tasking platforms can be seen as symptomatic, or representative, depending on how influential they can be considered.. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lukas Biewald the CEO of CrowdFlower, winner of the “’Netexplorateur’ prize,” said in a talk delivered to a group of young tech entrepreneurs several years ago: "Before the Internet, it would be really difficult to find someone, sit them down for 10 minutes and get them to work for you, and then fire them after those 10 minutes. But with technology, you can actually find them, pay them the tiny amount of money, and then get rid of them when you don't need them anymore."(quoted in Trebor Scholz, 'Crowdmilking', <http://collectivate.net/journalisms/2014/3/9/crowdmilking.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Sebastian Olma offers an astute survey of how 'sharing' is a deeply misleading category for the type of market disruption introduced by digital service-brokering platforms, and that 'platform capitalism' is a more accurate term. He quotes Sacha Lobo writing in *Der Spiegel*: 'By controlling their ecosystems, platforms create a stage on which every economic transaction can be turned into an auction. Nothing minimizes cost better than an auction – including the cost of labour. That’s why labour is the crucial societal aspect of platform capitalism. It is exactly here that we will have to decide whether to harness the enormous advantages of platform capitalism and the sharing economy or to create a "dumping market" where the exploited amateurs only have the function to push professional prices down.' quoted in Olma, 'Never Mind the Sharing Economy: Here’s Platform Capitalism' (http://networkcultures.org/mycreativity/2014/10/16/never-mind-the-sharing-economy-heres-platform-capitalism/) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 'These objective dependency relations [...] appear, in antithesis to those of personal dependence (the objective dependency relation is nothing more than social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e. the reciprocal relations of production separated from and autonomous of individuals) in such a way that individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another. The abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master.' (Marx 1973: 164) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. By "socially necessary", we follow the Marxian usage wherein wages (or in this case one-off fees) are maintained at levels “socially necessary” for workers – but often dip below this baseline. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Lordon, Frederic. 2014. *Willing Slaves of Capitalism: Spinoza & Marx on Desire*. London: Verso. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Free, Libre and Open Source Software. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Simondon, Gilbert, 1992. “The Genesis of the Individual” In *Incorporations*, eds. Jonathan Crary, Sanford Kwinter, 297-319. p. 307. New York: Zone Books [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ibid p. 307 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. We refer here to the work of Bernard Stiegler, specifically the philosopher’s three volume work Technics and Time. Stiegler, Bernard. 1998–2010. *Technics and Time*. translated by Richard Beardsworth, George Collins, Stephen Barker. Stanford: Stanford University. . [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Sohn-Rethel, Alfred .1978, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology.* Translated Marti Sohn-Rethel, London: Macmillan Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, 1978, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology,* London: Macmillan Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Sohn-Rethel [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Lazzarato, Maurizio, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, p. 97, Semiotext(e) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Some examples in finance are: mathematical equations, diagrams, the operations of financial markets including computationally derived investment stratagems, indexes, dataflows and protocols for trading; in computational systems this includes digital code, commands, arrays and stacks are some examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Deleuze, Gilles. 1992, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, *October*. Vol 59, Winter , pp. 3-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Since 2008 we have seen many instances of struggles that while they began as orderly demonstrationa culminated in confrontations between protestsers and police. For example protests in Greece in 2011, in 2012 in Montreal and 2011 in Spain are examples of this . [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Blaumachen. 2014. “From Sweden to Turkey: the Uneven Dynamic in the Era of Riots” *sic journal*, no. 2, http://www.sicjournal.org/en/from-sweden-to-turkey/the-uneven-dynamics-of-the-era-of-riots. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Among the many examples of this position is: Harvey, David. 2011. “Feral Capitalism Hits the Streets” http://davidharvey.org/2011/08/feral-capitalism-hits-the-streets/ For the 'defective consumer' position, see also Žižek 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Clover, Joshua. 2014. Paper presented at the conference Anti-Social turn, Cornell University, Oct 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Marx, Karl. 1844, “Critical Notes on the Article: “The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian””*Vorwarts!*, No.64, August 10. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/08/07.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In the UK, civil orders called anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO) are frequently given out to people deemed to have engaged in “anti-social behaviour”. The orders which can restrict behaviour in a number of ways were introduced in 1998 by New Labour government. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Many Marxist accounts of the agency of crowds and riots in early modern and early industrial eras, such as E.P. Thompson's, speak of 'moral economy' as the context in which riots either erupt or do not happen. We can tentatively connect 'moral economy' here to some of the ways in which we've been using the 'transindividual' in this essay. Subtending both terms is the necessity to reconstruct 'material conditions' in greater historical concreteness than allowed for by the abstract postulate of 'need'. (Thompson 1971) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Compare also: "What we learn is that the more these spaces withdraw from confrontation with the antagonistic forces surrounding them, the less they are able to open up spaces of difference with them, and the uglier and more terrible become the new forms of community they create. Conversely, the more the camps fight the surrounding police-world, the more they become actually liberated zones, rather than simulacra of liberation." [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Platform for Those Affected by Mortgages, in English. See <http://www.x-pressed.org/?xpd_article=pah-platform-for-the-mortgage-affected-si-se-puede> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See again Hansen, "the Marxian logics of organisation inspired by the philosophy of nature must be understood as *practical* concepts. As such they become relevant to the critique of actuality from the point of view of potentiality, as well as for the organisation and disorganisation of social relations, and for comprehending violence and force as intrinsic aspects of these processes." as before, p. 242 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)