Gerald Raunig, **Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution, Vol. 1**, (A. Derieg, trans.), Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2016, 208 pp., $16.95 (paperback).

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What is the atom, the indivisible unit, of informational capitalism? An intuitive answer would be the data point, a numerable entity that can be analyzed, mined, segmented, correlated, and valorized in endless ways. Digital data, however, do not exist apart from the algorithmic operations that produce them and reproduce them qua data. Ultimately, these operations express the logical states of a system, which are also describable as (binary) data. The impossibility of attributing an ontological primacy to data or algorithm—which exist only for one another—means that the digital world is always already divided, or, as Alexander Galloway (2014) puts it, "The digital is the capacity to divide things, and make distinctions between them" (p. xxix).
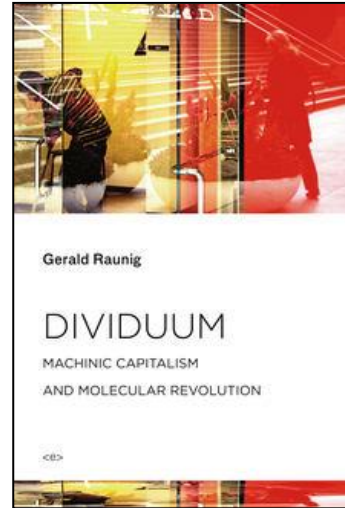
If we accept this definition, then our initial question needs to be reformulated. Rather than focusing on the indivisible and the atomic, perhaps we should be asking whether networked capitalism thrives on division. Gerald Raunig's book *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution* tackles this problem by putting the "dividual"—that which is divided and divisible—as the heart of capitalist accumulation in the age of networks. In Marxist terms, this is quite a challenging proposition, as the Marxian law of value identifies in labor-time the common unit of measurement that allows for the comparison of otherwise incommensurable use-values. In other words, Marx sees value as something that is generated from a process of integration, not division. And yet, data come into being only insofar as they are cut from the analog continuum through a logical procedure that marks distinction.

In computer networks, this segmentation—or *dividualization*—is a precondition of the recombination of multiple data points in variable data sets. This means that the dividual is always open to interaction, always ready to be detached from and attached to other dividuals. Thus, compared with the individual—which prides itself of its unique properties—the dividual has the advantage of being combinable with other divisible beings that share some properties with it. As Raunig notes,

> Whereas individuality mobilizes dissimilarity to emphasize the respective being-different, demarcation from everything else, dividual singularity is always one among others, *dividuum* has one component or multiple components, which constitute it as divisible and concatenate it with other parts that are similar in their components: similarity, not sameness or identity, similarity concerning only some components. (p. 67)

Here, Raunig draws on the scholastic philosophy of Gilbert of Poitiers, who was the first to contrast the dividual to the individual by attributing the property of *similitudo* to the former and the property of *dissimilitudo* to the latter (p. 64). Gilbert also noted that similarity is what enables dividuals that share some components to "coform" an *unum dividuum*. If we are to use a Deleuzian lexicon, we could say that the unum dividuum is an assemblage that is singular in its multiplicity, as its components are linked without being subordinated to a higher unity.

Three Modes of Dividuation

To these *transversal* concatenations among parts that escape totalization and closure, Raunig has dedicated, after Félix Guattari, much of his philosophical project. This is reflected not only in the subject of the book but also in its structure, which strings together forays into the history of language, philosophy, and anthropology without letting one heuristic overdetermine the others. Thus, we discover that the term *dividuum* first appears in the Roman comedies of Plautus and of Terence in conjunction with the patriarchal power to divide a contended property (*dividuom facere*). Here, dividing means to measure and distribute according to ownership so as "to newly reproduce order again and again" (p. 73). To dividuality as a "mode of partition," Raunig adds two further modes of dividuation: the mode of participation and the mode of division. In the mode of participation, the parts give themselves over to the whole without retaining their difference. In the mode of division, on the contrary, the dividual expresses a process of "re-singularization" whereby the parts concatenate without being "unified, communalized, herded" (p. 81).

The notion of a concatenation that is not unification is an attempt to bypass the opposition between the individual and the collective, the desiring subject and societal mores. If this is a well-established deconstructionist move, the notion of dividuum allows Raunig to approach the task of deconstruction from the preliminary observation that the individual is herself internally divided. This is something that Nietzsche had already hinted at in *Human, All Too Human,* in which he describes selflessness as the moral act of sacrificing a part of oneself to another (as in the case of a mother who gives all of her sleep, food, and strength to her child). Raunig takes Nietzsche's insight on morality as self-division as a point of departure for an excursus on the confession as a practice of self-disclosure. Drawing from Foucault, he notes that in the Christian confession the desire to admit guilt and be relieved is channeled within a formal procedure, which is quickly learned and naturalized. Likewise, the "machinic confession" of Facebook is fueled by "the desire to publicly communicate oneself . . . to divide oneself" (p. 118) and is habituated via the daily sharing of information via a user-friendly interface.

If self-disclosure via social media might be a contemporary form of confession, Raunig is not interested in comparing the protocols of the Christian confession to those of the Facebook confession. Yet academic research has shown that social media users are often aware of the risks of sharing too much personal information, of the intricacies of addressing multiple audiences within the same informational space, or of appearing inauthentic as a consequence of "self-branding." Thus, on a first level, the private space of the confessional (or the analyst's couch for that matter) might still allow for disclosures that remain unspeakable in the highly managed arena of social media. On a second level, the popularity of social media is often driven by a desire to access information and entertain relationships that might increase our capacity to act.

This is to say that the affective dimension of social media allows us to see self-division not only from the perspective of the data mining industry. Rather, there is always an *excess* in networked dividuality that is not entirely measurable or that is measurable according to different standards. Raunig acknowledges this point when he notices that big data is not to be understood as a "totalization of data," but as "an open field of immanence with a potentially endless extension" (p. 123). If the data-mining industry constantly strives to convert the immeasurable into the measurable (p. 127), the question remains as to whether the opposite movement is possible, that is, whether large data sets can be exploited for noncapitalist or even anticapitalist purposes.

The Dividual Derivative

Even though the author avoids discussing this accelerationist stance, a section of the book is dedicated to the recent works of Arjun Appadurai (2016), Christian Marazzi (2011), and Randy Martin (2015) on financial derivatives and the growing dividualization of the economy. Raunig seems to espouse the general approach of these authors, who see the derivative as an instrument that far from epitomizing the parasitical nature of financial markets "establishes the connection of all disparate economic sectors and types of capital, mak[ing] them commensurable with one another" (p. 147). In bundling attributes that mediate between the commodity and the asset, different forms of money, and different kinds of debt, the derivative allows for the intercommensurability of values that were previously incommensurable. This capacity of the derivative to express abstractions that push finance in uncharted territories, and thus *beyond* the economy, prompted Randy Martin (2015) to frame the derivative as a device for rethinking the social basis of wealth:

> Economy finessed questions of inequality that were manifestations of social surplus through alignment and division of self-possession and ownership. By virtue of their better decisions, the rich had more, and it belonged to them. Derivatives perform a dispossession of self and of ownership. They re-sort individual entities into bundles of shared attributes and render the present pregnant with the collection of wealth needed to make the world otherwise. (p. 78)

A promissory note whose value lies in what it does rather than what it is, the derivative, notes Martin, is a "form of meta-capital" which combines parts that had previously no relation to one another. At a first sight this process of abstraction is no different from the abstraction of the commodity form:

> Yet if commodities appeared as a unit of wealth that could abstract parts into a whole, derivatives are a still more complex process by which parts are no longer unitary but are continuously disassembled and reassembled as various attributes are bundled and their notional value exceeds the whole economy to which they may once have been summed. (Martin, 2015, p. 60)

Thus, the logic of the derivative implies a new kind of commensurability. Although it is predicated on a preexisting equivalence (the money-form), the derivative transcends money's referential function by mediating between values that are progressively detached from their original referents.

Arjun Appadurai (2016) illustrates this abstracting logic of the derivative through the paradigmatic example of the subprime mortgages, which led to the financial crisis of 2008:

> Mediated in the capitalist market, the house becomes the mortgage; further mediated, the mortgage becomes an asset, itself subject to trading as an uncertainly future commodity. Mediated yet again, this asset becomes part of an asset-backed security, a new derivative form, which can be further exchanged in its incarnation as a debt-obligation. (p. 108)

From this angle, the derivative is, to use a term introduced by McKenzie Wark, a *vector* that links a series of chained transactions, from the stipulation of the original mortgage to its repackaging and sale as an asset-backed security and a CDO. Obviously, the actors involved in such transactions do not have the same power as mortgage holders run a much higher risk (i.e., to be foreclosed) than real estate agents and financial brokers. Nevertheless, what matters here is that the derivative vector connects retroactively exchanges that would otherwise belong in different markets.

To paraphrase Guy Debord (1970), we may say that the derivative reunites the separate, but reunites it as separate. Whereas Debord coined this aphorism to describe the Spectacle—the new form and function of capital in the age of television—TV spectators shared at least the common televisual language of their separation. In the case of big data and financial transactions, this common language is reduced to a *machinic syntax* that assembles myriad data points in homogeneous data sets. This syntax is by and large unknown to the humans who generate the data. It also connects elements that were previously unrelated, but without altering their original nature (i.e., loans remain loans even when the probability that they may or may not be repaid is traded on a secondary market). Indeed, in what Franco Berardi (2015) has defined as the "connective mode of concatenation," the dividual elements of an assemblage "remain distinct and interact only functionally" (p. 21), that is, they do not undergo any transformation in the process of being algorithmically connected. In contrast, in the conjunctive mode of concatenation, the elements (e.g., the bodies of two lovers) do not follow any predetermined pattern or embedded program, giving rise to conjunctive syntheses that are unrepeatable and unique in the space–time continuum.

Temporary and Abstract Bonds

Berardi's distinction between the connective and the conjunctive allows us to approach the notion of "condividuality," one of the key concepts of *Dividuum*, from a perspective that Raunig does not fully explore. In *Dividuum*, *condividuality* refers to a movement that "conjoins what is similar/co-forming in the most diverse single things, but also affirms their separation at the same time" (p. 191). This paradox can be explained by returning to the notion of dividuation. As we have seen, Raunig distinguishes three modes of dividuation: in the modes of partition and participation, the parts are subordinated to the whole; in the mode of division, they concatenate without being unified. Because condividuality privileges multiplicity, "disturbs the truly participating" (p. 192), and eschews orderly partition, it ultimately coincides with the mode of division.

From this angle, the *cum-* of condividuality appears as a weak bond, or a making and unmaking of temporary bonds. The weak nature of this bond is also clear from the negative connotation Raunig attributes to the term *communitas*, the Latin root of community. As Roberto Esposito has argued, *communitas* descends in turn from the mutual obligation of the *munus*, the gift that must be reciprocated, or the tribute that all Roman citizens had to pay to be included in the community. In contrast, the *cum* of condividuality does not presuppose any reciprocal obligation, but emerges spontaneously through the very process of concatenation. In this sense, to use Berardi's lexicon, condividuality is firmly on the side of the conjunctive mode, as it denotes a nonrepeatable and nonstandardized encounter of singularities. This approach has several consequences, not all of which, in my opinion, are desirable.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Berardi (2015) notes that the connective and the conjunctive are not mutually exclusive, but often coexist within the same body:

> There is always some connective sensibility in a conjunctive body, and there is always some conjunctive sensibility in a human body formatted in connective conditions. It's a problem of gradients, shades, undertones, not a problem of anthitetical opposition between poles. (p. 18)

But if the connective and the conjunctive rarely appear as separate and opposed to one another, then perhaps we should more carefully consider their hybridization and complementarity. For example, all languages embed lexical, phonetical, and syntactical rules that govern the functional interaction of linguistic elements such as syllables, phonemes, and words. It is by following and interpreting these rules that humans and animals modulate singular and conjunctive linguistic expressions. Similarly, it is through repetition that children's play becomes structured in games, whose formal rules allow in turn for the invention of new games. The productivity of language and language-games, to say it with Wittgenstein, is thus rooted not only in our capacity to deviate from preestablished patterns of information (as Berardi has it) but also in our ability to deconstruct and reconstruct such informational patterns so as to adapt them to different contexts.

From this point of view, the cum- of condividuality can be thought not only as a weak and temporary bond but also as the very capacity of transferring a singular process of concatenation from one context to another, that is, as an ability to abstract without reducing and homogenizing. Let us consider McKenzie Wark's (2004) definition of abstraction: "To abstract is to construct a plane upon which otherwise different and unrelated matters may be brought into many possible relations" (para. 008). In enabling the concatenation of heterogeneous elements, this plane exceeds the singular conjunction and becomes a carrier of informational patterns. The virtual nature of these patterns allows, in turn, for many possible actualizations. In other words, if we admit that abstraction is not merely reductive (as in the case of exchange value) but also is generative, then the cum- of condividualiy becomes an abstract bond that is capable of producing manifold relations.

Compared with the temporary bonds of the mode of division and connnective conjunction, this kind of bond is durable because it carries a memory of its prior individuations. For example, all social movements organize drawing inspiration from "repertoires of contention" (Tilly, 2002) such as assemblies,

demonstrations, strikes, occupations, and sit-ins, which they repurpose and adapt to their local circumstances. These repertoires are nothing but a shared set of ethical, political, and aesthetic *codes*, some of which are handed down from tradition and some of which emerge from the novel encounter of singularties. As we have seen, Gilbert noted that the governing principle of the dividuum is similarity, which allows dividuals that share some components to coform an assemblage. If this is true, then the operating principle of the cum-dividuum should not be division, but *composition*—composition of dividual components that have some properties in common.

In Praise of Syntax

Such composition differs from the algorithmic assemblage of data points and the connective logic of the derivative in two respects. First, because condividuality is a process of becoming different, it transforms the parts in the process of (dis)assembling them. Second, as noted, this composition brings with itself a memory of its prior individuations. Here, Gilbert Simondon's notion of *transindividuality*—a concept that is conspicuously absent from *Dividuum*—would have been useful to eviscerate the interior dimension of condividual being. Similar to the condividual, the transindividual bypasses the opposition between the individual and the collective by positing a deep interconnection between these two dimensions. Further, for Simondon the transindividual denotes the process of individuation emerging from the preindividual, metastable, and unstructured ground that exists within all living beings. Because all individuals are internally open to the preindividual, they are already "group individuals" (*individus de groupe*; Simondon, 2007, p. 185). This means that individuation can always take multiple paths. It is by sharing their problematic with other beings—that is, by participating in social and collective life—that group individuals activate their possible other selves, their possible other individuations.

From this angle, the transindividual is not so much concerned with relations of similarity and dissimilarity, of parts and whole. Rather, the notion of the transindividual sheds light on the interior dimension of condividuality, that is, on the link between condividual memory (the memory of group individuals) and the actualization of such memory through social interaction. Certainly, this raises the question of whether transindividuality and condividuality are interchangeable terms. I would say that whereas in Simondon's ontogenetic model transindivuality concerns the individuation of all living beings, condividuality lays the emphasis on the composition of that which is singular and divisible. In this respect, condividuality is a more narrow but also more strictly political concept. Because of the presence of the suffix "cum," condividuality poses the problem of which syntax is the most apt to connect struggles and memories of struggles across different social, cultural, and political contexts.

For example, in my book *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous* (Deseriis, 2015)*,* I traced the evolution of one such syntax, the shared pseudonym, from the early 19th century to the age of networks. Many other works, both academic and nonacademic, and in a variety of media, try to forge a syntax that connects a variety of struggles beyond the ephemerality of tactic and the totalization of strategy. This syntax is a medium, a middle that is always at risk of being erased or, conversely, of being turned into dogma. In *Dividuum*, Gerald Raunig wisely shows us that "the middle is dividual" because only that which is divisible can be concatenated with other elements that share

some properties with it. Yet he also writes that "in the raging middle of the dividual no ground is needed, no roots, no floor" (p. 21).

As I have tried to argue in this essay, this celebration of (con)dividuality as pure becoming, as an unstructured body without organs, leaves the syntactical dimension unattended. The paradox is that the dividuals that rage in the middle do not seem to leave any trace of their encounters behind. It is this fear of mediation, perhaps the fear that mediation may ossify into representation, that prevents Raunig from seeing the generative capacities, the virtual dimension of condividuality. For dividuals compose radical concatenations when their encounter with other dividuals generates information—that is, knowledges, codes, and technologies for a politics of the incommensurable. Rather than a floor or a root, such information is a spiral or a vector whose propagation is vital to those movements of resistance that cannot always afford the luxury of reinventing themselves anew—especially now that the horizon of history seems to be narrowing, and life itself is increasingly at risk on this damaged planet.

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