

Tactical Research:

Practices for Thinking (Oneself) Differently

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You see, that's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing, because my problem is my own transformation [...] This transformation of oneself by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to an aesthetic experience. (Foucault, 1997: p.131)

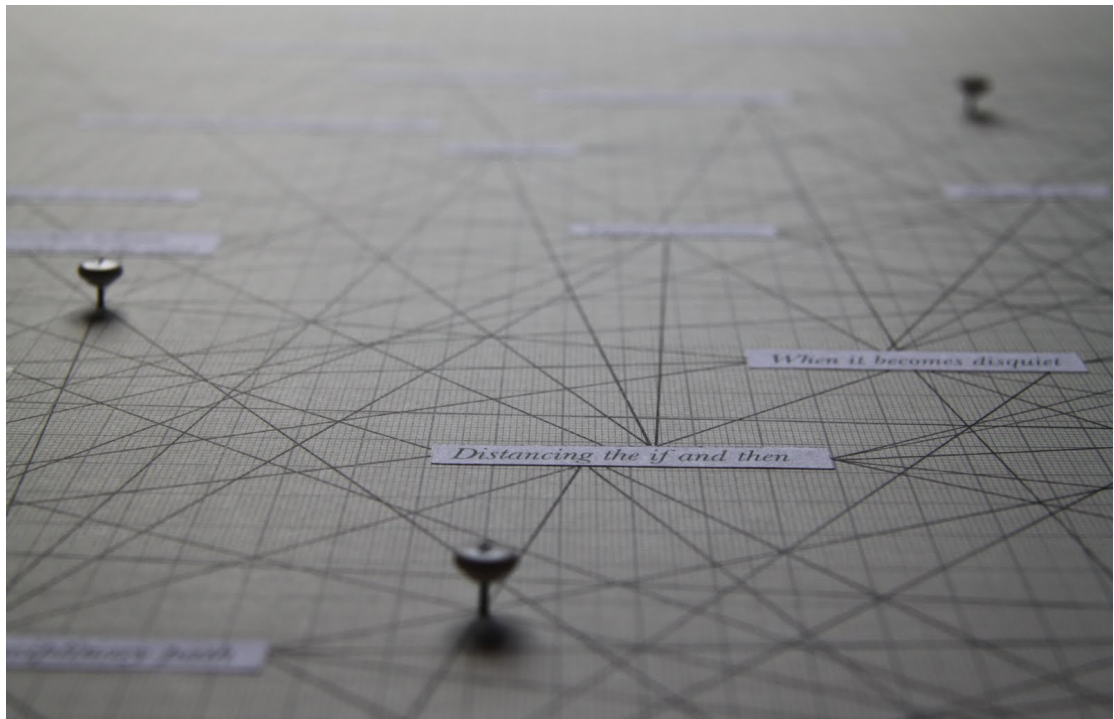
This paper approaches the (artistic) research process as an affirmative practice for thinking (oneself) differently, reframing artistic research as a 'tactic' or 'way of operating' (de Certeau) for producing a critical form of subjectivity, part of a wider process of subjectivization. Purposefully shifting from thinking of research as determined within and by the (narrow) terms of an academic 'project' (as defined by the more instrumentalized and commodified conceptualizations of research within academia) I develop an understanding of the research process as a live and lived enquiry, considering it in analogous terms to or as a manifestation of the philosophical project of 'making life into a *work of art*' (Foucault). My intent is to move from viewing research as the teleological pursuit of knowledge, a linear and outcome-driven process catalyzed by the identification of questions to which conclusions are subsequently sought. Instead, I consider research as an expression of 'conatus' (Spinoza) or of the 'enquiring of the enquirer (Badiou) where the search or striving of its endeavor — rather than its outputs or contribution to knowledge — is recuperated critical value. Here, a *subject* is not what is studied at a distance but rather what is performed or enacted through the research itself.

Through this paper, I develop a critical and conceptual rationale for permitting (even advocating) the fragmentary, bricolaged and sometimes errant approaches that make up my own extant research practice. Operating under the title *Not Yet There*, my own research explores how artistic practice can function as a space of rehearsal, the aesthetic *practice* of conceiving of things differently or *otherwise*. Drawing

on my experience of encountering certain art practices and on conversations with other artists, recent writing has often focused on exploring models of (art) practice and subjectivity, which resist or refuse the pressure of a single or stable position by remaining willfully unresolved. This enquiry has attempted to recuperate a critical (even affirmative) potential within, seemingly negative, experiences or conditions such as failure, doubt, deferral, uncertainty, boredom, hesitation, indecision, immobility and inconsistency. Deployed skillfully within a practice such conditions have the capacity to be re-inscribed as resistant and dissident ways of operating against the terms of dominant societal expectations (and its standard templates of enforced performance, purpose, progression, productivity). At times, I have visualized the landscape of my practice geographically: somewhere in the east is the practice of wandering; towards the northeast, stillness and collectivity; in the southeast, incomprehensibility and the conjectural. Westerly, practices of failure and inconsistency take hold; towards the north are boredom, dissidence and the counter-cartographical. Considered in these terms emergent thematics can be discerned where research interests gather to form a series of interlocking (or rather *entangled*) clusters or *zones* of enquiry including *The Potentiality of Failure*; *Performing Communities*; *Cartographies of Escape*; *Stray — the Art of Wandering*; *The Enquiring of the Enquirer*. Each cluster emerges through a network of related research enquiries, the same questions repeatedly explored from different perspectives and through different practices — a combination of art-writing approaches, collaborations with artists and academic research. Whilst the principle of clustering has been a useful way of containing a somewhat nebulous research practice, the research could be organized according to different terms of classification or taxonomy. Moreover, *Not Yet There* is not so much clustered as rhizomatic, where discrete enquiries form nodal points within a much broader network of activity.

My ongoing project *Field Proposals* (2009>) attempts to give shape to the conceptual landscape of my practice, attending to the rhizomatic (flat, planar, non-hierarchical) nature of how I work. *Field Proposals* exists as a pairing of two maps. The first uses titles from existing work to plot the coordinates of or establish the cartography of a practice. The second map is largely blank, in further anticipation of this still to be navigated territory. *Field Proposals* abandon the earlier geographical clustering of projects (westerly — practices of failure etc.), electing towards a self-

The image displays two large-scale network diagrams mounted on a wall. The left diagram is a dense, complex web of interconnected nodes and edges, while the right diagram is a sparser, more structured network. Both diagrams use small rectangular labels for nodes and lines for edges. The left diagram is a dense, complex web of interconnected nodes and edges, while the right diagram is a sparser, more structured network. Both diagrams use small rectangular labels for nodes and lines for edges.



The process of mapping does not provide any coherent, definitive structure, but rather reveals further zones of indeterminacy by drawing attention to areas (of the map) that are currently unknown, unexplored or unaccounted for. The *Field Proposals* outline a nascent methodology based on principles of transit, restlessness and mobility where the process of thinking is often activated in the vectoral movement or migration — the leaps of thinking — from one nodal point to another on the map, rather than through an attempt to solidify or stabilize any single coordinate as a ‘body of knowledge’.

Moreover, the *Field Proposals* emphasize the gaps between nodal points, the landscape of what is not-yet-explored, even indicating points on the map — where most lines cross — that could prove especially auspicious areas for relocating an enquiry. Intersecting lines suggest as-yet-unnamed possibilities that for now remain indiscernible. The maps thus prophetically signal — even *divine* — connections between areas of concern that may not have been considered without their guidance; they map a potential future as much as trace the past. Whilst it might be too much to claim divination as a research method, the *Field Proposals* do intimate towards a method of working that could be conceptualized using Deleuze and Guattari’s model of the rhizome, or as a model of nomadism or itinerancy following theorists such as Rosi Braidotti. The *Field Proposals* foreground the rhizome’s ‘principles of connections and heterogeneity’ outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, where ‘any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything and must be’. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: p.7)

Unlikely associations form in the friction of unexpected proximity, like connections made when skimming book-shelves (dis)organized without the guidance of Dewey. The rhizome seemingly resists attempts to isolate or separate its individual nodal points from their entanglement, for as Deleuze and Guattari assert, ‘A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines ... Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: p.7)

Breaking off a single section of the rhizome does not serve to isolate it (for focused research) but rather stimulates new growth around where the cut is made, provoking unexpected eruptions or emergencies elsewhere within the network. Deleuze and Guattari do however suggest a way of progressing:

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous point on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensity segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: p.161)

Arguably, this is what my project *Not Yet There* attempts, its nodal points attest to moments where a set of ideas have been inhabited (just) long enough to produce a piece of writing, a performance or a visual proposition, before the enquiry moves on, elsewhere. Here, thinking proceeds through what Braidotti calls 'leaps and bounds', where research is 'thus created as an in-between space of zigzagging and of crossing, non-linear but not chaotic, nomadic, yet accountable and committed'. (Braidotti, 2006: p.5)

Whilst Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, has undoubtedly helped me think about the method of my practice, the research itself is not about rhizomatic thinking as such. What underpins *Not Yet There* is an interest in practices for 'thinking otherwise', which manifests as the search for pragmatic 'tactics' or 'ways of operating' that offer different models for being and behaving (beyond what is considered normative). I am currently developing this area of exploration through the triangulation of certain philosophies of subjectivity (the *concept* of 'making life into a work of art'); tactical practices (*affective*, embodied 'ways of operating' drawn largely from contemporary art contexts) and reflection on the knowledge(s) produced therein (an exploration of productive knowledge or *techné*). The experimental 'project' of making life into a work of art (of folding back life to regard life) both requires *and* produces a different species of knowledge; it is less concerned in consolidating the canon of what *already is*, as in looking for loopholes or moments of porosity within the existing structure's logic. To conceive of 'life as a work of art' is to critically attend to the daily pressures that homogenize and control lived experiences, and to find new ways of rupturing these habitual or repetitive patterns. Various philosophers have advocated the necessity of viewing life as a kind of project or mode of invention,

suggesting ways in which one's 'styles of life' or 'ways of existing' might be produced or constructed differently to habitual expectation. Here, the making of life into a work of art involves the rejection of prescribed, accepted cartographies of subjectivity in favour of a perpetual — daily and life-long — quest for new modes of creative inhabitation not yet fully mapped out or declared known. Gilles Deleuze asks: 'What are our ways of existing, our possibilities of life or our processes of subjectification; are there ways for us to constitute ourselves as a "self", and (as Nietzsche would put it) sufficiently "artistic" ways, beyond knowledge and power?' (Deleuze, 1995: p.99) Following Spinoza, he argues that the making of life into a work of art (or the 'Art of Ethics') is a life-long project involving the conscious selection of those affects that offer possibilities of individual augmentation (an increase in power through joy) rather than diminution (a decrease in power through sadness). Moreover, for Deleuze, 'it's a matter of optional rules that make existence a work of art, rules at once ethical and aesthetic that constitute ways of existing or styles of life'. (Deleuze, 1995, p.98) For Michel Foucault, the 'techniques of the self' or 'arts of existence' take the form of 'those reflective and voluntary practices by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria'. (Foucault, 1992/1984): pp. 10 — 11)

I am interested in the symbiotic or reciprocal relation between the production of 'life as a work of art' (perhaps manifesting as artistic research) and the production of *techné* (or productive knowledge). Making a return to how the term was used within Ancient Greek culture, *techné* is conceived as a disruptive — even subversive — species of knowledge. *Techné* is a model of *known-not* knowledge capable of working within situations that remain indeterminate or are newly encountered; a knowledge that emerges simultaneous to the situation it attempts to comprehend, that alone is adequate to the task of comprehending that situation. Its revelations remain stubbornly situational, peculiar to the terms of a specific context, always in flux. A *techné*, asserts Janet Atwill in *Rhetoric Reclaimed*, is 'knowledge as production, not product, and as intervention and articulation rather than representation'. (Atwill, 1998: p.2) Moreover, she suggests, it is a dynamic form of knowledge production or art that emerges at the point when a boundary or limitation is recognized, in order to create 'a path that both transgresses and redefines that boundary'. (Atwill, 1998: p.48)

Techné is the practice of devising new ways of operating in situations when habitual forms of knowledge no longer suffice. Its interventions and inventions appear pitched against the logic of received wisdoms and hegemonic lines of powers in an attempt to produce moments of porosity or escape. Working against the logic and limits of normative knowledge and its systems of capture and control, *techné* ‘challenges those forces and limits with its power to discover (*heuriskein*) and invent new paths (*poroi*)’. Atwill states that, ‘*techné* deforms limits into new paths in order to reach — or better yet, to produce — an alternative destination’. (Atwill, 1998: p.69)

Conceived as a form of *techné*, ‘the making of life into a work of art’ attempts the transformation of what *is* into what is *possible*, by navigating the limits of its own production until they yield, becoming porous. This is not performed through blunt refusal nor direct force, but rather by staying vigilant to the fact that any limit is only as strong as its weakest point, is *already* full of holes. *Techné* is thus a practice of mindfulness, which — against the reactions of impulsive habit — holds back, bides its time. It is the art of *knowing-when*, of catching the limit off-guard. *Techné* is associated with an attendant form of cunning intelligence (*mêtis*) and a mode of time characterized by opportunism, the ‘right time’ (*kairos*). Writing on the specific subject of *mêtis*, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant describe it as,

(A) type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism [...] It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic. (Detienne and Vernant, 1991/1978: pp.3 — 4)

Harnessing the properties of dexterity (*euchireia*), sureness of eye (*eustochia*) and sharp-wittedness (*agchinoia*), *mêtis* ‘attempts to reach its desired goal by feeling its way and guessing’; it is a ‘type of cognition which is alien to truth and quite separate from *episteme*, knowledge’. (Detienne and Vernant, 1991/1978: p.4) For Detienne and Vernant, *mêtis* is a form of intelligence capable of seizing the opportunities made

momentarily visible as the prevailing logic within a given structure or system yields, like the catching of the wind or turn of the tide.

Techné is also often associated with *kairos*, a qualitatively different mode of time to that of linear or chronological time (*chronos*). *Kairos* is not an abstract measure of time passing but of time ready to be seized: timeliness, the critical time where something *could* happen. Yet within the logic of *techné*, opportunities are produced rather than awaited: it is a practice or art deemed capable of setting up the conditions wherein *kairos* (the time of opportunity) might arise and in knowing (through a form of *mētis* or intuitive intelligence) how and when to act in response. Here, it becomes possible to conceive of how ‘the making of life into a work of art’ might operate through a form of *kairos*. Rather than the attempt to make life into new *forms*, or by making — and leaving — a space wherein something unexpected might materialize; ‘techniques of the self’ could also be understood temporally, as the act of making time and of deciding how to act. Here, an attempt is made to create the conditions of *kairos*, the experience of a temporal gap or breach opening up within the logic of *chronos*. The subject must respond swiftly and with intent (with *mētis*), where in the moment of decision it must summon a new way of being — a new direction — that could not have been conceived had *kairos* not arisen. For Antonio Negri, ‘*Kairòs* is the modality of time through which being opens itself, attracted by the void at the limit of time, and it thus decides to fill that void’. (Negri, 2003: p.152) In Negri’s terms, ‘an authentic form of being is only produced if the subject recognizes this limit and is willing to call into existence the *new* of being through the finding of a name that is adequate to the *new being* called forth’. (Negri, 2003: p.152)

To perform as a practice for ‘making life into a work of art’ research must operate experimentally, affectively. Central to my research is the conceptualization of method as *tactical*. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau uses the term ‘tactics’ to describe ‘procedures’ for producing ‘everyday creativity’. (De Certeau, 1984: p.xiv) He differentiates between strategies and tactics, where a ‘strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* ... Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model’, whilst:

A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking over in its entirety, without being able to keep its distance ... a tactic depends on time — it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be 'seized on the wing'. Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'. (De Certeau, 1984: p.xix).

For de Certeau tactical practices signal towards those everyday moments where the dominant language and its products become appropriated and redirected into other uses, recombined into new arrangements through acts of bricolage, assemblage and improvisation, practices of 'making do' or of *poiēsis*. Alternatively, he conceives of 'ways of operating' as a form of wily or cunning manoeuvre, wherein the weak or perceived powerless assert control over the strong (as power *to*, not power *over*): 'clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', manoeuvres, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries'. (De Certeau, 1984, p.xix) Within these situations, de Certeau asserts,

The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. This is achieved in propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements [...] the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is 'seized'. (De Certeau, 1984, p.xix)

De Certeau notes how the Greeks described such 'ways of operating' by the term '*mētis*'. Certainly, for Detienne and Vernant, *mētis* is inherently tactical — the art of preparing for what could not have been anticipated or planned for in advance, 'where every new trial demands the invention of new ploys, the discovery of a way out (*poros*) that is hidden'. (Detienne and Vernant, 1991/1978) Less concerned with the relation of research 'methods' to the production of 'new' knowledge, my research practice proposes to explore (and indeed perform) the connection between 'tactical ways of operating' to the production of *techné*. Here, method cannot be separated from the encounter with its unfolding subject (since 'every new trial demands the invention of new ploys'); methods must be discovered or (re)invented along the way. Within recent

writing I have begun to explore this relation — between tactics and *techné* — within other artists' practice, to discern an emergent vocabulary of tactical approaches or principles (which in turn might constitute a tactical methodology). Tactical practices purposefully borrow, appropriate or misuse the language of the dominant structure (perhaps even conventional research methods) to produce new or unexpected readings (often in a *minor* key). It is the subversive approach at play within diverse examples of practice and thinking including, for example, the Situationists' technique of *détournement*; Nicolas Bourriaud's 'post-production'; the twist of Gianni Vattimo's 'verwendung' or 'weak thought', and Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of a 'minor literature'. Considered as part of a practice of producing oneself differently or of 'making life into a work of art', 'tactics' constitute a mode of continual experimentation or *endeavour*, intent on finding (even producing) moments of porosity wherein to develop oblique trajectories of thinking and being.

The research process can be conceived less as a teleological pursuit in search of conclusions or outcomes as a continually, unfolding endeavour endlessly attempting to produce new lines of flight. Research emerges as a space of rehearsal that keeps the thinking subject active and activated, a daily practice within which to test or exercise the limits of one's thinking and to attempt to reach beyond. In these terms, research no longer operates as a process for solidifying thinking towards fact or knowledge, but as a lubricant for keeping thought fluid, agile, malleable. It involves the perpetual undoing of what is known in order to prevent thought from becoming fixed and static; an attempt to rupture or destabilize — rather than contribute to or consolidate — the canon of accepted ideas, the knowledge of the encyclopedia. Considered as part of a wider project of performing oneself differently, research is the name given to the enquiry of a thinking subject intent on testing the limits of his or her capacity for thought. Research subjects emerge as those most likely to keep the chain of thought buoyant, preventing it from falling too quickly into orthodoxy or conjecture, or else simply falling flat. The practice of research can be considered as a flow of energy or even life force, through which a critical subject endeavours to stay in thinking. This process could be conceived as an expression of Spinoza's 'conatus', the endeavour or inclination by which a thing strives to continue to exist and enhance itself. Genevieve Lloyd states that Spinoza's central concept is '*conatus* — the 'striving' through which a thing endeavours to stay in being', where the thing's 'endeavour to persist in being is

identical with its very essence'. (Lloyd, 1996: p.8) Spinoza's *Ethics* (specifically understood through the prism of Gilles Deleuze's writing) offers an extended pragmatic model — or guide to living — where the actual striving or endeavour towards becoming more human has the capacity to create the very conditions whereby an individual body is able to become *more*. In these terms, the endeavour of research is one of producing such conditions. This paper thus proposes the possibility of value and meaning for research beyond the specificity of its findings, by considering the research process as evidence of a human capacity and desire for 'being more', its enquiry the flow or life force of a critical subject engaged in thinking.

Thus far, this text has attempted to suggest how research methods can be conceived as 'tactics' or 'ways of operating', which could be developed as part of a wider project of making life into a work of art. I have begun to propose a relation between such tactics and the production of a specific species of knowledge or *techné*, with its attendant forms of cunning intelligence (*mêtis*) and opportune timing (*kairos*). Moreover, I have argued that for research to constitute a 'technology of the self' it must be practiced experimentally, inhabited with the spirit of 'conatus', an endeavour whose central goal is one of producing the conditions for *being more*. The challenge is one of creating the conditions for oblique lines of flight, where thinking remains a generative, prospective site for producing new thought, rather than a form of repetition or regurgitation which simply maintains — without questioning — the trajectory of what has come before. Here perhaps, it becomes necessary to explore how to affect the fold in thinking or selfhood, which is central to Foucault's project of making life into a work of art. Through what means can the self become sufficiently detached from the event of living so as to be able to act upon itself? Moreover, how is it possible to observe a self that is perpetually transforming and in flux, a changing and changeable subject. In one sense, this is perhaps a phenomenological question, where an attempt is made to shift from the realm of objective study to one of embodied lived enquiry, to the experience of being in the world. The challenge of being both the enquirer *and* the enquiry, requires a capacity for occupying the interstice, of being able to momentarily bracket or break with life's flow *just* enough to regard it, and then return. Art and philosophy have the capacity to produce such breaks or ruptures in the smooth flow of habitual being and thinking. The encounter (with art or philosophy) affects a rupture, argues O'Sullivan, whereupon 'our typical

ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought'. (O'Sullivan, 2006: p.1) He states that, 'The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities. It produces a cut, a crack. However ... the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently. This is the creative moment of the encounter that obliges us to think otherwise.' (O'Sullivan, 2006: p.1) The challenge, perhaps, is one of deciding how to inhabit the space/time of rupture or breach, whether to allow oneself to be affected or transformed by the encounter, or to will back normality as swiftly as one can. This space of 'hesitancy' affords what Bergson might call a 'gap' or a mode of 'attention' or for Deleuze a space of 'creative emotion' within which a form of creativity might emerge. (Deleuze, 1988: p.111) However, returning to the principles of *techné*, I want to assert that what emerges in the rupturing encounter is the glint of *kairos*, the offering of an opportunity which is either seized or lost.

Whilst philosophy undoubtedly provides many of the ruptures within my own research practice, art offers the provocation (and permission) for my initial leaps of thought. It is thus towards art practice that I turn to consider ways in which the self (or a creative force) might be folded back to work upon itself. Arguably, this is the manoeuvre that practice-based research performs, where an art practice is folded to interrogate the conditions of its own unfolding production. Turning to key debates around the mode of thinking that emerges through art (art *as* research) is not (necessarily) for the purposes of advocating the research value of art as such, but rather to explore the nature of the knowledge(s) produced through the project of 'making life into a work of art'. Throughout this text I have intimated that certain research practices could be considered part of the project of making life into a work of art; furthermore, that the making of life into a work of art might also have a research potential in itself (since it generates new trajectories of thinking and being). Here then, debates around the role of art *as* research might help elaborate the critical potentiality of Foucault's making of 'life into a work of art'. If life is approached as a work of art, then what knowledge(s) are produced through such an experience and how can they be adequately researched/explored? Moreover, if knowledge or 'truth' is produced then can this 'practice' of 'making life into a work of art' be described as 'research'; a

form of ‘art *as* research’. Whilst there is perhaps a risk in taking Foucault’s proposition too literally, in doing so my intent is to affect a shift from interrogating the *concept* (or philosophy) of ‘making life into a work of art’ towards addressing the *art* itself, the tactical practices by which such a project might be *actually* realized.

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