

Counter-Dancing

1.

This is a list of 24 articulations about counter-dancing. While you are reading them, they might counter-dance in your body. This list is also a textual form and exercise of counter-dancing.

2.

Counter-dancing is an activity and an idea. As an activity it is a gathering of agencies in bodies, articulations, signals (tectonic, mechanic, acoustic, optic, electromagnetic) and particles involving the idea that in order to decouple from the so-called technosphere¹we² also need to re-link to it: While it is clear that during the last centuries we continuously got alienated not only from nature, earth, the soil or our environment, but also from technology and their socio-political and -material contexts, it is still an open question, whether we would feel more responsible towards the catastrophes, the suffering of the world we and our machines created, if we felt more compassion. This sort of problematisation sometimes helps to change our everyday habits and behaviour a bit, but still is not enough to reach the right critical mass considering the longer time scale of decades to come. One might even regard this form of awareness-raising as more depressing than convincing. Counter-dancing tries to start from that point.

3.

Counter-dancing is imagined as a sort of therapeutic manoeuvre against this depression we fall into after we recognise the problems we have caused. It is a joyful way to disentangle from the unwanted, discriminating, unfair ways technologies capture and lure us, not by withdrawal, not by an unrealistic attempt to leave the technosphere, but by re-pair, re-entanglement, re-linking or even re-bonding. Not by saying 'no', but by oscillating between 'yes and no'. It is an idea yet to be put into practice. It operates not only in the realm of social imagination, but something I would like to call social sounding.

4.

Counter-dancing is a form of breathing within our techno-mediated world. This is how it wants to link to a topic of this collection.

5. Counter-dancing is a form of technology appropriation and hacking. A form of reprogramming the code/space, a concept formulated by human geographers Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge that “occurs when software and the spatiality of everyday life become mutually constituted, that is, produced through one another. Here, spatiality is the product of code, and the code exists primarily in order to produce a particular spatiality.”³ One of their examples is a check-in area at the airport, which, when the software crashes, turns into a fairly chaotic waiting room. In code/space the production of space is dependent on code. Some urban neighbourhoods or selected highways might soon transform into code/spaces specially programmed for automated, driverless vehicles.
6. Counter-dancing is about creating alternative code/spaces, which are not designed for profit-generation or capitalist efficiency. Counter-dancing is acting against the congestions, bottlenecks and limitations imposed on us by the extractive networks of the techno- and infosphere, especially their algorithmic and computational systems.
7. Counter-dancing wants to participate in the discussions about so-called ‘smart’ and ‘intelligent cities’, infrastructures and logistics, where planning, governing, modelling and computing are rhythmised and articulated on urban scales.
8. Counter-dancing involves architecting,⁴ a term hyped in the late 1980s within the then new field of system architecture reacting towards major developments in information technologies. Counter-dancing re-interprets architecting as a more commonist,⁵ solidarity-oriented, inclusive, participatory, critical and anti-capitalist way of architectural articulation, planning, controlling and automation. Let us re-imagine the future of architecting in different, more hopeful ways.
9. Counter-dancing unfolds in a dynamic, non-hierarchising, never ending gesture, movement and dance of eternal search. Therefore, it is critical to change the beat from time to time. Don’t believe in techno-utopianism nor in so-called ‘progress’. Technology rarely solves a problem, it only differentiates it in a Derridean meaning, it brings it away from us. But from far away it will still haunt us.
10. Counter-dancing greets the philosophers Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. It resonates with the principle of rhizomatic action. Rhizomatic dancing links one’s selves, joys and desires coupled with capitalistic technology with those of others in a flat manner. It

evacuates, empties and distributes accumulated energy, tensions, power and money in a non-violent dance. It involves the careful dismantling of individual entities in our environment, which is not the same as their erasure, but rather about “opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorialisation measured with the craft of a surveyor.”⁶ While making new maps, new choreographies and new compositions, it is also crucial to learn and train “the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger.”⁷ Opening up one’s body and mind to linkages with the malicious and toxic technosphere is done only in order to counter-dance it, to rhizomatise it, to make it queer, decolonial, non-patriarchal, ungraspable and schizo-phrenic.

11.

Counter-dancing works with Donna Haraway’s ironic concept of the cyborg. It suggests “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.” The cyborg is “an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories.”⁸ The late Michel Foucault’s notion of critique might add another twist into this dance. It is energised by critique as an inquiry of the “limits that are imposed on us”⁹ by discourse, and technologies, especially computational, I would add. It is therefore an “experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”¹⁰ *Them* meaning the limits imposed on us. A sort of experimental critique, which attempts to treat those “instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do”¹¹ as made by history, and thus changeable. This collective media, techno and psycho critique therefore allows us to “separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.”¹² So it creates gateways for introducing change.

12.

Counter-dancing surveillance, data, platform and techno capitalism are imagined as being conducted by group-based critical mapping, coding and sounding as forms of therapy, similarly to art or music or dance therapy, but not fully reduced to functionality and attempting to go beyond pure applicability. Let’s see similarities in coding, composing and dancing. Programming machines and algorithms resonate not only with designing music machines (and software), but also with architecting. This form of therapy wants to transgress copying the already known, but wants to map, dance, sound and transform the unknown by unfolding in an explorative, dynamical manner, similar to how musicians act in improvisation.

This implies the formulation of a critical pedagogy, which enables us to raise a critical mass of tech-savvy counter-ravers, yet to come. Making rhizomes with technology involves demystifying its latest advances, which often emerge like magic. To dance rhizome-inspired structures aims to avoid making tree-like forms: We want to network, but we want to avoid the hierarchisation of its nodes. We want equal distribution, not concentration of power. No accumulation of outrageous amounts of money, data and wealth! And maybe even not too much joy and happiness? We want to address the inherent biases, gradients and vectors coded into both the advertising networks of social media and the machinic decision-making systems used by powerful companies and precarious governments. We plan to tackle this by engaging with adversarial machine vision and listening, with the algorithmic ecosystems of face and voice recognition analysis or the automatic decision-making algorithms used to filter, categorise and govern the flow, supply and logistics of masses of people, organisms and things for control, surveillance and exploitation.¹³

13. Counter-dancing is a form of poetry. A poetry not of words, but of movements and signals. As formulated by Marxist philosopher Franco Bifo Berardi, all we can do to regain our breath, while living in this suffocating, subordinating world, is to empower ourselves with more poetry. Poetry always has a rhythm, which links counter-dancing also to late Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. Inspiration as breathing-in forms an upbeat, an opening and a beginning of a rhythm. By dancing our bodies, heat and joy transpires into our environments. Everyday life in cities has its rhythm, machines also have their rhythms, financial markets, too. Rhythmanalysis wants to operate similar to psychoanalysis or even schizoanalysis, but listens more to the timing of the capitalist's networks.

14. Counter-dancing involves also algorithmythanalysis meant as a variation of rhythmanalysis with a stronger focus on algorithm-driven ramifications of profiteering with computational information networks in our everyday life. An algorithmyth is a cacography of algorithm, what engineers and information technologists call step-by-step instructions written in some coded form, so that some machine can operate, execute and compute them automatically. And with algorithmyth I intended to emphasise the rhythmic mode algorithms operate in.¹⁴ Rhythms are always also carnal, physiological and affective and not merely chains of machinic pulses.

15.

While counter-dancing, the counter-dancer operates as a poet and a schizo, who reveals “the infinitude of the process of meaning-making.”¹⁵ They¹⁶ need to collaborate with coders, tinkerers, investigative journalists, activists, organisers, scholars, educators, politicians, policy makers and many more. When becoming an advanced practitioner they want to go beyond monotonic measures and measurability established by the “colonisation of reality by the force of the law.”¹⁷ Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman calls it chrononormativity, which converts “historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines,”¹⁸ since algorithms and their rhythms are crucial for imposing an even more exhaustive chrononormativity on us, be it in the field of the gig economy, on Amazon warehouse or food delivery workers, content moderators or click workers. Everything is, as Berardi might add here, “reformatted according to the algorithm, the vibratory nature of the bio-rhythm is suffocated. Breathing is disturbed and poetry is frozen—poetry, the error that leads to the discovery of new continents of meaning, the excess that contains new imaginations and new possibilities.”¹⁹

16.

Counter-dancing is thus about defrosting the stiffening, clustering and categorisation effects of algorithms operated by profit-oriented or even authoritarian systems. Media studies scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues something similar alongside by referring to homophily as a configuration, which is enabled by hierarchised social graphs, our links with people, groups and organisations in a social network. We need to counter-dance homophily, our love for sameness and strive for difference, which is difficult since usually we like those who are similar to us. But we urgently need a counter-dancing of our habitual patterns and preferences. We need to leave our comfort zone. “To be uncomfortable, then, is to inhabit norms differently, to create new ways of living with others—different ways of impressing upon others [and] new forms of engagement. Different, more inhabitable, patterns.”²⁰

17.

Counter-dancing is operating, co-existing and overlapping on several levels of rhythm and time scales. While the level of human perception is situated on a meso-scale, there are rhythms whose duration go beyond and below. Below are the technological micro-operations, which are faster than humans can perceive, beyond are the longer rhythms of months, years, decades and centuries; and in the middle rhythms sorted by milliseconds, seconds, minutes, hours and days. Notably humans perceive the range from 50 milliseconds down to 60 microseconds as a continuous spectrum

of tones with pitches. Formulated more concretely, counter-dancing is not only operating on the level of sounds, music, dance or movements, but below, beyond and besides, such as in the range of electromagnetic signals, radio and wireless protocols using means such as software defined radio.²¹ Each assemblage or *agencement* for counter-dancing is a specific orchestration of timed actions and signallings operating on many of these levels of rhythms and time scales. Especially the realm of months and years are crucial for effects, which have community or group-oriented implications.

18.

Counter-dancing while coming back to Berardi, dances with chaosmosis, a term he borrows from Guattari, which is the “opening of the ordered system to chaotic flows and the osmotic vibration of the organism that looks for a rhythm tuned to the cosmos.”²² Therefore, we need to make rhizomes with software and algorithhythms in order to de-stiffen them, to allow that their congested energies can flow outwards or new things inwards, and to allow and re-program them to perform chaosmosis. But this means—as mentioned earlier—that we also need to carefully resonate with technology and algorithms to a certain degree, applying the right dosage and bearing in mind that they can also easily capture and control us.

19.

In more materialist, but old fashioned, masculine terminology inspired by Walter Benjamin, counter-dancing is about “blasting open the continuum of history,”²³ meaning the hardened, linear structures of oppressive history, as he already formulated around 1940 in his famous *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. A historical materialist waits for the moment where a historical situation is crystallised, stopped or at least presented in a sort of time-lapsed, slow-motion mode, so that they can analyse it materialistically, reshuffle, recombine and reconstruct it as it was witnessed by the oppressed and not as written by the powerful as a sort of teleological, linear continuum of progress legitimating their hegemonic status. This sort of activist interpretation of Benjamin gets supported by his reflections on film. Film is the forgotten, unreflected medium of Benjamin’s materialist historian and is for him a technology, similarly to Haraway’s cyborg, which operates in-between a hybrid of positive and negative usage. Film renders the performance of an actress into measurable, quantifiable processes of labour and alienates them,²⁴ but at the same time it enables one to dissect a situation like a surgeon would do during a medical operation. Therefore a magician is to a surgeon as a painter is to a cinematographer.²⁵ “Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came

film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended.”²⁶ With a camera and a projector as empowering media technologies, the activist materialist historian in the early 20th century similar to poets experimenting with the alphabet around the same time was able to re-write, re-cut and re-construct new forms of expression and revolutionary counter-dancing. What are the implications of such media activism in today’s context of coding, simulation and data analysis? What are the implications for computer-driven, but commonist architecting?

20. Counter-dancing needs to focus on education as a form of production using media technologies. A little bit more than forty years after Benjamin, looking at the technology of poetry, a young Friedrich Kittler argued that it is the lip-mouth-tongue-throat system of a pedagogue, often a mother, combined with a certain way of looking at and operating with letters on a printed paper, which predetermined the “condition of production for Classical poetry.”²⁷ Focusing on the early 19th century in Germany, Kittler argued that, “poetic texts were on the technological cutting edge because more than any others they could speak to and exploit alphabetized bodies. They operated on the threshold of response itself, where discursive powers paraded as the innocence of bodies and Nature.”²⁸ About two hundred years later our situation is unimaginably more complicated, but still we could try to make analogies and ponder about the most prevalent pedagogic situations around the production of software including their technocratic and solution-oriented culture. When our creativity is striving for poetic code and algorithms as the cutting edge of contemporary technology and cultural production, what are the modes of exploitation linked to our algorithmised bodies we need to be aware of?

21. Counter-dancing draws some ideas from similar turbulent times a hundred years ago. In France during the 1920s and 30s, Célestin Freinet developed his renowned pedagogy, which was built around a collectively maintained printing press in the school. The printing press is an ancient media technology, which completely reorganised the school into a place of collective cultural production, an on-going re-reading, re-printing of written accounts from students for students with students. Freinet’s approach emphasised the use of machinery and technology “disengaged from consumerist desire and the logic of accumulation [...]”²⁹ At around the same time, specifically in 1928, the architect and teacher Hannes Meyer, second

and relatively unknown director of the Bauhaus, defined “*bauen*”³⁰—translated as ‘building’ or ‘constructing’—as a sort of collectively practised, biological process of designing for affective and bodily needs. According to him, architects enquire besides the physical and thermal aspects of the building also constellations in the family, its links to outsiders, animals and plants in the garden and the interdependence of humans, pets and insects. Architects therefore become specialists in organisation, who collaborate with other specialists in a sort of collectively enacted process. Architecting, to use the term from articulation 8 is therefore about organising societal, technical, economical and physical matters. In the late 1970s techno-optimists like Seymour Papert, co-founder of the MIT Media Lab, claimed that “it is possible to design computers so that learning to communicate with them can be a natural process, more like learning French by living in France than like trying to learn it through the unnatural process of American foreign-language instruction in classrooms.” And that this would motivate “children [to] learn mathematics as a living language.”³¹

22. Counter-dancing as an elusive, rhizome-inspired counter pedagogy attempts to join or rejoin these historical, minor fragments or wreckage—if you will—which didn’t transform into major developments, but at the same time it wants to avoid mistakes from other past movements such as psychedelics or cyberdelics, which are inspiring for their usage of joy, but on the other hand were too hedonistic and optimistic.

23. Counter-dancing surely needs more exploration, elaboration and this list is only a beginning.

24. Counter-dancing never forgets to change the beat from time to time.

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- . 'Take Back the Algorithms! A Media Theory of Commonistic Affordance'. *Media Theory* 3, no. 1 (August 23, 2019): 269–86.
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- 1 Technosphere is a term coined by earth systems scientist Peter K. Haff in 2012 and has been extensively discussed in the context of the 'Technosphere 2015–19' project at *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin.
 - 2 See, P. K. Haff, 'Technology and Human Purpose: The Problem of Solids Transport on the Earth's Surface', *Earth Syst. Dynam.* 3, no. 2 (2012): 149–56.
 - 3 In this text "we, our or us" is meant inclusively, but still respecting different opinions. The difference between us and the "others" are dynamic, indeed intersectional and complicated, but still critical. There are lines to draw, but they must stay erasable, bendable and shiftable.
 - 4 Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 16f.
 - 5 Eberhardt Rechtin, *Systems Architecting: Creating and Building Complex Systems: Creating Building Complex Systems* (Prentice Hall, 1991).
 - 6 Shintaro Miyazaki, 'Take Back the Algorithms! A Media Theory of Commonistic Affordance', *Media Theory* 3, no. 1 (August 23, 2019): 269–86.
 - 7 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), 160.
 - 8 Deleuze and Guattari, 160.
 - 9 Donna J. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century (Reprint from 1985)', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 1991), 181.
 - 10 Michel Foucault, 'What Is Enlightenment?' In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 50.
 - 11 Foucault, 50.
 - 12 Foucault, 46.
 - 13 Foucault, 46.
 - 14 See for example literature addressing this issue, Claudio Celis Bueno, 'The Face Revisited: Using Deleuze and Guattari to Explore the Politics of Algorithmic Face Recognition', *Theory, Culture & Society*, August 7, 2019, 1–19; Kathleen Griesbach et al., 'Algorithmic Control in Platform Food Delivery Work', *Socius* 5 (January 1, 2019): 2378023119870041.
 - 15 Shintaro Miyazaki, 'AlgoRHYTHMS Everywhere—a Heuristic Approach to Everyday Technologies', Eds. Birgitte Stougaard and Jan Hein Hoogstad, *Pluralizing Rhythm: Music, Arts, Politics*, no. 26 (2013): 135–48.
 - 16 Franco Bifo Berardi, *Breathing—Chaos and Poetry*, Intervention Series 26 (Semiotext(c), 2018), 20.
 - 17 "They" here is used as a gender-neutral pronoun instead of "she" or "he".
 - 18 Berardi, 40.
 - 19 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds (Perverse Modernities)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.
 - 20 Berardi, *Breathing—Chaos and Poetry*, 114.
 - 21 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'Queering Homophily', in *Pattern Discrimination*, ed. Clemens Apprich et al. (meson press, 2018), 89.
 - 22 See <https://www.gnuradio.org/about/>.
 - 23 Berardi, *Breathing—Chaos and Poetry*, 49.
 - 24 See chapter, 'Theses on History', Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Harvard University Press, 2003), 396.
 - 25 She chapter 'Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility', Benjamin, 261.
 - 26 Benjamin, 263.
 - 27 Benjamin, 265.
 - 28 Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 28.
 - 29 Kittler, 117.
 - 30 Matthew Carlin and Nathan Clendenin, 'Celestin Freinet's Printing Press: Lessons of a "Bourgeois" Educator', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51, no. 6 (May 12, 2019): 10.
 - 31 <https://www.cloud-cuckoo.net/openarchive/Autoren/Meyer/Meyer1928.htm> From, *bauhaus, zeitschrift für gestaltung*, vol. 2 no. 4 October 1928,
 - 32 Seymour Papert, *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 6.