Renegade Activism and the Artist-as-Collective

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His research focuses on the derivative condition of technocapitalism and how the semantic field of resolution can be activated for a less passive conception of transparency. Critical art, video and performative discourse works include: *The Future of Demonstration* (2017/2018) and *WHISPER. Status Code: No Entity Found*, (2016), both in collaboration with the artist Sylvia Eckermann. See also Nestler's *Countering Capitulation, From Automated Participation to Renegade Solidarity; high-frequency trading and the forensic analysis of the Flash Crash* (2014) and the *Portraits of a Philosophy* video series: *Contingent Claims. Elie Ayache* (2012); *Contingent Optionality. Randy Martin* (2014); and *Contingent Ethics. Haim Bodek* (2014).

knowing [ˈnəʊɪŋ]

intelligence with motive

Instead of an introduction: Notes on the derivative condition

Today, the future emerges within a derivative paradigm—the implementation of data-intensive, algorithmic processes based on scientific modelling, mathematical equations and data exhaust evaluation that leverage the dynamic recalibration of contingent claims (derivatives) at present. Thus, rather than merely critiquing its contractual and algorithmic applications, this chapter diagnoses the derivative as a paradigmatic force which shapes our economic, political and social reality. The derivative as a technopolitical innovation has introduced a new and pervasive level of exploitation. Financial markets are exposed to volatility, which corresponds to uncertainty. Risk, defined as ‘measurable uncertainty’ is the tool that keeps the complex circulation of leveraged capital operating (primarily by applying probability calculus to random or historic data). While the orthodox view maintains that financial markets are catalysts of future wealth (the promise of profit accumulation), it subjects the idea and history of *promise* to a quantitative archive of (meta)data whose ‘sense’ is to *claim* the future at present.²

² F.H. Knight (1921), *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit*, (Boston: Hart, Schaffner & Marx).

The derivative is situated in the future

The financial expert and philosopher, Elie Ayache, speaks of the derivative as the ‘technology of the future’ because it is the quantitative equivalent of anticipation and expectation.³ At first, its dynamic recalibration regime revolutionised finance, as it offered new access to trading future outcomes in the face of uncertainty. But given the edge of finance over the wider economy (for example dominance of circulation over production; displacement of value by price; leverage as tool to inflate surplus value), its conceptual and acting force now far exceeds its field of origin. In finance, the derivative pricing of contingent expectations serves as a resolution regime to move along (in parallel with) the uncertainty of the future. Hence, mathematical recalibration computed to render prices for any conceivable outcome, that is risk potential, creates the future at any present moment of trading. The present as we know it has no bearing here; the moment it emerges (every moment), it arrives as price and instantly turns into historic data, entering a new cycle of calculating profit probabilities. The past succumbs to a probabilistic reservoir for the quantification of future events, while the present vaporises in the

³ See: E. Ayache (2015), *The Medium of Contingency: An Inverse View of the Market*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

knowledge [ˈnɒlɪdʒ]

knowledge is power ; but power does not want you to know that this is the case.

⁴ To this point, see in particular this work: Gerald Nestler (2013–14), *Countering Capitulation. From Automated Participation to Renegade Solidarity. High-frequency trading and the forensic analysis of the Flash Crash*, May 6, 2010, Single channel video, 11:20' at vimeo.com/channels/AoR; Nestler (2014), "Mayhem in Mahwah: The Case of the Flash Crash; or, Forensic Re-performance in Deep Time," in *Forensis, The Architecture of Public Truth*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press), 125–45; and Nestler (2014), *Contingent Ethics: Portrait of a Philosophy: Haim Bodek*, series II, Single channel video at vimeo.com/channels/AoR

⁵ Evgeny Morozov (2019), "Capitalism's New Clothes," in *The Baffler* at thebaffler.com/latest/capitams-new-clothes-morozov

actualisation of the one price realised from the myriads of virtual prices that 'inhabit' these volatile 'galaxies' of risk options. These quickly fading 'bodies' increasingly include a commodity called human capital. Thus, in what I term the 'derivative condition' of social relations, not only those contingent futures that emerge from subjectivities and their relations 'collapse'; it is the present, where subjectivity and agency are born in the first place, which now decays in microseconds.

I have argued elsewhere that the derivative, through the power yielded to financial markets by the capital-state complex, has effectively re-oriented not only economic but all relations; it delivers the paradigmatic infrastructure for *making* the social, affective and material relations we call our world—an increasingly volatile cohesion in which the promise of welfare for all is replaced by the exploitation of individualised affects.⁴ In a world in which 'states' (from corporate bodies to national states; from social status and individual identity to probabilistic states of the world) shift from (theoretically) autonomous devices within specific systems of relations to speculative ventures exposed to contingency, the ability to leverage one's bets at high factor, dynamically hedge exposure any time and externalise losses in no time. This becomes the unifying—if not universal—method of governance in managing claims repetitively against one another. As this condition includes all data traded in complex interrelations, the market regime—both embodying and exceeding the neoliberal framework—escalates the derivative paradigm to social media, politics and the contingent becoming of subjectivity. This point refers not only to the prognostic role of finance in the economic realm. Rather, the way people-as-data are treated is based on a derivative paradigm. This case is often neglected, as debates about the contours of our technocapitalist era are often narrowed down to a 'dataism' that Evgeny Morozov exposes in his review of Shoshana Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism*: "Google and Facebook were restructuring the world, not just solving its problems."⁵ One fact largely ignored in is that derivatives are metadata *par excellence*. Long before data-driven platforms like Google and Facebook appeared on the world stage of proprietary digitisation, the introduction of scientifically endorsed derivative models, contracts and algorithms (that make derivatives large scale operational) prompted ever-increasing waves of data

exploitation. This rise not only constitutes a main source of what was later dubbed Big Data; in fact, derivatives performatively pre-structure the modes of how capitalism exploits the unknown (future) and volatility (risk). Hence, I propose we view disruptive platforms not only as Big Tech but as Hedge Funds that speculatively capture, capitalise, produce and govern (future) individual behaviour and social patterns at any (micro) moment.

The derivative paradigm is not just the model for how data are made productive—in other words, how the future is made productive. By the power this logic holds over the most elusive (and illusory) of human ambitions—foreknowledge of the future—the contingent claim has also initiated a turn from representative to performative speech in the way power communicates today. In our volatile world, black box *technowledge* forms the framework of algorithmic governance, and thus the regimes that performatively evaluate, predict, surveil and enforce social automation, adaptation, recognition and control. By escalating volatility and leveraging information and access asymmetry, platform capitalism (digital service providers with monopolistic data-power that privatises governance) and Twitter politics demonstrate sophisticated but at the same time sociopathic symptoms of the derivative condition. A prominent example is the arena of alt-right politics populated by hedge fund owners (like Mercer), data brokers (like Cambridge Analytica) media interest groups (like Breitbart), troll factories (sourced for example in Russia) and politicians (like Farage). Donald Trump, for instance, redesigns Twitter as Dark Pool in which the escalation of noise—that is, the production of volatility—turns into competitive advantage. He escalates unexpected microevents by ‘surfing the volatility wave’ outside the realm of the probable; in other words, he attacks and subverts truth as a function of probability. Black Swan events—commonly deemed rare—are now manufactured in electronic speed, leveraged by fake news and other malignant information asymmetries. Within a performative speech of power, the production of volatility and the recalibration of leveraged claims becomes paradigmatic for automation-based success; but this also amplifies authoritarian symptoms. Algorithms are not only written, automated and manipulated but owned and exploited. The question at the core of technocapitalism therefore concerns the biopower of what I propose to call the *leverage class*.

libidinal [lɪˈbɪːdəʊnəl]

sexual energy that underwrites movement, intensity, flow. Lyotard’s ‘unsayable something’ linked to/forming economies of exchange, ethics, life itself.

⁶ Randy Martin (2015), *Knowledge LTD: Toward a Social Logic of the Derivative*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

The ‘derivative logic’ (a term introduced by Randy Martin in his financialisation studies) has infiltrated social, legal, temporal and material relations to a degree that it is now the paradigmatic claim—the *canon*—of technopolitical governance.⁶ Due to this worldview, mimesis shifts from reproduction by imitation to (self-)production by recalibrated approximation (for example the quantified self; online echo chambers; bot targeting; social credit scores, also its state-driven regime in China).

However, epistemic inquiry and aesthetic imagination rarely grasp the full scope of what the derivative unleashed and what it exploits as resource: wealth and power derived from volatility (risk) and leverage (debt). Most studies of debt are blind to leverage as a potent form of credit, and thus neglect leverage as that other face of debt which takes advantage of volatility. But leverage and volatility are crucial to conceptualise how (bio)power operates between state and private interest. A point in case is the conception of the class system. In a nutshell, I propose the formulation of *social asset classes* in which the *leverage class* dominates tiers of *debt classes*. The proprietary upper class performatively secures, or shifts between, future potentials by recalibrating leveraged debt; and in case of systemic default, it externalises toxic assets by socialising them to the debt classes (for example by bailouts, public debt inflation, austerity politics). This regime change has not been fully acknowledged, partly because the performative turn of the speech of power and its non-linear, derivative regime is still relatively unexplored; but also, because at times even highly critical studies get distracted by neoliberal narratives—deeply entrenched myths that we need to debunk and resolve. Hence, there is urgency for a radical analysis of volatility and leverage as tools appropriated by technocapitalist governance.

But there is another angle to this topic, an antithesis that reads the derivative against the grain to unearth other forms of thinking and making in the derivative condition. Based on this critical examination, what I call *poetics of resolution*, engages with the question how the derivative, volatility and leverage can be reconceived as means to act against the preemptive embrace of data exploitation and (right-wing) escalation politics. How can the notion of the derivative be accessed to give way to *other* meanings? How can we leverage its abundance to care for *other* sensibilities?

Here, it makes sense to explore possible counter-tactics by expanding on a point made by Martin on the ‘derivative logic’: due to its pivotal position, the derivative can be recast to harvest collective forms of wealth formation and distribution. If we agree (or at least are open to the thought) that the ‘technology of the future’ is a *techne* in its own right and as such not fully owned by capitalism, we can learn the art of reorienting the derivative and resolve which other ways it may gift for other forms of worlding. But such resolution does not come without risk. Hence, I propose a radical initiative in all ambivalence and vulnerability: the *renegade*. This renegade (an expert witness denouncing loyalty to the black box) is stigmatised as traitor; but in turn she becomes educator of the *demos*, the general public. This uprising—a marginal and precarious act, but more promising than the cry for transparency—destabilises neoliberal discretion hegemony. Here, ‘resolution’ is not treated as consensus in terms of probability—in other words, as risk management. Instead, resolution points to an engagement with the *impossible*—to risk the experience and lived (in Donna Haraway’s diction, by “staying with the trouble”).⁷ The *artist-as-collective* as an alliance of *renegade activism* is a model for decentralised, nonlinear acts of civil courage that make *resolution* possible. It is the insurrection that unlocks the *black box*.

⁷ Donna J. Haraway (2016), *Staying with the Trouble* (*Experimental Futures*), (Durham: Duke University Press).

THE ABYSS. Nonlinear Engagements in Postdisciplinary Entanglements

“Noise crashes within as well as without.”

(N. Katherine Hayles)⁸

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, derivatives went viral. Scholars from a wide array of disciplines sought new approaches to critical finance studies. Journalists and pundits picked up on the theme, devoting books (some of which were bestsellers), articles and telecasts to financial malpractice, economic injustice, the disastrous consequences of boom-and-bust cycles and algorithmic information asymmetries. Artists, hacker communities and social movements ramped up efforts to oppose the repercussions of financial capitalism and to develop open source models, knowledge commons, distributed systems and citizen access. What is seldom examined in depth, however, is the fact that the derivative has taken hold outside the

⁸ N. Katherine Hayles (1999), *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 291.

arcane world of financial speculation. As a result, the future emerges today within a derivative paradigm: exploiting algorithmic processes that leverage the dynamic recalibration of contingent claims (another term for derivatives) is not only characteristic of finance. Rather, its performative language has become the template for a technocapitalism (data-driven financial and platform capitalism) in which the future acts on the present. But lack of attention to this 'history of the future' impedes critical reflection on finance and how it gained the power to shape individual, social and material relations beyond its 'natural habitat.' Hence, shedding light on the derivative is a matter of urgency if we want to grasp how data-driven prognostics affect, appropriate, produce (and even pre-empt) actions, relations, promises and claims in the era of technocapitalism.

To address the articulations of technocapitalism, this short chapter thus focuses on the potential of artistic research and intervention. In contrast to academic disciplines, which sometimes tend to emphasise their study area over others, this, *postdisciplinary* and heterogenic approach enters the abyss to tackle financial and other data-driven spheres from a multiplicity of epistemic, aesthetic, ethnographic, technological, economic and political perspectives. Data-driven technocapitalism mediates abundance—notwithstanding the fact that accumulation and distribution continue to be highly asymmetrical, producing precarity and austerity for those it denies leverage. But it is the derivative intervention which facilitates the shift from scarcity to abundance in the first place. So instead of demonising it, such a critical reflection explores how we can access the intellectual and financial wealth absorbed by the neoliberal mediation machine; and how we disentangle the derivative to multiple potentials for ecologies of commons. For me, working as an artist entails encountering a crack, a flaw, an opening. I use the word *encounter* deliberately, as it implies a kind of serendipity, a chance connection, an experience of inconsistency enigmatic enough to become magnetic. I insert myself into the gravitational field with the twofold tactics of research and imagination in order to find, that is, construct, a trace that leads to a strategy. The strategic focus could be a term, a notion, a process or an image but it allows me to expand on it and connect it to other topics or fields seemingly unrelated at first. One example for this approach is what I term the *figure of the renegade*.

The topos—and it is a place, a location, a spatial knot as much as it is a subject and a technology—derives from *Countering Capitulation*, a research project on forensics and its relation to financial markets, presented in the exhibition *FORENSIS*, curated by Eyal Weizman and Anselm Franke at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, 2014.⁹ I had already worked on algorithmic trading and the so-called ‘Flash Crash,’ a market crash that occurred on May 6, 2010. The topic seemed promising, as the case and its investigations showed rather ambivalent results even though they were highly data driven. On the one hand, there was an epistemic edge, which seemed corrupted from the beginning. On the other hand, I wanted to investigate how finance had achieved its powerful position without utilising the forms of representation we usually think of when it comes to power regimes. I examined the material I had collected on the Flash Crash with the help of the financial data analyst Nanex LLC.¹⁰ Nanex is known for its seminal role in creating a counter-narrative to the official statement resulting from the investigation undertaken by both the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CTFC).

The official report attributed human error for causing the Flash Crash, while Nanex, amongst others, followed a different route by exploring technological sources and concluded that algorithmic operations caused the crash. When I scrutinised the material, the reports, and the visualisations, something surfaced: a discrepancy, that to Nanex, was a scandal concerning the official investigation. But to me the material gave reason to expect wider implications, due to the fact that this discrepancy not only annihilated the core of forensics, but also of the epistemic as such, and thus constituted a specific corruption of knowledge- production and decision-making. Visibility, knowledge and resolution are based on access to information and we usually consider this as either a question of collecting new or examining existing data. However, the term ‘black box society’ points to a situation in which data are deliberately concealed.¹¹ Manufacturing information asymmetry—imbalances of power due to leverage, misinformation, concealment, collusion or fraud—has become an effective tool for gaining competitive advantage across all levels of life. In a nutshell, noise is the master of information.

matter [ˈmæta]

usual understanding of matter: a substance that occupies space and possesses rest-mass, as distinct from energy, mind and spirit, with four so-called natural states of physical matter: solids, liquids, gases and plasma. the fifth state is the man-made bose-einstein condensates. matter often also refers to the material of thought or expression as something that is the subject of discussion, concern, action, thing or affair (business matters). printed matter subsumes all documents and letters sent, or to be sent, by mail. dialectical matter re-stages thesis:anti-thesis and the movement of negation to produce synthesis. radical matter is the superpositionality of encounter, diffracted with or without dimension.

⁹ *Forensis*, Latin for ‘pertaining to the forum’, is the root of the term forensics. See *FORENSIS*, curated by Eyal Weizman and Anselm Franke 15 March 2014–05 May 2015, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, at [//forensic-architecture.org/programme/exhibitions/forensis](http://forensic-architecture.org/programme/exhibitions/forensis)

¹⁰ Nestler, *Mayhem in Mahwah*, 129–135.

¹¹ Frank Pasquale (2015), *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*, (Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press).

Resolution and its semantic field

“Performativity is not about creating but about making happen.”
(Michel Callon)¹²

¹² Michel Callon (2006), “What does it mean to say that economics is performative?,” CSI working papers: Hyper Archive onLine (HAL) archives-ouvertes, ff-halshs-00091596f, 15.

¹³ For an elaboration on whistleblowing, see: C.F. Alford (2002), *Whistleblowers: Broken Lives and Organisational Power*, (New York: Cornell University Press). With respect to ‘block-chains’ see: Jaya Klara Brekke, and Ben Vickers, Eds. (2019), *The White Paper by Satoshi Nakamoto*, (London: Ignota Press). See also Brekke’s PhD thesis: J.K. Brekke (2019), *Disassembling the Trust Machine: Three cuts on the political matter of blockchain*, (PhD Thesis, Durham University), at distributingchains.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Disassembling-TrustMachine-Brekke2019.pdf

¹⁴ Eric S. Raymond (1999), *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*, (Sebastopol: O’Reilly Media).

¹⁵ Wolfie Christl and Sarah Spiekermann (2016), *Networks of Control: A Report on Corporate Surveillance, Digital Tracking, Big Data*

and Privacy, (Vienna: facultas) at archive.org/stream/Christl-NetworksKO/Christl-Networks_K_o_djvu.txt

To counter information and access asymmetry, I propose *resolution*, rather than transparency, as conceptual tool for *other* (political) sensibilities and relations. I read the term’s semiotic assemblage—ranging from perception and cognition to knowledge-production and decision-making—as a template for ecologies of solidarity, which we encounter in *renegade activism*. The *renegade*—such as a whistleblower, hacker with ‘skin in the game’ or ‘those with two names’ (Jaya K. Brekke)—is a figure that exceeds conventional frameworks of critique and agency for alliances that resist the false purity and determinacy of the technocapitalist doctrine.¹³ *Renegade activism* is a call for emancipatory insurrection. I resort to the term ‘resolution,’ not only to throw light on (or rather into) the black box, but more generally as a counter-conception to transparency, a paradigm for governing sociality that has come under extreme pressure. The logics of technocapitalism have thus become a threat to the body politic—they not only restrain agency but carve out new forms of exploitation and segregation. As power increasingly shifts from representative to performative speech, it reorganises the strata of society by creating divisions that affect bodies, minds and affiliations along quite different lines as how class and consent have been contextualised historically. Hence, we are witnessing a crisis of democratic resolution. Recommended policies often follow a logic summarised in Linus’ Law, “given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow.”¹⁴ The question remains whether these rather linear approaches can disarm proprietary interests that obscure transparency, visibility and information access. In today’s hypercompetitive world, in which margins narrow and monopolisation is in the ascendant, non-transparency is tantamount to leveraging against adverse selection. The pitfalls of a linear conception of transparency fall into two main categories. One is described by Christl and Spiekermann in their study *Networks of Control*: “Transparency is not provided, but avoided. Ambiguous business practices are still the norm and even misleading rhetoric is used to trick people into one-sided and disadvantageous data contracts.”¹⁵ Hacker and Petkova, in a study devoted to the limits

of transparency, conclude: “The ways in which data collection and processing are accomplished are opaque and exclusive.”¹⁶ The second issue relates to the depth and scope of algorithmic complexity summarised by the data researcher Freek Bomhof, “[w]hen a system is too complex to understand, transparency will not help us—not even with the most skilled algorithmist to explain what is going on.”¹⁷ This nonlinear ‘nature of complex systems’ is illustrated by the former high frequency trader David Lauer in his account of the financial Flash Crash 2016:

“The markets and the interplay in the industry between all these firms with all these very complicated and complex technology systems and how they interact makes the entire system of exchanges, high-frequency, brokers and the interaction between the technology a complex system. [...] There is no cause and effect that you can point to. What caused the Flash Crash is a nonsense question. [...] if you were to replay the same sequence of events, identically, there’s no guarantee that it will cause a Flash Crash again.”¹⁸

Transparency is commonly conceived as prerequisite for resolution. Under black box conditions, however, this relation is ruptured or, in fact “colonised by the logic of secrecy,” as Frank Pasquale argues.¹⁹ To propose a different route to challenge non-transparency as a tool of capitalist accumulation, let me focus on an artistic conception that centres on the term *resolution* itself. What I argue is that the term’s rich semantic field offers an avenue towards resolving transparency. This postdisciplinary project activates the levels of meaning of the term resolution—from perception, visualisation, imagination, cognition to knowledge production, decision making and public/regulatory action—for knowledge-making as a collective-activist practice against information and access asymmetries. Here, ‘resolution’ is leveraged for a multi-dimensional, non-linear and decentralised concept of civil agency. But its means and consequences are as radical and ambivalent as the sea change provoked by secretive black box capitalisation. Hence, the artistic research on an *aesthetics of resolution* does not content itself with Linus’ Law or design for accountability. Rather, it proceeds from what it holds as a fact: *resolution as visibility has been severed from resolution as cognition and knowledge*. Instead of merely critiquing this breach, it attempts to access the black box as an entry point for collective activism.

¹⁶ Philip Hacker and Bilyana Petkova (2017), “Reining in the Big Promise of Big Data: Transparency, Inequality, and New Regulatory Frontiers,” in the *Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property*, Vol 15, no 1, at scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njtip/vol15/iss1/1

¹⁷ Freek Bomhof (2013), *In Order to Trust Big Data, Transparency is not Enough*, Blog entry at dataflop.com/read/transparency-in-big-data-is-not-enough/138

¹⁸ David Lauer at 46:00’–46:48’ in: Meerman, *The Wall Street Code*. Film documentary, 51 min at youtube.com/watch?v=k-FQJNeQDDHA

¹⁹ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 2.

²⁰ James Bridle (2018), artist / curator, *Agency: Curatorial Statement*, (Berlin: Nome Gallery). Cf: jamesbridle.com/works/agency and also nomegallery.com/exhibitions/agency/

Accordingly, the move from an *aesthetics* to a *poetics of resolution*—that is, from *perceiving* to *making* and consequently from *critique* to *insurrection*—requires a corresponding conception of the agent producing and carrying through this escalation against the critical mass of non-disclosure. Given the complexity and secrecy to which we are exposed, this agency is inevitably a collective counter-effort, rather than an individual one. In a blurb for an exhibition in 2018, the artist, writer and curator James Bridle states:

“[...] As the scale and complexity of our societies grow ever vaster, individuals feel ever more disempowered and hopeless. Our vision is increasingly universal, but our agency continues to be reduced. We know more and more about the world, while being less and less able to do anything about it. In an age of planetary-scale networks and opaque, remote systems of governance, how do individuals retain the capability for creative thought, meaningful action—and a sense of humor?”²⁰

The *artist-as-collective* posits that the ‘individual’ evoked by Bridle is fundamentally one among many. It can only make sense of itself and the volatile world it inhabits in spheres populated by others. Hence, conceiving the individual as singular makes little sense, neither artistically, nor philosophically, nor politically, as it violently abstracts living assemblages and immixtures to capitalist segregation and extraction (including the art market’s individuation and capitalisation of the artist brand). In contrast, the figure of the *artist-as-collective* focuses on the multitude of affiliation, alliance, assemblage, material as well as opposition and controversy. It provokes works which are not objects of beauty for disinterested pleasure or interest-bearing value investments, but ‘subjects’ with their very own *poietic* agency in time. Because action is only meaningful in context, *collective resolution* extends the conversation to wider collectives, audiences and allies. The *artist-as-collective* focused on here still includes the figure of the *renegade* because this figure embraces collectivity not only in forms of affinity, but by entering the risky realms of ambivalence and conflict. It is based on the premise that controversy is a crucial facet of conversation and making. As such, the work is a form of dispute congealed from creative exchange. Humour is a vital ingredient of such (artistic) encounters and makings, as it fluidly performs ‘staying with the trouble’ (to refer once again to Donna Haraway), as

we engage with the structural ‘enemy’ by working with those who interact with us from the ‘other side’. This enables the taking of the *labour of making*—the agency of the artwork—to a deeper level of inclusion against capitulating to non-transparency. The multifaceted semantic field of the term resolution and its technological as well as social significance offers a new kind of collectivity. Bringing together visualisation, discrimination, and intelligence with intention, purpose, (common) initiative and (joint) decision-making presents a conceptual basis for an artistic practice that does not lose sight of rethinking socio-political constitutions as well as the conditions that make the ruptures and breaches of social contracts possible in the name of proprietary and other interests. It could thus play a crucial role in the effort to trace aesthetic as well as political consequences. In other words, to move from the *aesthetics* to a *poetics* of dissent within an artistic paradigm that is interested in the consequences of events, assemblies, processes and decisions beyond mere relational aspects.²¹ Such an approach does not hinge on an artist/observer relation that has been a key aspect of contemporary art for decades. Rather, it fosters collaborative affinities of different kinds of publics, experts and expert systems—artists and scientists, processes and technologies—all of which can come together in common attempts to reconceptualise and re-orient the aesthetics of knowledge-production by inserting themselves into their making. This approach revitalises the initially liberating programme of the avant-garde by affirming the demise of the political thrust of ‘making everybody an artist,’ which has become the creative core of the neoliberal project since the late 1990s. It also affirms the fundamental premise of technologies that process dissemination, visualisation and decision-making as well as its various incorporations of enclosures (for example black boxes), which underlie technocapitalism. It does so because without acknowledging their power and impact we cannot move on from an anaesthetic arbitrariness of form towards a decentralised conversation of activist hacker-theory-experts—a realm addressing a growing population of digital natives—on consequential content. Such a postdisciplinary approach seems essential if we want to move from an aesthetics to a poetics of resolution. This is from a quasi-unconscious state of consumption to an involved engagement that not only develops counter-tactics

²¹ The epistemological move to a poetics is of course not new (Heidegger onwards), but what is important here is the move to develop a non-linear, non-instrumentalist logic that takes as fundamental the role of the arts. See J. Golding (2010), “Fractal Philosophy (and the small matter of learning how to listen): Attunement as the Task of Art”, in Steven Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan (Eds.), *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 133–54.

night-vision [naɪt-ˈvɪʒən]

made possible by a certain combination of spectral and intensity ranges. invented by dr edwin i golding, night vision is broadly divided into three main categories: image intensification, active illumination, and thermal imaging. unlike most predators, the human eye lacks tapetum lucidum, an enabler of low-light vision. originally invented to take aim at enemy positions in poor light, today it can be found in one's phone, camera and other distributed forms of intelligence. ‘night vision’ has also been used as song or album titles by artists as diverse as bruce cockburn (1973), suzanne vega (1987) and daft punk (2001).

against proprietary interests but realises political agency within metastable information flows. Hence, poetics of resolution on the one hand highlights the complexities and intricacies of such an endeavour as well as its achievements and failures. And on the other hand, it outlines an instance of artistic practice in the realm of post-disciplinary research and intervention. A new medium emerges from the techno-quantification of financialised and automated data. N. Katherine Hayles reminds us, “for information to exist, it must always be instantiated in a medium.”²² Bots act on the infrastructure. In the technosphere, the production of risk—the mode of production of finance in its engagement with the future—turns into an operational hazard. While massive amounts of data are analysed, trading logistics are streamlined to happen in a flash. Real-time action is instant and thus opens up to the whole gamut of a *technowledge* that constantly redefines the increment of an actionable moment. Immediate visibility is constricted to the mediation by advanced resolution machines. The HFT trader and whistleblower Haim Bodek ascribes cannibalistic acceleration to competitive advantage: “Since 2007, we saw compression in the algorithm trading space where the profit margins approached near zero. [...]”

We sometimes call that ‘the race to the bottom’ in the business. If I can make a near-risk-free fraction of a cent and even if the whole day would have demanded a little bit more, I’m happy to do that now even if we barely make a profit because I’m basically taking away the opportunity for someone else to make a profit. [...] We cannot tolerate a zero-profit margin environment. We will find ways around that situation. We will cheat. We will manufacture situations. We will undermine infrastructure.”²³

Algorithmic trading accelerates the exploitation of an old paradigm materially embedded in the computer-powered calculative evaluation of massive data sets. How this plays out in financial corporations has been powerfully explored in *Liquidated* by Karen Ho.²⁴ Predication machines attempt to evade *their* unpredictable contingent event by trading in fractions of a second.²⁵ This performative paradigm exploits a future it does not know, and does not need to know, as it *meets* it immediately, at an instant. The production of volatility (risk)—a massive concept for complex societies, their needs and desires—complexifies price, but without producing a present in which the latter is

²² Hayles, *How We Became Post-human*, 13.

²³ Cf Haim Bodek in Gerald Nestler, *Countering Capitulation: From Automated Participation to Renegade Solidarity*, at vimeo.com/channels/AoR. 14:20’

²⁴ Karen Ho (2009), *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, (Durham: Duke University Press).

²⁵ One can look at Knight Capital’s bankruptcy as black box event. On 1 August, 2012, the HFT trader lost over 400 USD million in 30 minutes due to a technical error. “The glitch led to 4 million extra trades in 550 million shares that would not have existed otherwise.” Nanex, *Flash Crash Summary Report*, 29 September 2010 at nanex.net/FlashCrashFinal/FlashCrashSummary.html

translated back to value. It produces massive volatilities in the social realm; resolution dissolves into leveraged power. This reverberates in the critical work, *Undercommons*, by Harney and Moten:

“[... P]olicy is a new class phenomenon because the act of making policy for others, of pronouncing others as incorrect, is at the same time an audition for a post-fordist economy that deputies believe rewards those who embrace change but which, in reality, arrests them in contingency, flexibility, and that administered precarity that imagines itself to be immune from what Judith Butler might call our undercommon precariousness. This economy is powered by constant and automatic insistence upon the externalisation of risk, the placement at an externally imposed risk of all life, so that work against risk can be harvested without end.”²⁶

In the case of the Flash Crash (but not only here) immediacy defines visibility as a performative issue. In relation to market activity, immediacy equals visibility: immediacy is technological visibility constructed by resolution techniques. Developers in the algorithmic trading space increase obscurity within the entire playing field by narrowing, if not modifying, the field of visibility.²⁷ The data-driven black box—a scientific apparatus—constructs reality in finance. Donald MacKenzie’s use of ‘counterperformativity’ throws a sharp relief in the light of recurring flash crashes: While self-fulfilling prophecy explains success or failure in terms of beliefs, counterperformativity transcends the human mind.²⁸ It deploys all the materialities of the socio-technical *agencements* that constitute the world in which agents are plunged: performativity leaves open the possibility of events that might refute or happen independently of what humans believe or think. Due to the complexity described by Lauer, the market cannot be ‘captured’ in all its immediacy and ‘replayed’ like a film. The vision-enhancing sensors, which detect time-blurred traces and mark discriminations in a complex environment, deliver information from noise. But it has to be unearthed before it can be resolved in a separate stage. The notion of *resolution* involves technologies that engineer thinking and affecting, orient attractions and forge applications. Resolution is not restricted to technical appropriation, such as a device for perceiving (previously undiscovered worlds), a visualisation tool, the setting of a laboratory, Big Data evaluations or the like. Neither is it only a cultural technique of conciliation and consultation

²⁶ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013), *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, (New York/Port Watson: Minor Compositions), 76–77.

²⁷ This is the most current in a row of performative revolutions in finance, which started with the displacement of (human) floor traders by quants. It should be added that immediacy, understood as visibility engineered performatively in micro-time, expands Callon’s theory of performativity. “[...B]oth the natural and life sciences, along with the social sciences, contribute towards enacting the realities that they describe.” In Callon, *What does it mean to say that economics is performative?*

²⁸ Donald MacKenzie (2016), “A Material Political Economy: Automated Trading Desk and Price Prediction in High-Frequency Trading,” in *Social Studies of Science*, (London: Sage), Vol 47, no 2, 172–194.

nothingness [ˈnʌθɪŋnɪs]

non-dialectical in the first place.

to craft compromise and compensation. It is a basic category, though not uncharged with ideologies. As an instrument of power, it inspired revolutions and served restorations. Its trajectory is towards imagined openings and new perspectives but at the same time it is also reversed to map the scales of new hierarchies. Semantically, resolution initialises new layers of thought that move from surface to surface in a connective, interrelating and unbiased way (a flat ontology) and erupt in new visions and knowledge. In such a postdisciplinary arena of research, science, philosophy and art are natural allies, as resolution apparatuses provide *transparency* in a subversive techno-cultural sense. But they also produce competitive advantage when commodified that leverage modes of attraction, evaluation and appreciation. A profit maximisation inherited from post-Fordist operations, its semantic openness is 'fenced in' technologically, legally and socially.²⁹ The intrinsically flat ontology of this communicative ensemble is deliberately breached, corrupted, redirected, and stratified: The black box exploits resolution through the whole entangled gamut of the term's semantic potentials. It circumvents transparency and inserts hierarchies. But as performative power resolution techniques are never pure, impeccable and flawless; there are glitches, inconsistencies and noise that escape the probabilistic contraption from consumer products, social media to finance. Techno-human entanglements give rise to new forms of collectives. Hayles' general thesis comes to mind:

"The contemporary pressure toward dematerialisation, understood as an epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence, affects human and textual bodies on two levels at once, as a change in the body (the material substrate) and as a change in the message (the codes of representation)."³⁰ While accounts of financial practice up to the 2000s, such as Mackenzie's, are concerned with 'bodies' (physical and mental ones as well as devices) and their 'messaging' operations, automation replaces the 'trivial' resolution of humans with high-resolution algorithms—it is imperative to automate and *derivate* in order to stay in the game. Massive real time calculations and new contractual products, which produce volatility to hedge the underlying corporate extraction asset, fold in new bodies, scales and hierarchies. They leverage big data to construct the future on a preemptive trajectory; this is to their hypercompetitive advantage. But for the 'uninitiated' it still happens at random.³¹

²⁹ While a digital camera contains the full scope of its resolution capacity, the price paid determines which resolution is unlocked; this is not only a technique to control access and commercial interests but the *signature* of the capitalist order. Obsolescence is another example.

³⁰ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 29.

³¹ This form of leverage is also at play in security, debt and austerity politics, which are partly socio-economic implementations of such exposure.

our lady (of the flowers) [ˈaʊə ˈleɪdi (ɒv ðə ˈflaʊəz)]

jean genet mon ami and the importance of love, lovers, corporeality, friendship in the form of being a (drag) queen.

The figure of the renegade

“Wall Street is not immoral; it is amoral. When you are not comfortable having an ethical discussion with somebody over lunch, that’s a clue. When those types of basic questions are taboo, you’re not going to have much reflection.” (Haim Bodek)³²

³² Haim Bodek in Gerald Nestler, *Countering Capitulation*.

Scientific and technological progress have had far-reaching implications (not only) on financial markets. Beyond the market proper, this shift has radically affected a fundamental category: “value has no place at all in the neoliberal market, which is solely the regime of price.”³³ The complex and intricate operations and machinations between humans and bots result in new resolutions that either constrain, or resolve, our perception, cognition and appreciation. What is at stake is to reorient resistance from critique to insurrection by transforming *aesthetics* into *poetics of resolution*. Such a shift away from critique, however, implies forms of resistance that enhance, and yet also exceed, for instance, Bruno Latour’s ‘composition’:

“Where critique aims at debunking, composition aims at building. Where critique focuses on content and modes of representation, composition focuses on regimes of attraction. If regimes of attraction tend to lock people into particular social systems or modes of life, the question of composition would be that of how we might build new collectives that expand the field of possibility and change within the social sphere.”³⁴

³³ Jon Roffe (2015), *Abstract Market Theory*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 29–30. Morozov diagnoses a shift: “One of the most striking developments in neoliberal theory and practice of the last decade has been an explicit concession by some neo-Hayekians that information technology could provide efficient methods of social coordination in environments where price signals

are missing. Here, as in the case of market design, neo-Hayekian embrace of non-price forms of social coordination is mainly driven by the political exigencies of keeping neo-liberalism afloat by attacking the rump administrative state. If taming the Leviathan now means that neo-liberals must preach the virtues of decentralised civil society, the ‘social economy’,

the Ostroman commons, or ‘polycentric orders’—still short of celebrating *autonomia operaia*, but getting there!—it seems they will oblige.” In Evgeny Morozov (2019), “*Digital Socialism? The Calculation Debate in the Age of Big Data*,” in *New Left Review*, (London: NewLeftReview.org), no 116, 61, at newleftreview.org/issues/1116/articles/evgeny-morozov-digital-soc

³⁴ Levi R. Bryant (2011), *The Democracy of Objects*, (London: Open Humanities Press), 226.

As the Flash Crash and its investigations showed, in order to push resolution to the level of immediacy, we are in need of a *decentralising attractor* that is both inside and outside the black box. As black boxes extract competitive monopolies by implementing access hierarchies that fold in a new ontology of resolution, their reiterated power can only be addressed by the performative resonance of a counter-agent who not only *knows* the violence *expertly* but takes the consequence of exposing themselves. I call this the *figure of the renegade*.

A typical dictionary definition defines a renegade as “1. having deserted a faith, cause or religion for a hostile one; 2. as someone or something that causes trouble and cannot be controlled, synonymously an apostate, defector, recreant.”³⁵ In our case, the ‘composition’ of a renegade is that of a *traitor* who denounces loyalty to the *black box* and transgresses their system’s unwritten laws of complicity and secrecy. At the same time (and often by default rather than design), they become the *educator* to the general public. Providing material from undisclosed or classified sources, the *renegade* is the expert witness who establishes degrees of transparency by procuring otherwise unavailable evidence of information asymmetry (most famously Edward Snowden).

Such resolution does not come without risk: it is a radical act both ambivalent and vulnerable. It is an uprising—albeit a marginal and precarious act—more promising than the cry for transparency. It can deeply destabilise the neoliberal discretion hegemony.

Here, resolution is not treated as consensus in terms of probability—in other words, as risk management. Instead, resolution points to an engagement with the impossible and the willingness to the risked, lived experience. The renegade is exposed to sheer limitless consequences—impossible personal risk—but her/his/their act of civil courage makes resolution possible. Disengaging with the capitalist infrastructure, which renders critique ineffective by exploiting or externalising it, they enter the realm of revolutionary negation. Such renegade activism might seem at the margin of technocapitalism, but it is in fact right at its core. Its insurrection unlocks the black box. It transforms the acquiescent conditions of social automation and (digitised) labour and thus bears the potential to access a wealth preempted by the capital-state nexus, finance conglomerates and data platforms.

³⁵ Cf Merriam-Webster at merriam-webster.com/dictionary/renegade

Towards a poetics of resolution

"The past is only the impatience of the future."

(Elie Ayache)³⁶

The story of the Flash Crash offers an example of the significance for the *making* of future publics, depicting in all its complexity the horizon of an exposed and discontinuous self-regulating force against the boundless utopia of a self-regulating market. In the impasse between 'perspectives,' such as the official investigation versa Nanex, the intricate problem of resolution demonstrates the ambiguity contained: the participation of a *traitor* is required to unearth data buried in undisclosed documents, in fractions of a second or elsewhere. Hence, the paradigmatic shift to technowledge also gives rise to the cognate notion of a subtly different witness than the eye-witness, one who is capable of challenging calculative violence. The *renegade* who presents objects as subjects-of-debate is an expert witness as much as an analyst that by composing facts produces strata of transparency and opposition within the system. The one who speaks is addressed by violence. Revisiting Judith Butler's reasoning on the speech act, she writes: "Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change."³⁷ When confronted with the black box, composition and association are secondary to the *renegade act* (they follow it), which itself is secondary to an event or a series of events (violence). Reframing Judith Butler's reading of the performative, the marginal becomes potential for insurrection. The *renegade* opens new inroads into sets of technowledge that allow building new compositions and collectives by performatively 'in-citing' speech from affirmation to allegation. Systemically speaking, a marginalised outside (for example the public) can again be inaugurated into a sociality.

"The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well.

³⁶ Elie Ayache (2010), "Future of the Market," in *The Blank Swan: The End of Probability*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons), 421.

³⁷ Judith Butler (1997), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (New York/London: Routledge), 163.

The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated. This point [...] raises again the possibility of a speech act as an insurrectionary act.”³⁸

³⁸ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 160.

The figure of the renegade points to a destination where resistance is inside rather than outside a system. In fact, the renegade constitutes an act that proceeds from mere dissent (critique within a system) to concrete insurrection (an act of resistance and renunciation). The renegade is a positively *unprofessional* expert acting from a point of no return, a risk taker at the point of massive crisis. By speaking out and sharing proprietary data or classified information, she not only discloses what was excluded from public debate but also manifests noncompliance as an act of civil courage.³⁹ The ambivalence, the perils and the counterperformativity of the renegade surface in Haim Bodek’s personal experience:

³⁹ See also the development of *parrhesia* in Michel Foucault (2011) *Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*, translated by Graham Burchell, (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

“The whistleblower syndrome is kind of a pattern. The whistleblower says that ‘this is obviously wrong and I’m going to call it out’ and then when I call it out everyone else is going to realise that it’s wrong and it’s just going to get fixed right away. What he doesn’t realise is that everybody knows about it. So, the message a whistleblower should probably address is [...] ‘you know this is wrong and I know all of you recognise this is happening, but this is *wrong*.’ And when you realise that that’s what whistleblowing is—that you’re making people go through the uncomfortable process of looking at themselves—you realise you’re not the hero, you’re not bringing new information to the table. You’re the guy pointing out the thing that no one wants to see, that everybody knows about. And what’s weird about all these cases is that it seems that these, call it injustices, happen in pharmaceuticals, in labor and it’s the same pattern over and over, where there’s massive injustices no one wants to talk about and no one wants to admit vocally but everybody knows that’s how things work. It doesn’t change until the whistleblower does it.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Haim Bodek in Nestler, *Countering Capitulation*, 40:36’.

The figure of the renegade is not heroic; it is as ambiguous as the world she/he/they inhabits. But this is not to the disadvantage of the concept: in the midst of (fabricated) noise, the system *accidentally* yields information; exploiting the event of sectoral asymmetry resolves societal blindness. The *renegade act*—essentially a violation of current custom, rule or law—produces a host of viable resolution

materials across the semantic field of the term: visualisation, discrimination, cognition, transparency, decision. Whatever the impulse, each act perforates an autonomy that is increasingly conceded to corporations as legal persons. Against all odds the *renegade act* reclaims autonomy against platform capitalist and data driven sovereignty (and thus against human capital). That said, it does not constitute political autonomy with a capital 'A'—an autonomy that bestows rights or vests powers. To the contrary, it constitutes an act that attracts serious consequences and might fail. The renegade is an extremely precarious figure, as history has shown unmistakably.

Moreover, the normalising enclosure, virtualisation and commodification of data leads to a constitution of citizenship where the virtual, bot-assembled stake in the subject increasingly separates it from the physical body.⁴¹ What is looming at our political horizon is its disappearance from the social contract and from status, rights and autonomy.⁴² Latour reminds us: "While a division between nature and society renders invisible the political process by which the cosmos is collected in one livable whole, the word 'collective' makes this process central."⁴³ Hence, if we imagine the figure of the *renegade* as solidarity in the sense of creating collective voices and practices—the *artist-as-collective* transforming resolution from aesthetics to poetics—we can conceive *renegade activism* as a forceful strategy (a debt embraced mutually) to subvert technocapitalism and its immediate biopolitical grip on life and its ever-shrinking distance (physically, affectively and ethically) manufactured from *absolute* distance to its *investment*; this is the derivative paradigm: knowledge is not resolved; what is dissolved is contingency (what cannot be known) by pricing its volatile intensities. The making of resolution and the renegade act stand against information asymmetry and noise by counter-constructing their 'assemblies.' *Renegade activism* stands for counter-institutions whose collectives (activists, artists, experts, nonhuman agents) act together to enhance public resolution across the whole gamut of the term's meaning.⁴⁴ The autonomy gained is ambivalent, marginal, in a state of constant flux and highly volatile if not outright dangerous. At the same time, *renegade activism* can generate tactics of infiltration that create the imagination of value and as a consequence produce myriad forms of contextualised knowledge.

⁴¹ Or, as Harney and Moten observe, "Logistics wants to dispense with the subject altogether. This is the dream of this newly dominant capitalist science." *The Undercommons*, 87.

⁴² Cf Hayles, *How We Became Post-human*, 84ff.

⁴³ Bruno Latour (1999), *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 270.

⁴⁴ Butler's suggestion as regards 'coming out' as LGBT might be helpful for *renegade activism* and *solidarity*, its systemic and individual implications. As she says, "we surely need to take seriously the contention that 'coming out' is intended as a contagious example, that it is supposed to set a precedent and incite a series of similarly structured acts in public discourse." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 124.

past [pɑːst]

any length/infinity of time up to the moment of now.

⁴⁵ Giles Deleuze (2004 [1955]), “Instincts and Institutions,” in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)), 19–21.

⁴⁶ Including open source infrastructures and blockchain technologies. Cf Joana Pereira, M. Mahdi Tavalaei and Hakan Özalp (2019), “Blockchain-based platforms: decentralised infrastructures and its boundary conditions,” in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, (Amsterdam, Elsevier), at research.vu.nl/ws/portafiles/portal/78136241/Blockchain_TFSC_for_Uni_Open_Archiving.pdf

⁴⁷ Steven Shaviro (2012), *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics [Technologies of Lived Abstraction]*, (Cambridge: MIT Press), xii.

⁴⁸ Boris Groys (2014), “On Art Activism,” in *e-flux Journal*, no 56, at www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/

⁴⁹ Brian Holmes (2006), “The Artistic Device or, the articulation of collective speech,” in *Ephemera*, vol. 6, no 4, 411–432.

In intensifying, reinforcing recursive acts that belong to art, language and other forms of expression, new modes of making (*poiesis*) can come into existence that again produce new ways of perceiving, thinking and making the world. As Deleuze once wrote,

“The institution is always given as an organised system of means. It is here, moreover, that we find the difference between institution and law: law is a limitation of actions, institution a positive model for action.”⁴⁵

Renegade activism is a way to create, enable and offer platforms of affiliation (rather than a conformity exploited by platform capitalism). It is a case of strengthening the desire to participate in *commonism* and forms of autonomy that exist side by side and in flux (derivative equity of relations).⁴⁶ Renegade activism points to the possibility of a future that can be imagined without foregoing a differentiating world. In short, it enables the ability to move from *low-res* to *high-res* across the whole gamut of resolution’s consequential—and hence not only technological or economic but eminently artistic, philosophical and sociopolitical—meanings.

Renegade activism and the artist-as-collective

“*The world is already otherwise.*”

(Steven Shaviro)⁴⁷

Boris Groys argues that the ‘artistic aestheticisation’ of contemporary art “means defunctionalisation, violent annulation of practical applicability and efficiency” and therefore operates in “art museums because it does not believe in the stability of the present conditions of our existence—to such a degree that contemporary art does not even try to improve these conditions.”⁴⁸ Brian Holmes, in contrast, identifies the art museum (and the university) as the “normalising devices within the rule-set of a financialised economy.”⁴⁹ Responding to both these accounts, this final section offers an aesthetic-artistic turn that seeks both to defunctionalise the black box and the white cube, thus emphasising the market framework that generates and recalibrates the scenes of hypercompetitive asymmetries in algorithmic as well as artistic practices. The media art theoretician and curator Christiane Paul recounts an “unsatisfactory but necessary mediation” in the contemporary art world:

point [point]

in mathematics a point is an exact position or location on a plane surface or in a coordinate system without dimensionality of its own. in his 1884 satirical novella ‘flatland. a romance of many dimensions’, english theologian edwin abbott described the adventures of a square in a one-dimensional world (lineland) inhabited by ‘lustrous points’. these points are unable to see the square as anything other than a set of points on a line. thus, the square attempts to convince the realm’s monarch of a second dimension; but is unable to do so. in the end, the monarch of lineland tries to kill the square rather than tolerate its nonsense any further.

“The post-digital and New Aesthetic provide us with a blurry picture or perhaps the equivalent of a ‘poor image’ as Hito Steyerl would understand it, a ‘copy in motion’ with substandard resolution, a ‘ghost of an image’ and ‘a visual idea in its very becoming,’ yet an image that is of value because it is all about ‘its own real conditions of existence.’ Whether one believes in the theoretical and art-historical value of the post-digital, post-Internet, and New Aesthetic concepts or not, their rapid spread throughout art networks testifies to a need for terminologies that capture a certain condition of cultural and artistic practice in the early 21st century.”⁵⁰

To put this slightly differently, this is a move to reorient artistic-activist practices along the lines of an aesthetics in the field of consequences. This is a move from critique to insurrection via ‘renegade resolution’. From an art theoretical perspective, such practice constitutes a radical reformulation of new media art for the 21st century. The very antithesis to *l’art pour l’art*, it is situated in a realm of postdisciplinary research, which is operationalised within a number of contests such as laws of court, NGO campaigns and negotiations with governments, not to mention the extensive coverage received by mainstream media. A leading example: Forensic Architecture, a collaborative group of scholars-artists-architects-philosophers whose collective practice uses architecture as an optical device to generate evidence, and cross reference it with a variety of sources, such as new media, remote sensing, material analysis, witness testimony, and crowd-sourcing.⁵¹ Regarded in the light of Malabou’s theorisation of plasticity via repetition, what characterises Forensic Architecture’s radical counter-investigations is their intention—their agency—to ‘receive form’ by way of acts of violence and ‘bestow form’ by way of the event of forensic *reperformance* of these very acts. While these practices enhance resolution not solely for artistic means, their *revolutionary* association of technology, theory and research towards entangled and encouraging interventions reverberates increasingly in art world corners that are seeking new conceptually, materially and ethically consequential approaches to move beyond conventional frameworks of criticality.⁵² In the midst of this array of (forensic) investigations and mappings, we are confronted with a regime that only submits “substandard resolution, a ghost of an image—to take Paul’s observation outside the art field.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Christiane Paul (2015), “From Immateriality to Neo-materiality: Art and the Conditions of Digital Materiality,” in *Disruption. Proceedings of the 21st International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA, Vancouver)*, 1–2.

⁵¹ See: thefutureof-demonstration.net/vermoegen/e01/index.html

⁵² Cf Catherine Malabou (2010), *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, translated by Carolyn Shread, (New York: Columbia University Press).

⁵³ Paul, *From Immateriality*, 1–2.

Hence, only renegade alliances seem capable of making the black box speak—enhancing resolution across all levels of the term—and produce knowledge that is otherwise absent due to the proprietary logic of capitalism. The point of arrival for the *artist-as-collective* is no longer the gallery or the museum; rather these institutions serve as important ‘bus stops’ marking artistic-discursive *intelligences* on route to other destinations and to other institutional ecologies.

Last words: Resolution as a counter-concept for transparency

“All consciousness is a matter of threshold.

(Gilles Deleuze)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze (1993), *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, translated by Tom Conley, (London: Continuum), 101.

The term *resolution* reflects open processes more adequately than the term transparency, as the potential agency of the former’s semantic field can be conceived as a viable template for collective action. Ranging from visualisation, discrimination, intelligence and knowledge to intention, purpose, (common) initiative and (joint) decision-making, the term’s meanings understood as cohesive rather than distinct aspects of reality enact a thinking and making that performs collectivity against data-driven violence. As Vilém Flusser once noted: “Technology, to be overcome, needs to be transformed into something else.”⁵⁵ That ‘something else’ is both intellectual as well as affective potential. It involves technological and algorithmic operations. It can thus be seen as a paradigmatic node of how we may sense, develop, differentiate and support relations between humans and non-humans. Moreover, it holds the potential for thinking and creating access to value in contrast to the capitalist price(ing) engine without losing the performative edge necessary within complex societies in flux.

⁵⁵ Vilém Flusser (2019), *The Holy See. An Extract from the Last Judgement: Generations (1965–66)*, translated by Rodrigo Maltez-Novaes, (Pittsburgh/New York: Flugschriften), 17–18.

Against the enclosures of capital with its ‘derivative autonomy’ mentioned at the outset (one that has also captured and financialised the arts), perhaps it is the very notion of ‘autonomy’ that now must be reconceptualised: no longer as demarcating ‘independent’ but rather as entangled, dynamic, open, sometimes aleatoric and instantaneous processes (acts connected to a multitude of contingent moments) that purposely integrates ambiguous, heteronomous influences in order to *make* resolution in the full meaning of the term. Resolution, then, would not only be of intellectual, physical and affective potentials

but also would involve technological properties, operations and the 'distances' between them. It becomes a socially powerful node of how we may sense, map, differentiate and support material and performative relations. Moreover, it holds the potential to access value in radical contrast to the proprietary logic of technocapitalism, without losing the performative edge necessary within complex socio-political contexts in flux.

The multifaceted semantic field of *resolution* and its technological, aesthetic, social and political significance offers a framework against the noise that makes the ruptures and breaches of social contracts possible in the name of proprietary interest. Thus, it traces the aesthetic (what we 'see'), the poetic (what we 'make') and the political (how we apply resolution as decision-making) consequences. Here, solidarity means to become *traitor-educator*. The *renegade* as revolutionary figure re-maps and re-claims the playing field; she loses faith in *promises* and instead enters the realm of *claims*; what she invests in research and analysis (critique) is to resist and interfere black box evaluative preemption (insurrection). Following from a specific event in algorithmic finance, this chapter conceptualises artistic practice as the work of many towards possibilities for radical intervention. It proposes a conception and framework in which art embodies risk and takes the leap from contemporary art's open promise to an aesthetic in the field of consequences that claims the present: a post-disciplinary practice in which the *artist-as-collective* resolves *aesthetics* of critique into *poetics* of resistance.

The presented concepts transgress contemporary art. As artistic practice, their orientation is aesthetic in the sense of perceiving and applying leverage points for a poetics that moves beyond the capitalist framework. Contrary to market activity (including the 'art market') artists rarely indulge in insuring or speculating on risk. Rather, artists leverage risk by embodying risk. Their 'derivative mode of production' is not about securing a future-at-present by recalibrating (pricing) every conceivable expectation. Rather, it is to affirm and employ risk as the potential to trust and thus imagine (materially speculate on) how to realise *common* expectation along (in parallel) with the volatile contingencies: building worlds in which the depth of resolution does not collapse into a surface for the few. This is to say, then, that art is a force for political resistance—by default.