Immaterials, Exhibition, Acceleration

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Les Immatériaux,[1] the exhibition staged by design theorist Thierry Chaput and philosopher Jean-François Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1985, confronted an accelerating cycle in which technological instruments afford us a grasp of matter beyond the human perceptual gamut, decomposing the structure of objects into systems of imperceptible elements which are then recomposed, predominantly through the use of machine languages, into new materials. (The term "immaterials" therefore refers to these new materials and their retroactive effect upon our conception of matter as such; not to any notion of the dematerialised, incorporeal or disembodied).

According to the proposition of *Les Immatériaux*, these new developments disrupt the notion of matter as something destined for and subservient to human projects. Rather than a stable set of materials ready for use, we are faced with an unstable set of interactions that problematise apparently stable polarities such as mind versus matter, hardware versus software, matter versus form, matter versus state, and matter versus energy.

In its attempt to articulate this rupture and its repercussions in the form of a public exhibition, *Les Immatériaux* can be regarded as a pivotal moment in the convergence of philosophy, art and exhibition-making. It enables us to take a critical look at a set of intertwined tendencies related to what we might

1 My acquaintance with *Les Immatériaux* has emerged over the course of many discussions, initially with composer Florian Hecker, and, more recently, with philosopher Yuk Hui. This text is drawn from presentations made at several symposia during the course of 2014: at the exhibition *Speculations on Anonymous Materials* at the Fridericianum in Kassel, at *30 Years after Les Immatériaux* at the Centre for Digital Cultures at the Leuphana University of Lüneberg, and at *Megarave-Metarave* at Wallriss in Fribourg.

call "the postmodern moment", which include the emergence of theoretical and/or philosophical thought as a constituent part of exhibition-making and, conversely, the emergence of the contemporary art exhibition as an international arena for (something like) philosophical discourse; exhibition-making as a collective dramatisation of the contemporary conjuncture; and the instrumentalisation of this practice as a mode of cultural capitalisation.

In the following, I first argue for the continuing relevance of the concept of "immaterials" for us today, then go on to examine the exhibition itself, detailing its historical and institutional context and scrutinizing Lyotard's philosophical and extra-philosophical motivations for entering into the unknown territory of this crossover between disciplines and genres. I suggest that the intentions and means of *Les Immatériaux* should be re-evaluated in the light of the norms, politics and economics of the globalised contemporary art scene that has developed since the time of *Les Immatériaux*, many facets of which were anticipated by the 1985 exhibition. Finally, I ask whether the question of "accelerationism" emerging in contemporary philosophy today (which is strongly linked to a certain turn in Lyotard's thinking at the time of *Les Immatériaux*) might provide a way to reorient the impulse of *Les Immatériaux* outside of what have now become institutional constraints.

Immaterials Today

In the 1990s, working with a colony of narcoleptic dogs that had been bred in captivity for several generations in a research facility in Stanford, scientists finally identified the damaged gene responsible for their dynasty of sleepy canines: these dogs lacked a receptor for a neurotransmitter chemical that would later be named *orexin*. This chemical had been identified in the late '90s as having an appetite-stimulating effect, and had been earmarked for future obesity research. The discovery at Stanford opened up a different destiny for it, and suggested a novel approach to the development of sleep drugs: whereas scientists had formerly aimed to find neurochemical agents that would encourage the onset of sleep – something that a whole generation of drugs had achieved only by adopting a crude "sledgehammer" approach – research now became focused on blocking the reception of a chemical that is instrumental in keeping the brain in a waking state.

The pharmaceutical giant Merck conducted a computer-controlled chemical scan of a library of three million compounds, compounds which themselves were the by-products of other (both successful and unsuccessful) research projects. A sample of each of these compounds was introduced in turn into a "cellular soup derived from human cells and modified to act as a surrogate of the brain". An agent was added that would react with orexin and glow if it was present. This automated process was filmed automatically and, over three

weeks, the plates that failed to light up were reduced down to a few for further testing. The resulting new drug is currently under review by the Federal Drug Administration and is expected to come to market shortly.[2]

This type of procedure is in more general use as a technique in materials science called "high-throughput computational design", which is expected to replace the trial-and-error techniques previously used in developing new materials. It combines the resources of massive computing power and a growing knowledge of how desired properties such as hardness, conductivity, colour, etc., can be attributed to quantum-level characteristics of matter. Once they have identified the low-level configurations of matter that give rise to a certain desired property – its "fundamental descriptor" – scientists at the Materials Project at Berkeley[3] can "access, search, screen and compare" a database of tens of thousands of inorganic materials for candidates. A "golden age of materials design" is anticipated: "[m]assive computing power has given human beings greater power to turn raw matter into useful technologies than they have ever had."[4]

A material is no longer an obstinate, opaque, natural given, ready to be formed according to a specific human project. Materials are now coded structures that are already the product of a generalised scanning and an immaterial manipulation and production before they even enter the domain of manufacturing. The total combinatorial space of possible configurations (including compounds that do not occur naturally, and are even virtual and as-yet inexistent) is available as a huge memory bank to be searched and probed; increasingly, the same can be said for the neural space of the brain. Rather than being the subject who masters the material object, or the destined recipient of its message, the human is the transmitter of automated discoveries, and in turn is itself treated as a complex of coded, structured matter interfacing with other compounds both organic and inorganic.

Closer to the everyday world, consider the recent mass-market emergence of the electronic cigarette: here the pleasure taken in the inhaling of the smoke of the burning tobacco plant – a ritualised psychotropic act emerging no doubt from a contingent encounter in human history – is analysed into its component parts and simulated through the use of electronic components and inorganic materials. The meanings with which tobacco products were freighted are also disrupted through their transfer into this new, simulated form. The synthetic process splinters the organic meaning of the act of smoking: the neuroactive agent and its addictive properties are separated from the evocations of fire, smoke and ash, with a nicotine-laden glycol-water

2 Ian Parker, "The Big Sleep", *New Yorker,* December 9, 2013, p. 50–63.
3 See https://www.materialsproject.org.
4 Gerbrand Ceder, Kristin Persson, "The Stuff of Dreams", *Scientific American*, December 2013.

vapour offering a tactile and visual analogue for smoke; the potential to tincture this base with multiple flavours opens it onto the space of the culinary and olfactory arts, and introduces a disturbing parallel to candy (deplored as either infantilising for adults or as a danger to children). In the new simulacra of the aesthetic and – if we might say so – sublime or spiritual aspect of smoking, with its connotations of nihilism or sacrifice, the fatal consequences are attenuated (as far as we know), and the habit is welded to a new complex of associations (the logic of the electronic gadget, that of hardware/software, and, increasingly, that of "hacking").

In meshing neurotropics with digital electronics (potentially Internet-connected, keeping in mind that vapestick batteries are charged by plugging them into the USB ports of PCs), what is really created is a generalised platform for the delivery of self-administered pharmaceutical compounds – something that is already being explored by vape "modders". It would not be stretching things to imagine, a few years from now, that a wireless vapestick will sample its owner's saliva and, detecting imbalances or being programmed for a required psychotropic state, will immediately synthesise and supply an appropriate cocktail in vapour form, at the same time recording and consolidating the data for mass analysis or crowd-based sharing, data which in turn could be scanned and analysed to develop new products.

Even the time-honoured experience of duration involved in smoking *a* cigarette disappears, replaced by the temporality of "chainvaping". The public health (not to mention tax) implications are unclear, and so far the devices exist in a kind of legal and statutory limbo. In short, here as elsewhere, material innovation also constitutes a *cultural* event that has repercussions across many different spheres.

As Lyotard surmised, then, "Immaterials" assemble a machine neoculture whose developments are intractable to the discourses we inherit from humanism and modern progressivism. With a prescient sense of the danger that this revolution of materials could easily proceed uncomprehended by philosophical thought, in staging *Les Immatériaux* Lyotard set himself up as a (devil's) advocate for immaterials:

> Prisoners of the materialism of the industrial revolution, immaterial materials suffer from their invisibility. But it is here that a culture is fashioned, through images, sounds and words.[5]

The few examples I have given – and of course there are many more – show clearly enough that the question of materials has indeed changed register. As Lyotard argues, with these developments we can no longer trust our intuitive categorisation of objects, and their matter can no longer be understood

5 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 10.

as a given that can be expected to correlate naturally with common-sense language derived from our historical interactions with the world. New symbolic machineries, whose rapid and dense operations we can no longer fathom, shape the synthesis of these new "immaterials" that have become a part of our lives; they confound natural language, confronting us with experiences we don't yet have the words to describe, and in which our place as creator–designer–user is significantly reconfigured by ubiquitous mechanisms of abstraction:

> "Immaterial" materials, albeit not immaterial, are now preponderant in the flux of exchanges, whether as objects of transformation or investment, even if only because the passage through the abstract is now obligatory… [A]ny raw material for synthesis can be constructed by computer and one can know all of its properties, even if it does not yet exist or no longer exists.[6]

According to Lyotard, the classic modern (Cartesian) conception of matter sought to expel "secondary qualities" from matter-as-pure-extension; their sensible reception would be only a "theatrical effect" of the body, the body as a "confused speaker" which "says 'soft', 'warm', 'blue', 'heavy'".[7] The science of immaterials instead grasps and manipulates these qualities as the effects of relative disparities between memory-systems (tellingly, Berkeley's Materials Project was formerly known as the Materials Genome Project). In turn, the human mind becomes only one of a series of "transformers" that fleetingly generate immaterials as they extract and contract flows of energy-information: "even the transformer that our central nervous system is … can only transcribe and inscribe according to its own rhythm the extractions which come to it"[8] – we are synthesisers among synthesisers, and not the destination and arbiter of all matters:

> the progress that has been accomplished in the sciences, and perhaps in the arts as well, is strictly connected to an ever closer knowledge of what we generally call objects. (Which can also be a question of objects of thought.) And so analysis decomposes these objects and makes us perceive that, finally, there can only be considered to be objects at the level of a human point of view; at their constitution or structural level, they are only a question of complex agglomerates of tiny packets of energy, or of particles that can't possibly be grasped as such. Finally, there's no such thing as matter, and the only thing that exists is energy; we no longer have any such thing as materials, in the old sense of the

6 Ibid.

7 Jean-François Lyotard, "Matter and Time", in *The Inhuman* (London: Polity Press, 1991), p. 37–38.

8 Ibid., p. 43.

> word that implied an object that offered resistance to any kind of project that attempted to alienate it from its primary finalities.[9]

For Lyotard the historical moment of immaterials promises a *deanthropocentricisation* of culture even as it heralds the end of the progressive program of modernity. Far from being simply emancipatory, however, the predicament into which it draws us is profoundly ambivalent: "if we have at our disposal interfaces capable of memorizing, in a fashion accessible to us, vibrations naturally beyond our ken … then we are extending our power of differentiation and our memories, we are delaying reactions which are as yet not under control, we are increasing our material liberty"; and yet this liberty comes at the price of security, at the price of a counterfinality of technique and a "foreclosure of ends".[10]

What the age of immaterials promises, then, is a complexification of matter "in which energy comes to be reflected, without humans necessarily getting any benefit from this".[11] And since immaterialisation, through its generalised coding and redistribution of material affect, also reconfigures our relation to the cultural and the aesthetic, it implies "a profound crisis of aesthetics and therefore of the contemporary arts".[12] As a deliberate exacerbation of this crisis, *Les Immatériaux* sought to create a "dramaturgy" of the new condition of "interactivity";[13] to stage the uncertainty and ambivalence of this disruptive moment in the history of matter, exploring "the chagrin that surrounds the end of the modern age as well as the feeling of jubilation that's connected with the appearance of something new". Most importantly, it sought "to activate this disarray rather than to appease it",[14] by creating an experience that would allow its audience to explore the "collective cortex constituted by machine memories"[15] (a formulation that no doubt sounded futuristic in 1985 but is close to being a commonplace today).[16]

Legitimation, Intensification

It is a question, then, of "legitimation" or "vindication", of allowing these new materials their proper place in a culture yet to come, and thus of ushering in this culture – an operation that simultaneously entails a calling into question

9 Jean-François Lyotard, Interview with Bernard Blistène, *Flash Art*, March 1985.
10 Lyotard, "Matter and Time", p. 54.
11 Ibid., p. 45.
12 Ibid., p. 50.
13 "Interactivity" in the ambivalent and disquieting sense that Lyotard gives to it: see his "report" in the present volume.
14 Lyotard, Interview with Bernard Blistène.
15 Lyotard, "Matter and Time", p. 45.
16 For example Ray Kurzweil, director of engineering at Google, explicitly describes his work in terms of the construction of a "synthetic neocortex": http://www.33rdsquare.com/2015/01/ray-kurzweil-is-building-synthetic.html.

of some of the most fundamental principles of modern thought. This legitimation entails a kind of destabilisation of the human, an admission that we inhabit a material culture that is no longer "ours", is no longer straightforwardly "human" – or rather, one that gives us to understand that "human" is no longer a straightforward matter. But how and why did Lyotard come to employ the medium of the exhibition to make this disquieting truth felt?

The initial brief for the project (drafted before Lyotard was involved) speaks of a situation in which the passage from an energy-intensive to an information-intensive society presents "new modes of perception, representation and symbolisation, corresponding to new means of decision, conception and production".[17] The origin and outcome of production processes, product and raw material, are not straightforwardly distinct any more, and a "profound modification of the duality design/production" is under way, creating a new environment that escapes the symbolic order and the means-end configuration of modernity. For new technologies create their own symbolic order – and a new social order and new modes of distribution along with it. The authors find this process at an acute stage in which it is not yet fixed, and where what is most widely shared is a perplexity, which is what they set out to "dramatise" in the exhibition. Already invoked at this point is the idea of an experimental scenography and alternative pedagogy, placing a series of exhibits within the exhibition space according to a conceptual organisation that would allow for multiple readings.

In taking charge of the conceptualisation of *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard proceeds to trace these questions to their fundamental roots – calling into question the very notion of "creation" that was present in the initial title ("New Materials and Creation") and operating an (all told, rather idiosyncratic) conceptual dissection of the meaning of "material". The structure Lyotard devises for the exhibition suggests that in modernity "the object in general is considered as a sign",[18] but that the conclusion that therefore all matters are now matters, materials, of communication, remains unexplored. He adapts a model of communication taken from Harold Lasswell's linguistic pragmatism to distribute the various declinations of the Sanskrit root *mât* ("to make with the hand, to measure, to construct") in accordance with this model of the various elements involved in any instance of communication. In the first full proposal for *Les Immatériaux* the semantic ambiguity of "material" already plays a role in setting in motion slippages from one semantic zone to another: through shifts in perspective, one and the same material can be seen to occupy various different positions within the communicational structure.

17 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 8.
18 Ibid., p. 17.

Lyotard imagines that the dramatisation of this structural slippage (the content of one message may be the material support for another message and, from another perspective, the recipient of yet another, etc.), dramatised within the exhibition space, will produce a kind of disorientation. For "it is not a matter of explaining", a brief for the project tells us, "but of *making sensible* this problematic … [*Les Immatériaux*] seeks to awaken a sensibility assumed to be present in the public, but deprived of the means of expression. It wishes to make felt the sentiment of the end of an era and of the disquiet that is born in the dawn of post-modernity".[19] Throughout the development process Lyotard carefully calibrates *Les Immatériaux*'s response to this challenge. Rather than a judgement, it is to be a performative *intensification* that is as one with the *legitimation* of immaterials invoked above: "[i]t is not a matter of making apocalyptic pronouncements or, on the contrary, of affirming that nothing has changed; it is a question of intensifying interrogation and, so to speak, of aggravating the uncertainty that it makes weigh upon the present and the future of humans."[20]

Before we broach the question of what Lyotard qua philosopher brings to the new medium of the exhibition – and indeed what the change of medium offers to the philosopher – we will first trace the history of the site within which this "dramaturgy of interaction" was to be staged.

The Slaughterhouse and the Piazza

In 1955 the French government resolved to modernise the famous abattoirs of La Villette on the outskirts of Paris, a late nineteenth-century monument to rational industrial design and centralisation.[21] Work began in 1961, with the cost of the project growing from an already enormous 245 million to 110 billion francs, and with a great deal of these funds ultimately left unaccounted for. The new abattoirs and auction market proved obsolete before they were completed. In conceiving of them as a prestigious municipal trophy, the authorities had ignored the problems of situating a massive centralised facility in an already congested city, at a time when decentralisation was the predominant economic and logistical trend. The project proved totally maladapted to the realities of industry. Work at La Villette was discontinued in 1967 and the whole edifice was finally demolished, amidst great financial scandal.[22] With the new slaughterhouse and market dynamited and pulverised, with a great deal of public money having been squandered in the process, La Villette would lie

19 Ibid., p. 26.
20 Ibid., p. 17.
21 See Dorothée Brantz, "Recalling the Slaughterhouse", *Cabinet*, Fall 2001, http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/4/slaughterhouse.php.
22 See "Les Autres Scandales", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, September 28, 2001: http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/opinions/00018896.EDI0001/les-autres-scandales.html.

dormant for a few years before eventually becoming the site of a "polyvalent cultural complex", a "City of Science and Industry", including a new National Museum of Science and Technology, the Cité de la Musique, and other cultural centres: in effect, an early "cultural theme park".

Georges Pompidou, who along with De Gaulle and Giscard d'Estaing had presided over this disastrous project, unbowed by scandal and having lubricated the "settlement" of May '68, became president in 1971.[23] The neo-Hausmannian zeal of this "managerial medici"[24] for remodelling and modernizing the city continued with the razing of the Les Halles area and the construction of a massively funded cultural centre – the famous building which (instead of the ill-fated slaughterhouse) would take on his name.

Perhaps mindful of the fate of the centralised meat market, the Minister of Culture of the time proclaimed the Centre Beaubourg to be *une centrale de la décentralisation*. There is some truth in this, since it is an institution that had to operate a capital concentration: it needed to figure disproportionately large upon the national cultural scene because France was losing its political gravitas in a globalised, decentralised world. The belief that this powerhouse would reconsolidate some of that power through the cultural realm is indicated frankly enough in the title of the opening exhibition *Paris–New York* (original entitled "Paris–New York–Paris"!).

Needless to say, the Beaubourg prefigures many subsequent trophy projects: in a model to be followed worldwide, it was supposed at once to cement the importance of culture as a dimension of national patrimony worthy of international recognition, and to kick-start the "regeneration" of an old area of Paris into a *quartier des arts*, a "high-rent location for editorial offices, publishing houses, architects and boutiques"[25] all clustered around the Piano-Rogers "cultural warehouse".

Cultural Space

The appearance of the Beaubourg is also contemporaneous with a certain set of expectations demanded of public exhibition-making. The appointment of Pontus Hultén[26] was a symbol of the institution's determination to at least *be seen to be* taking seriously the propositions and demands of the broadened field of contemporary art emerging in the '60s within the inherited institutional framework it sought to reinvigorate and capitalise

23 See Paul Jankowski, *Shades of Indignation: Political Scandals in France, Past and Present* (Oxford, NY: Berghahn), p. 88.

24 Ralph Rumney, "Pompidou's Multi-Coloured Dream-Machine: Or How They Opened the £125m Art Refinery", *Art Monthly*, February, 1977.

25 Nancy Marmer, "Waiting for Gloire", *ArtForum*, February 1977.

26 Willis Domingo, "Pontus is Pilot: A Profile of Pontus Hulten", *Art Monthly*, February 1977.

on. In Stockholm, Hultén had proved his ability to attract a non-traditional audience through a festive programme of controversial happenings and cross-disciplinary initiatives across the arts, sciences and pop culture. Upon his appointment at the Beaubourg he spoke enthusiastically of the need to "create new institutions":

> we are probably moving towards a society where art will play a very large role… While waiting for art to be integrated with life and penetrate society in its entirety, exchange (between artists and the public) must take place in "museums" newly conceived. Such museums will no longer be simply areas for the conservation of works … but places where artists encounter the public and where the public itself can become creative… we must try to *open up* the museums.[27]

In Hultén's words we find encapsulated the articles of faith of a new conception of art – and thus of the museum and the exhibition – that perhaps have a different and less hopeful resonance today: the faith that the avant-garde dream of the unification of art and life is all but achieved, subject to delivery through natural dynamisms at work in society; the anticipation of an age in which "a greater part of the population no longer has to struggle every day for survival" and will thus reclaim artistic creation from the elite; and an affirmation of the role of the metropolitan arts complex in helping to break down "cultural attitudes" and in "opening up" – vertically (to new audiences) and laterally (to non-art disciplines) – the space of culture.

Hultén sees the space of the museum in terms of an urbanist logic: the museum should be "in the form of a city", a "system of rooms" that "communicate and interpenetrate", so that the one would have the "chance of losing oneself and reorienting oneself". In the framework of this perpetual mobility, in a building where even the director's office is circumscribed by temporary mobile wall panels,[28] and where transparency and porosity extends from the external architecture to the configuration of the inner space and the interaction of audiences, Hultén imagines, for example, the viewer of a Braque collage having the option to press a button to bring down a screen upon which five more collages are mounted – or not, if she doesn't want to! Thus technology is anticipated as a prop for the new museum's aspiration to dream in advance the deterritorialised free circulation of a new kind of society.

To what extent did the inscription of this prestigious multi-billion-franc project within the narrative of an avant-garde unification of art and life succeed? In a conversation between Hultén and Richard Rogers in 1981, it is impossible not

27 Ibid.

28 Richard Eder, "Beaubourg's Director Reflects on his Reign", *The New York Times*, February 22, 1981: http://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/22/arts/beaubourg-s-director-reflects-on-his-reign.html.

to notice a certain slippage, and a modulation of the original heady ambitions. Rogers opines:

> I think that the Beaubourg has democratised or popularised culture. It gives all people of all classes and ages something to do on a Saturday afternoon. You, as a specialist, can go to the museum; your grandmother can go to the restaurant; and the kids can play in the square.[29]

Which Hultén amplifies as follows:

> Usually a museum … is just a museum. At the Beaubourg, you have a whole series of overlapping things to do, and therefore the area becomes much more active. It's more like a railway station… It's the theory of the flexible magic box, which includes the piazza. Nothing is ever static, and nothing is ever perfect.[30]

In the same year but in less sanguine spirit, interviewed by the *New York Times* on his departure from Paris, he says simply:

> I wanted – it sounds stupid – to bring art and life together, something like that. Rauschenberg said it better: the museum of the future is to be in the little crack between art and life. It sounded very good at the time.[31]

The success of the regeneration exercise now appears in a more ambivalent light:

> Society loves it. The artists don't … The bohemian life that reigned in Paris until the end of the '50s is gone. The artists [then] had more time to think, to reflect.[32]

By this time it was already tempting to read this gigantic culture machine as a synecdoche for the generalised spaces of dynamic circulation, according to whose exigencies a new city and a new society were indeed being formed; spaces that formed a suitable receptacle for the "festive neoconservatism" denounced by philosopher Gilles Châtelet, in which "cultural production" is incited to be a facsimile or working scale-model of economic dynamism, oriented towards an optimisation of the liquidity of all flows[33] – or, as Baudrillard has it, in what reads retrospectively like an ironic *détournement* of

29 "A Flying Start", interview with Pontus Hulten and Richard Rogers, *Images&Issues*, Summer 1981: http://s3.amazonaws.com/eob_texts-production/texts/127/1344579035_IMAGES_ISSUES_PDF.pdf?1344579035.

30 Ibid.

31 Eder, "Beaubourg's Director Reflects".

32 Ibid.

33 See G. Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies*, trans. R. Mackay (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2014).

Les Immatériaux's proposed slippages between form, content and material support:

> Never has it been so clear [as at the Beaubourg] that the contents – here culture, elsewhere information or merchandise – are merely the ghostly support for the opposition of the medium whose function is still that of beguiling the masses, of producing a homogeneous flow of men and minds. The huge surges of coming and going are like the crowds of suburban commuters absorbed and disgorged by their places of work at fixed hours. And of course it is work that is at issue here: the work of testing, probing, directed questioning. People come here to choose the objectified response to all the questions they can ask, or rather *they themselves come as an answer to* the functional, directed questions posed by the objects.[34]

An alignment of the radical extension of the avant-garde project with the creation of a central–decentralised node of cultural circulation, at once a prestigious asset in the soft power of the nation-state and a symbol of the degradation of culture into a bargaining chip, all "while waiting for art to be integrated with life and penetrate society in its entirety" – to whatever degree this was a calculated risk, it was certainly a pioneering one, albeit on the part of a statesman who had more than enough resources at his disposal to stake on such a venture. As a profile of Hultén in *Art Monthly* in 1977 admits, "one can only speculate that the man whose name the new cultural centre bears was gambling that behind Hulten's image in the French press as the ebullient anarchist lies the potentially docile and productive reality of the *jeune cadre dynamique*" – that is, that the reassertion of culture as a soft-power asset of the nation-state would merely set the stage for the real economic game of installing, in the surrounding remodelled streets (the "hygienic buffer zone", according to Baudrillard), the aggressive vanguard of an urbane, "nomadically" precarious, networked and networking "creative class".[35]

The Project

It is in this context – albeit after the departure of Pontus Hultén and his replacement by Dominique Bozo – that *Les Immatériaux* was conceived. Before Lyotard's involvement, the project had been brewing since around 1982, under various titles, as an exhibition to be mounted "on the theme of new materials and creation" by the *Centre de Création Industrielle*.

The Centre Pompidou was founded as a collaborative space of different cultural centres, and, alongside the Modern Art Museum and IRCAM (the

34 Jean Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg Effect: Implosion and Deterrence", trans. R. Krauss and A. Michelson, *October* 20 (Spring 1982), p. 7–8.

35 See Châtelet's biting satirical portrait of this "young nomad elite" in *To Live and Think Like Pigs*.

generously-funded electronic music institute ordered directly by Pompidou to bribe Boulez out of exile) the *Centre de Création Industrielle* (CCI) was formed to represent the worlds of design, industry and architecture. The CCI's early years were marked predominantly by a failure to integrate happily into this transdisciplinary family – perhaps owing to the continuing presence of "an interior uptight with old values" beneath the "fluid commutative exterior" (Baudrillard again): an exhibition on "The Factory" was viciously publicly attacked by ministers; one on "Marginal Architecture in the US" was the subject of controversy because of the inclusion of political texts (by Herbert Marcuse, Jerry Rubin and Allan Ginsberg); and, most sensitively, a film scripted by Henri Lefebvre about the problems caused by the "renewal" of the urban fabric of Paris was banned by Robert Bordaz, Director of the Beaubourg. The director and assistant director of the CCI departed soon afterwards, with Bordaz himself temporarily taking over its directorship.

The CCI was finally closed down a few years after *Les Immatériaux*, so that the show can be seen at once as its one signal achievement, and, as Anthony Hudek has suggested,[36] also as a "hinge" in the history of the Pompidou itself; at once the point at which its ideal cross-disciplinary post-museum status was effectively achieved, and the last exhibition in which that ideal would be seriously pursued.

Les Immatériaux certainly took full advantage of the open and indeterminate space of the fifth floor, and its dazzling range of exhibits taken from industry, art and commerce lived up to the promise of transdisciplinarity. Yet at the same time it seemed designed to baffle its audience: the grey metallic meshes hung from the ceiling blocking any overall perspective, the labyrinthine set of "zones" impossible to navigate, the (often malfunctioning) audioguide that switched from one soundtrack to another as the visitor moved through the space. Far from Hultén's slick vision of an audiovisual apparatus gliding into view at the viewer's command (or not, if she doesn't want it to), for Lyotard "interactivity" suggested a disorienting condition in which the visitor was just one more interface relaying matter-information, subject to lines of force and flows of energy that could never be satisfactorily integrated, a "rhizome" of "generalised interactions" through which there was no "preferred path". Lyotard speaks of

> processes of displacement in which man is but one node of the interface. The exhibition would be one interface among others … [T]here should be places where the visitor is no longer an actor … vague terrains, physical frontiers or sonorous frontiers of fringes of interference.[37]

36 Anthony Hudek, "From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*", *Tate Papers*, Autumn 2009, http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/over-sub-exposure-anamnesis-les-immateriaux. In this volume, p. 74.

37 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 13.

He explains this approach, at length, in terms of a deliberate violation against the traditional space-time implied by the gallery. The gallery is "an establishment of culture – that is to say of acquisition and assimilation of heterogeneous data – within the unity of an experience which constitutes a subject"; its spatial set-up is precisely designed in order to facilitate this synoptic pedagogy.[38] Lyotard seeks with *Les Immatériaux* to overturn this "modern-dominant" model of the museum gallery in which the visitor is reduced to an eye moving through a perspectival perceptual space, in a formative journey with a certain didactic finality. The development of an alternative "postmodern" space-time, conceived by Lyotard on the basis of a strange alignment of Diderot's *Salons* with postmodern urbanists, architects and sociologists,[39] recalls significantly Hultén's urbanist conception of the museum. Lyotard describes it more expansively in terms of driving from San Diego to Santa Barbara, in a zone of "conurbation" where "the opposition between centre and periphery disappears" and where "one must retune the radio many times … it is a nebula, where materials are metastable states of energy. The roads, the sidewalks, have no façade. Information circulates through irradiation and invisible interfaces".[40] This conceptualisation of the show was even extended to the catalogue, whose *Album* lays bare the processes of development of the concept, while the *Inventaire* gives the reader a set of loose-leaf representations of the "sites" within the show, which can be reconfigured and reordered at will.

Les Immatériaux was no world's-fair-type extravaganza, then. What is noticeable in the first full brief of the project following Lyotard's involvement, and even more so in the exhibition itself, is the way in which he injects the excitement engendered by cutting-edge developments with a note of *chagrin* – anxiety, sorrow or disappointment – from the hegemonic misdeeds of the modern project across the world wars and the holocaust – central subjects of his writings at the time. The exhibition opens not with flashing computer screens but with the desolation of the body in five Beckettesque scenarios, and with Joseph Losey's sombre film *Monsieur Klein*. Thus, if *Les Immatériaux* seemed in certain senses to satisfy the Pompidousian agenda, it also introduced an abrasive approach to both content and form that was apparently at odds with it. Indeed, these contradictions and ambivalences are clear in the very conception of a project that adopts a proto-cybernetic theory of communication as the armature for an experience that renders "clear" communication impossible. But at the same time, one also wonders whether its conceptual interrogation was shielded from the political and economic context within which it was produced.

38 Ibid., see also Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work…", in this volume.
39 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 19.
40 Ibid.

At least one member of the CCI team admits to a concern that these latter aspects were missing from the show's "materials". A press conference text for *Les Immatériaux* declares: "Insecurity, loss of identity, crisis, are not expressed only in the economy and the social, but also in the domains of sensibility, of knowledge and of the powers of man … and modes of life".[41] In a contemporaneous interview with the CCI team, during a discussion of the "global" point of view adopted by the exhibition, and the risk that it may be perceived as a "reactionary … apology for technology", Chantal Noël suggests that *Les Immatériaux* should be seen as a "preliminary enquiry" leading to further interrogations. Sabine Vigoureux replies: "One might all the same ask why, from this preliminary enquiry, all economic and social analysis is excluded. As if thought in its pure state were independent of these factors, when in fact they also have an influence on thought. Personally, I saw this as a deficiency, at the outset"; to which Nicole Toutcheff replies that these factors are indeed present, but simply not systematically presented as such, and that the overall conception of the show obviates such concerns, since "an interesting aspect of this kind of philosophical discourse is that it does not try to organise these scattered elements into a system".[42]

Certainly none of the team – least of all Lyotard – could have been unaware of the problematic context outlined above (Lyotard mentions ambivalently the question of the Beaubourg's "centrality" in his report during the last stages of planning).[43] Baudrillard had issued his brilliant, withering analysis of the "carcass of flux and signs" in 1981.[44] But if we place it side-by-side with Baudrillard's ferocious satire, we can perhaps see Lyotard as striving to counter-instrumentalise the space he had been offered: "if you had to have something in Beaubourg – it should have been a labyrinth", says Baudrillard;[45] Lyotard uses the reconfigurable space to build a darkened labyrinth on the fifth floor – or something even less ordered than a labyrinth (for, as Lyotard notes, even a labyrinth usually has one thread and restricts movement to particular paths).[46] "And they stampede to it… because, for the first time, they have a chance to participate, en masse, in this immense work of mourning for a culture they have always detested… The masses charge at Beaubourg as they do to the scenes of catastrophes, and with the same irresistible impulse", says Baudrillard;[47] Lyotard tries to create an experience that heightens unease and disquiet and confirms the demise of modern culture. "The only content of

41 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 26.
42 "La Règle du Jeu: Matérialiser les Immatériaux", interview with the CCI team, in E. Théofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et Après? "Les Immatériaux"* (Paris: Autrement, 1985).
43 See Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work…", in this volume, p.59.
44 Baudrillard nevertheless cooperated with the Centre Pompidou (notably on the journal *Traverses*) for many years both before and after the publication of *L'effet Beaubourg*.
45 Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg Effect", p. 6.
46 See Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work …", in this volume, p. 62.
47 Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg Effect", p. 8.

Beaubourg is the masses themselves, whom the building treats like a converter, like a black box, or, in terms of input-output, just like a refinery handles petroleum products or a flood of unprocessed material", says Baudrillard; Lyotard invites the masses to experience themselves as material "transformers" alongside the immaterials they have come to explore, and looks into installing electronic systems to involve visitors interactively by monitoring and gathering data on their visits.

Les Immatériaux is undoubtedly more than just a symptom. As Lyotard recounts at length in his report,[48] inside the project an acute struggle is taking place with the conditions under which it was possible to make the exhibition happen. Yet *Les Immatériaux* perhaps paid too little attention to the way in which its elaborate sabotage of the space and conception of the *modern* gallery risked being undermined by the problems of a *postmodern* space that was designed precisely to supersede that classical-modern framework. When Chaput reflects on this institutional problem, he seems to understand the latter as simply an extension of the former:

> I don't think that there is any contradiction in the sole fact that philosophical discourses change medium. The problems start when one wishes to make it the object of mass consumption. Doing philosophy in the framework of a public service (which Beaubourg is) is no straightforward matter. The whole "communication", "mass", "democracy", "public service" aspect has not been an easy fit with the innovative principles of the exhibition… The "exhibition" medium, the Pompidou Centre, are tools conceived as vehicles for a unique meaning and devices to share it through successive capillaries as far as possible. Here, we do the opposite: one product with multiple meanings, confided to the sensibility of individuals. This is rigorously the inverse of traditional communication.[49]

This predicament is reflected in the sometimes baffled and ambivalent responses to *Les Immatériaux*. A contemporary review by Kate Linker in *Art-Forum*,[50] while convinced by the show's conceit, judges that its execution "banalised its central themes", with "too much mechanical hokum – too many light machines and holograms, too many buttons to push and atomisers to squeeze", with "technology occupy[ing] center stage", "inevitably valorised, and thereby mystified". But if this "change of medium" for philosophy looks, ironically, "better on paper", she admits that its failure "raises the question of whether profound shifts of a philosophical nature can be represented through objects".

48 Ibid.
49 "La Règle du Jeu", p. 16.
50 Kate Linker, "A Reflection on Post-Modernism", *ArtForum*, September 1985.

It is doubtless *Les Immatériaux*'s simultaneous success and failure – its contradictory status as both an expensive, technically-demanding, trailblazing postmodern technological extravaganza *and* a sombre subversion of communication – that makes it interesting for us today. This ambivalence, as Linker indicates, is owed at least in part to the difficulties involved in transfusing philosophy into the medium of the exhibition. How, then, did Lyotard envision this transfer, and what motivated him to attempt it?

A Medium of Resistance?

Chantal Noël, one of the team from the CCI who worked on *Les Immatériaux*, speaks of "philosophy changing its media. It comes down to inscribing this exigency in another space and with other means than those of the book". "Through the 'exhibition' medium", she continues, "the cultural institution becomes a site where certain reflections of a philosophical order can be grasped."[51] We might agree, but at the same time we need to acknowledge that this proposition already gives rise to another set of questions: What *is* the exigency of philosophy? Simply to create a state of wonder, or questioning? To craft and communicate new concepts? To offer a glimpse of the resolution of social or political problems? To shape intuitions or symbols that schematise concepts? And what is the function of a "cultural institution" in relation to such aims?

Moreover, what made this question of a "change of medium" appealing for Jean-François Lyotard at the time of *Les Immatériaux*? It seems that he found himself under pressure from two related movements: Firstly, at a distance of a decade and a half from '68's transdisciplinary delirium, he observed the one-way drift of institutional philosophy back into a closed circle of scholars, and an embattled one at that. At the time of *Les Immatériaux*, philosophical activity in its traditional (university) setting was beginning to be challenged by the edicts of neoliberal "pragmatism", "communication", and "efficiency" (a process whose nadir seems to be in sight today). Outside the academy, meanwhile, a new breed of professional public intellectuals – the *nouveaux philosophes* – had emerged to proudly sweep under the carpet all of the conceptually violent, antihumanist enquiries of poststructuralist thought, railing against its abrasive experimentalism, its uselessness for immediate practical politics, and its nihilism, and seeking to reestablish thinking upon solid ground with the human as a fixed point from which to assert, as Lyotard writes in *The Inhuman*, "the authority to suspend, forbid interrogation, suspicion, the thinking that gnaws away at everything".[52] Yet at the same time, within the most disparate of *nonphilosophical* spheres – biology, design, art and science,

51 "La Règle du Jeu", p. 16.

52 Jean-François Lyotard, "Introduction: About the Human", in *The Inhuman*, p. 1.

and everyday life itself, straining under the torque of technical developments whose vocation had never been to "make sense" and whose deliverances scramble the finalities of humanism and modernist optimism – philosophical questions presented themselves not just as unavoidable, but in the form of a generalised intense *experience* of disorientation.

The enlightenment institutions within which philosophy could traditionally claim a rightful place are in decline, then, and yet a tacit appeal for philosophy comes from every quarter. This, Lyotard says, is what gives rise to a philosopher's need to go outside the university; he states this explicitly as one of the reasons for his involvement in *Les Immatériaux*: "A philosopher like me is more inclined to think his interests lie in becoming involved in what happens outside institutions; that he needs to get out of the university. Hence my presence in the team planning *Les Immatériaux*… Beyond institutionalised philosophy, there is a philosophy yet to come, one which corresponds to the abolition of 'disciplinary' boundaries.".[53]

Refusing the clear and efficient communication commanded by the *nouveaux philosophes*, *Les Immatériaux* would precisely not address its audience in any illusorily straightforward way. In its dramatisation of philosophy, it set out to resist the consensual stifling of the fundamental *inquietude* that constitutes the being of the human, and would even aim to amplify the intensification of this inquietude in an increasingly technicised environment.

It is worth noting here that this two-way resistance is no less pertinent today, when there is little diffusion of academic philosophy outside the university walls, and when, if "philosophy" ever does appear in a popular setting, it is still more or less in the "communicative" form outlined above, or even worse: philosophy as an alternative form of entertainment, distraction, therapy, self-help, as a diversionary enrichment of one's life, and so on. Moreover, any attempt today to bring philosophy into the public sphere in the more indeterminate, challenging way that Lyotard prescribes will find itself in direct competition with a more formidable claimant: increasingly, over the past 40 years, contemporary art has established itself as the primary cultural site where a public thinking recognisable as philosophical takes place. This new agora is all the more formidable a competitor in that, within it, participation in contemporary thinking is said to take place not through a laborious study and working-through of concepts, but through collective and individual experiences and happenings. Precisely the kind of "dramaturgy" of ideas that Lyotard pioneered in *Les Immatériaux* has in effect become endemic. Thus, as we look back on *Les Immatériaux 30* years later, we can see it as one of the first events in which philosophy and the art of the exhibition were brought

53 Jean-François Lyotard, Élie Théofilakis, "Les Petits Récits de Chrysalide" (interview), in Théofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et Après?*, p. 5–6.

together in such a way – with all the ambivalence entailed by that pioneering status.

Les Immatériaux sought to make good the deficiencies of philosophy in its public role by reasserting philosophy's vocation: that of exacerbating inquietude rather than issuing reassuring communications based on an assumed common ground. And yet it was of course conceived as a project that would gain a large audience. It at once embodied and challenged the emerging model of the exhibition as a public spectacle – a model which, one might argue, merely feeds into the communicative frenzy of accelerated development. In this sense, too, *Les Immatériaux* can be understood as a kind of hinge point: it seems to be poised on a knife-edge between satisfying the Beaubourg cultural megamachine's call for polyvalent cultural communication, on the one hand, and entirely sabotaging these demands with disorientation, indetermination, and greyness ("philosophy paints its grey on grey!") on the other. As we shall see, the roots of this ambivalence must be sought within Lyotard's philosophical work of the time.

Inquietude and The Accelerationist Error

At the same time as Lyotard is tempted to undertake *Les Immatériaux*'s experiment of pursuing philosophy "in another medium", his writings attest to a renewed commitment to philosophy "itself". It is as if, during this period – at least in the texts collected in *The Inhuman* (which, as Lyotard reminds us, were largely delivered to nonprofessional audiences) – the philosopher was undergoing one of those upheavals in which technical labour, and the unfolding and elaboration of a programme of investigation, gives way once again to philosophizing as such: indeterminate, ambiguous, puzzling and open. (As he writes in *The Differend*, a "weariness with regard to 'theory'" means that "[t]he time has come to philosophize."[54]) All of this makes these writings valuable for those of us who – naively, and counter to professionalisation, archivisation and exegesis – wish to take philosophy outside of the academic cloisters and do philosophy not "by the book" but "from the heart". Perhaps we might legitimate such naivety by appealing to tradition and saying that this heart is Augustinian: *Inquietus est cor nostrum*, says Augustine: our heart – for Augustine, that of postlapsarian man – is unquiet, it can find no rest; its inquiry into itself – *the question I have become for myself* – is not one of patient, systematic exegesis, but something more like a continuous unease, or even panic. This *inquietude* is a keyword that appears continually in Lyotard's vision for *Les Immatériaux*.

54 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, p. xiii.

Augustinian *inquietude* is reprised by Pascal in the anthropology at the heart of his fragmentary, agitated, exemplarily modern corpus: an anthropology abbreviated in the *Pensées'* terse formula: "Condition of man: inconstancy, boredom, inquietude."[55] In Pascal as in Augustine, the attribution of inquietude to man as a primordial condition is not understood merely as descriptive, but as a *normative* and even *programmatic* demand: not only is inquietude an inevitable aspect of human existence no matter how much we may try to suppress it; it is to be acknowledged, exacerbated and intensified – and this is the philosopher's task. The philosopher's job is to stir up trouble in himself and his fellow humans, to expose the constitutive inquietude at the heart of the human, which modern civilisation intensifies while supplying us with endless distractions with which to repress and ignore it.

Nowhere is this inquietude stronger in Lyotard than in his departure from Marxism. In his emotionally charged 1982 memoir of Pierre Souryi,[56] Lyotard expresses exquisitely the pain of his inability in all conscience to accede to the certainties required in order to commit himself to "the struggle": his doubts as to the inability of orthodox Marxism to describe the contemporary world; his suspicion of the dialectic as a universal language (language-game); and his conviction that capitalism has entered into an unprecedented phase, in which the supposed certainties of its so-called "organic development" are subverted. It is at this point in Lyotard's work that we arrive at the question of "accelerationism".[57]

The circulation of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's 2013 "Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics"[58] has led to a reconstruction and reappraisal of what Benjamin Noys has retrospectively dubbed the "accelerationist" period in French theory, a period which begins precisely with Lyotard's (and Deleuze and Guattari's) break with Marxist orthodoxy:[59]

> Galvanised by the events of May '68 and driven to a wholesale rejection of the stagnant cataracts of orthodox party politics, in his text of 1972 *Energumen Capitalism* and 1974's *Libidinal Economy* Lyotard suggests that emancipation of desire be sought not through the dialectic, not through the party, but by way of the polymorphous perversion set free by the capitalist machine itself. Errant forces are at work *in* the signs of capital itself, he says. The indifference of the value-form, the machinic composition of

55 On inquietude in Pascal, see Alexandre Declos, "L'Inquiétude dans les Pensées de Pascal", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 78 (2013), p. 167–184.

56 Jean-François Lyotard, "A Memorial of Marxism", in *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 45–75.

57 On accelerationism, see R. Mackay and A. Avanessian (eds) *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth and Berlin: Urbanomic and Merve, 2014).

58 Ibid.

59 B. Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 4–9.

> labour, and their merciless reformatting of all previous social relations is seen as the engine for the creation of a new fluid social body. It is the immanence with universal schizophrenia toward which capital draws social relations that promises emancipation here, rather than the party politics that, no doubt, paled by comparison with the oneiric escapades of '68. The credo of accelerationism is most explicitly formulated by Gilles Lipovetsky in his reading of Lyotard: "'[R]evolutionary actions' are not those which aim to overthrow the system of Capital, which has never ceased to be revolutionary, but those which complete its rhythm in all its radicality, that is to say actions which accelerate the metamorphic process of bodies."[60]

Accelerationism in its contemporary form, on the other hand, while drawing heavily upon this moment, introduces some different nuances; it is said to consist in

> [t]he assertion that the crimes, contradictions and absurdities of capitalism have to be countered with a politically and theoretically progressive attitude towards its constituent elements. Accelerationism seeks to side with the emancipatory dynamic that broke the chains of feudalism and ushered in the constantly ramifying range of practical possibilities characteristic of modernity... [T]the focus of much accelerationist thinking is the examination of the supposedly intrinsic link between these transformative forces and the axiomatics of exchange value and capital accumulation that format contemporary planetary society. According to accelerationism, then, the transformations wrought on the planet and on the human by globalised technology, the corrosion of tradition and heredity, the artificialisation of experience and the inextricably global reformatting of the social are not deplorable ills, they are not only inevitable but present an opportunity to extend the ongoing adventure of the human project. And crucially, the claim is that to think this is not merely to acquiesce to capitalism but to speculate beyond it: that acceleration can be an emancipatory vector of enlightenment.[61]

Before turning to this contemporary accelerationism, let us ask whether it is possible that *Les Immatériaux* was also a part of Lyotard's reckoning with the "accelerationist" moment in his work. In several of his works from the '80s, Lyotard speaks of that period as a *lapsus*. First of all in *Peregrinations* – where he talks about *Libidinal Economy* as his "evil book, the book everyone is tempted to write".[62] And secondly, and more indirectly, in the introduction to *The Inhuman*, where he seems to deplore the impulse behind this work and

60 Mackay and Avanessian, "Introduction" to *#Accelerate, p. 11–12*.
61 Ibid., p. 4.
62 Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 13.

to regret the mistakes he made in the wake of his departure from the party line. Lyotard's key point here – one echoed by many critics of contemporary accelerationism – is that the accelerationist error consists in *a failure to draw a distinction between two types of the inhuman:*

> The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development … must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage. To believe, as happened to me, that the first can take over from the second, give it expression, is a mistake.[63]

The fatal mistake of accelerationism was to believe that, on the horizon of the deterritorialisation opened up by capital, there would be disclosed an originary desire that could flow free of instituted structures of power. Now, however, Lyotard takes a more sober view of the dangers involved in capitulating to "the imperative to introducing ever more mediations, of breaking down and modulating everything to assure more control and more capacity and a 'richer' set of possible modifications" – a generalised differentiation of which "new technologies and the media are aspects", a process which "is reproduced by accelerating and extending itself according to its internal dynamic alone … assimilat[ing] risks, memoris[ing] their informational value and us[ing] this as a new mediation necessary to its functioning".[64] What he once saw as the revolutionary "metamorphic" potential of capitalist deterritorialisation, he now sees as a process that, in its inexhaustibility, "takes away the hope of an alternative".[65] What is more, just as development does not entail emancipation, so the inhumanity of the system does not preclude a banal humanism. The rise of the *nouveaux philosophes* has proved that there is in fact no incompatibility between the alienations of capital and the reinscription of an all-too-human mask from which spout communicative homilies that act as a suitable emollient for inquietude.

Given that the above description of "development" cited above is not dissimilar to Lyotard's definition of the "immaterial condition", let's hypothesise that the two are not unconnected, and that, in *Les Immatériaux* as in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard is seeking a third option – neither socialism nor barbarism – and in doing so, seeking to atone for his error. In *Les Immatériaux*, he continues to interrogate the technosocial reformatting of the human through inhuman material memory. He certainly does not erect any moral objection to it – in fact, as we have seen, he constructs the notion of *immaterials* precisely so as to *let them speak*, to legitimate them as an object of philosophical discourse, breaking them out of the modern paradigm and allowing them to be

63 Lyotard, "About the Human", *The Inhuman*, p. 2.
64 Ibid., p. 7.
65 Ibid., p. 6.

expressed according to their proper nature. As we have suggested, this also involves a "legitimation" of the inquietude they provoke. And, finally, it is this inquietude that gives rise to the immanent demand for a non-institutional philosophy conducted by other means. But what relation do these exigencies have to Lyotard's retreat from his accelerationist stance?

The attempt to legitimate immaterials without returning to his irresponsible accelerationist stance generally gives rise to an advocacy of *slowness*. "To go fast is to forget fast", under the imperative "Be operational or disappear",[66] whereas "writing and reading which advance backwards in the direction of the unknown thing 'within' are slow".[67] Lyotard here seems to rediscover the theme of anamnesis as the "*other* of acceleration".[68] He recovers this classical philosophical term – the remembering of what was already within, the immemorial non-self in the self, glazed over by *doxa* and by everyday habit – as the name for a recovery of the "other" inhuman; a recovery that takes place through an *advocacy* of immaterials that is not, however, a *submission* to the vista of sheer acceleration they open up. The age of immaterials and the demands it makes upon thought open a deep chasm within the human which must be carefully distinguished from the promise of cheap accelerationist thrills – the *jouissance* of which, precisely, would collude with "communication" and "development".

Lyotard links the *immaterial* closely to the *immature*;[69] and the anamnesic inhuman is the province not of the urban sophisticate but of the child. For Lyotard, "the child is eminently the human because its distress heralds and promises things possible" – that is, it attests to what is not yet securely bound within the horizon of the human, and demands and makes evident the incompletion of the labour of becoming human. Humanism conceived as already achieved and complete (the smugly-assumed majority of the *nouveaux philosophes*) is but a façade of maturity, a feigning of adulthood whose stance is entirely compatible, ideologically speaking, with the merciless acceleration of capital. But presumably accelerationism goes in the opposite, equally undesirable direction, losing sight of the *inquietude* of the child as it gazes rapt at the imagined spectacle of a deterritorialised future.

As Pascal tells us, we may create endless "diversions" in order to forget our inquietude and the vacuity it alerts us to – and yet all this will achieve is to deepen it. In Lyotard's words: "the system has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it. But the anguish is that of a mind haunted by a familiar yet unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think – if one claims to exclude it, if one doesn't give it an outlet,

66 Ibid., p. 2.
67 Ibid., p. 2–3.
68 Ibid., p. 3.
69 See Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work…", in this volume, p. 34.

one aggravates it."[70] Inquietude therefore needs to be recognised, awakened and intensified, an inquietude which – according to Pascal – stems from our vacuity, from the fact that we do not know what we are. And, as Chaput declares:

> The proposition of *Les Immatériaux* is … to make felt, to show, troubledness, inquietude and madness.[71]

Lyotard's accelerationism was really about the acknowledgement of the end of the human project understood as a project of will, as the collective project of enlightenment. Through technics, through the hegemony of the exchange-form of value, through the automation and autonomisation of the machine of development, human projection into the future had been usurped by the autonomic will of capital, a blind and infinite will-to-will, a purposiveness whose only purpose is to produce more, to extract more, to mediate more – what Lyotard now calls "development". Clearly, the accelerationist error had been to place faith in the emancipatory dynamic of this autonomic process.

Lyotards *immaterialism*, however, still corresponds to the renunciation of the modern Cartesian vision of authorial projection, the free imposition of a project conceived by the will upon a matter which is an indifferent patient for the human agent. But it combines this renunciation with a recusal of the accelerationist faith in capital's futurity. It is in something like a state of shock (to use Bernard Stiegler's expression) that, while defiantly resisting any nostalgic reaction against the disquieting technical edifice of immaterials, Lyotard seeks to undertake a "deeper reflection" that would discover their more fundamental significance by way of anamnesis or the "other inhuman".

It is difficult, however, not to see this contemplation without project as being, also, a retreat. The risk is that it consigns philosophical thinking to an even more confining sequestration, and that, moreover, it attests to a continuing faith in an underlying reality of the (in)human, or of thought, that can be extracted, recovered, and provide succour – even if this recovery is infinitely deferred. At the same time as he wants to reflect that immaterials are transforming the human, Lyotard also wishes to move this reflection to a register that will effectively be a prophylactic against machinic contamination, since it indicates that thought can maintain a reflective distance. And it is *the exhibition* that then comes to stand for this free space in which we can distance ourselves from the accelerative process and return to a thought that "doesn't have its place and time on the support of inscriptions" and that "remains unknown to the breachings and scannings".[72]

70 Lyotard, "About the Human", p. 2.

71 Thierry Chaput, voiceover in the short film *Octave dans le pays des immatériaux* (dir. Paule Zajdermann, 1985).

72 Jean-François Lyotard, "*Logos* and *Techne*, or Telegraphy", in *The Inhuman*, p. 55.

The intention here, after all, seems to be to reinscribe the machine within a technical space that is *lacking in being* – which suggests that *Les Immatériaux* stakes everything on a test which, on the basis of affective response, would reinscribe the border between man and replicant.[73] Although this "recovery" will never be complete, the experience of inquietude furnished by the drama of the exhibition in effect becomes proof of the human's resistance to absorption into the accelerative dynamic.

Exhibition and/or Laboratory

In general, cultural investment in the exhibition as a site for thinking has only intensified since *Les Immatériaux*. Many contemporary art projects, often with the imprimatur of a philosopher, and often mixing "non-art" objects with artworks, promote the idea of a community of inquietude and indeterminacy that exists fleetingly, fugitively, in the hidden corners of "the system of development", in places of contemplation or collective fabulation, thus reconfirming that some immemorial site remains for a thinking outside of it: this, it seems to me, is precisely the hope of the contemporary form of public exhibition, and of the world of contemporary art in general.

The aggressive drive to exacerbate inquietude present in *Les Immatériaux*, however, seems to have given way to more anodyne forms. Wary of asserting any purpose or project, retreating from the technosocial realm, cowed by the dread that technology = rationality = mastery, many of these cultural reflections are prey to a certain institutional calcification of the dogmas of indeterminacy and sublimity. Their articles of faith are the community of that which cannot communicate its community; the value of open, free, nondetermined play, receptiveness, and indefinition; and the insistence that we must build spaces in which *not* to conceptualise, explicate, project, plan, assert, or produce. In the guise of sombre reflection, this distances both art and philosophy from the forces and knowledges that shape the world. Moreover, when non-art objects are brought into the exhibition space, they are precisely severed from these complex productive forces and rendered over to a system of circulation that wrongly supposes itself capable of distancing itself from them. Why does an artist take disquieting, vexing, puzzling objects from the world of contemporary capitalism and place them inside this other environment? Because these materials are what construct our technosocial situation. With what purpose? The artist refuses to tell you, because his value as artist is precisely to tear these objects away from their functional integration into "the system of development" and to present them in a space of indeterminacy, to enable us to reflect upon them in a deeper manner. To

73 On Lyotard's post-accelerationist project as an extended *Bladerunner*-style "voightkampff test" see I. H. Grant, "LA 2019: Demopathy and Xenogenesis", in Mackay and Avanessian (eds), *#Accelerate*, p. 275–301.

what effect? To aim at effects would be precisely to cede to the system – the artist does not do this, because he is well aware that the modern idea of will is compromised by the evils of capital, that accelerated development makes of any human "project" an absurdity.

What is disturbing now, in short, is that the presentation of inquietude has become indistinguishable from a certain quietism, and that "the gallery" has once again become the "establishment of a culture", albeit a distinctively (post-)postmodern one. Perhaps the type of project anticipated by *Les Immatériaux* is now fully integrated into the consensual politics proposed by the *nouveaux philosophes* and by neoliberalism, as a sanctioned form of communication. It has found its proper place, as a passive contemplation without project, which, at most, nurtures the forlorn hope of preserving thinking intact within a sequestered space. The edifying function of inquietude is fully integrated into the circulatory system of the culture and communications industry that Lyotard had hoped his sombre grey labyrinth would delay or obstruct. All of this means that we must look at *Les Immatériaux* not in a nostalgically indulgent mode, but from the point of view of a contemporary situation which it anticipates and which it played a part in creating, at the same time as it set out to resist it.

Today's exhibitions, with catalogues full of philosophers' essays, and whose eclectic exhibits sagely reflect on various "materials", "objects" and "things", provoke some ambivalence as to "which inhuman" they serve: the troubling reflection that erodes self-certainty and exposes us to immanent crisis, or the accelerating circulation of messages quite capable of comforting and reassuring us as they lubricate development and the extraction of surplus value; the child who speaks in an alien tongue, or the infantilised adult of consumer capital, a relay for platitudes of cultural literacy and self-satisfied "contemplation"? Just as Lyotard returned to his earlier "mistake", the dialectic within *Les Immatériaux* between acceleration and anamnesis should be critically revisited in order to assess the context in which its producers sought to stage this struggle through a dramatisation within the space of the exhibition.

It is easy to pledge allegiance to our inquietude, to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of what it is to be human, without assuming the collective responsibility to once more determine what we will make of ourselves. This latter question is the one that contemporary accelerationism sets out to ask,[74] insisting that the impossibility of fixing our place in relation to matter in terms of an inherited concept of mastery *does not* have as its necessary consequence that we must resign ourselves to merely contemplating our possible fate from

74 See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics", in Mackay and Avanessian (eds), *#Accelerate*, p. 347–361.

within a sheltered space. In its renewed optimism and advocacy of enlightenment, it reminds us that we have modes of thinking at our disposal that go beyond Cartesianism mechanism and Laplacean determinism, and argues that we have the means to orient ourselves speculatively within these new spaces and to positively take hold of inquietude.[75] Whether or not one finds convincing the broad sketches set out so far by contemporary accelerationism, I would argue that its basic impulse poses an appropriate challenge that today invites us to reach beyond the stakes of *Les Immatériaux*: that of decoupling the experimental exploration of the unknown spaces that immaterials open up from the profit axiomatic, and of doing so beyond spaces of contemplation and indeterminacy that present the fleeting illusion of shelter or dazzle us with the sublime aestheticised spectacle of our own disorientation, within the context of a culture industry whose productions are safely sequestered from that of which they speak.

According to Srnicek and Williams,[76] accelerationism is a matter of remaining true to both inquietude and the avant-garde will to become inhuman, but also of imagining ways to collectively undertake the reformatting of the socius, to *reorient* the hegemony of sociotechnics, the extension of the "collective cortex constituted by machine memories".[77] For isn't the time for melancholy and mourning – the "first state of shock", in Bernard Stiegler's words – now over? Don't we need to go beyond stupefaction, and doesn't *Les Immatériaux* ultimately still fall too much on the side of *chagrin* rather than *jubilation*? To go further calls for a transformative anthropology rather than an apologetic anthropology, and a constructive rather than a reflective immaterialism. It calls for the involvement of philosophical thought across disciplines, certainly, but in the register of design and production rather than exhibition and reflection. The greatest problem of politics and of desire is the mismeasure between possibility and reality to which technocapitalism constrains us. The experiment is already being conducted upon us, but how do we break into the laboratory? How do we mobilise that which is awakened by the inquietude of the immaterial age yet which resists the system of development (the "other" inhuman) in the direction of the construction of an immaterial future? This is a task that arguably no longer belongs within the register of reflection or of exhibition, even the *surexposition* that *Les Immatériaux* intended to operate. For ultimately, if we are to take on the philosophical and political stakes that Lyotard wished to bring to light in *Les Immatériaux,* perhaps the exhibition is no longer the appropriate site for such a process.

75 As many contemporary accelerationists argue, science fiction should be an inspiration here, as it turns fear and inquietude into excitement at unknown possibilities – let's not forget that Lyotard himself says the goal is "to move from *melancholia* to *novatio*, from chagrin to jubilation".

76 Ibid.

77 Lyotard, "Matter and Time", p. 45.

Despite the feverish hybridizing of contemporary philosophy and contemporary art, today we rarely see anything as acutely expressive as was *Les Immatériaux* of the tension between the demands of neoliberal cultural institutions and the will to use the exhibition as a medium for thinking. Rarely do the two sit together in quite such open discomfort. At a time when we risk creating a closed-circuit between theoretical production and contemporary art, Lyotard's heartfelt wish to use the "new support" of the exhibition for philosophical thought in order to "dramatise ideas", to reach an audience beyond both academic philosophy and the art-museum audience, and to do so by *disquieting* them, remains inspiring; yet its implicit critique of the "modern gallery" needs to be extended into a consideration of the machine of cultural circulation that is the contemporary exhibition; the conventions and limitations of this institution of culture also need to be challenged, in order to move toward a *constructive* immaterialism. As Lyotard says:

> There is a gap between what is proposed to us for our little everyday lives, and the enormous capacities of experimentation and their ramifications in the social, opened up by technoscience. People are very aware of this. Leading a dog's life when one is at large in the cosmos, etc. … A laboratory humanity, that is to say an experimental humanity, this would be the best outcome of the crisis.[78]

78 Ibid., p. 11, and 13.