In Samuel R. Delany’s story »Among the Blobs« from 1976, Joe, one of the story’s protagonists, accidentally bumps into another passenger on a shaky New York subway train: »To one side of his back was, not a pain nor even a feeling, but rather a sensational ghost, an unformed blob, where she had lurched against his army jacket, or he had backed into her tweed. Are you alright? She probably couldn’t hear him because of the subway car’s roar. Joe turned, because after all all he had done was bumping into her a little, or she had bumped him. But I could have smiled, he thought.«

The Blob here, a sensational ghost between two interconnected bodies, is in many ways not far from theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad’s rethinking of the notion of the void. They state: »The quantum theory of touching is radically different from the classical explanation. Actually, it is radically queer.« In classical physics, particles, fields and the void are separate elements. In quantum field theory, however, »a physical particle does not simply reside in the vacuum as an independent entity, but rather is inseparable from the vacuum.« From the point of view of classical physics, the vacuum has no matter and no energy. However, within quantum field theory, »the void is a spectral realm with a ghostly existence,« where the indeterminacy principle allows for fluctuations. »In fact,« Barad states, »this indeterminacy is responsible not only for the void not being nothing (while not being something), but it may in fact be the source of all that is, a womb that births existence.« Georges Bataille might have been after something similar in his writings on laughter. In his famous lecture »Non-knowledge, Laughter and Tears« from 1953 he suggests that »the laughable is not only unknown, but unknowable.« Rather than thinking of laughter as something accidental, Bataille highlights it as essential. »We would laugh, not for a reason that we would not happen to know, for lack of information, or for want of sufficient penetration, but because the unknown makes us laugh.« In contrast to beliefs that laughter is a human expression after a feeling of happiness, confusion, or even contempt or disgust, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio points out that conscious emotions are rather later byproduct. Instead we could perhaps locate laughter in between bodies or as a participant force in the processes of mattering, »as a direct feeling of the virtual: the sensation of invisible forces acting on a body—a direct inarticulate sensation of change.«
too near or sat too close) he had to apologize, be appallingly polite, and generally come on far more deferentially than any normal human should be expected to to establish that, indeed, he was not a heterosexual lustful panting-monster. «

»What is recognition?« asks Hito Steyerl in her text »Sea of Data,« recalling the famous scene of (self)-recognition described by Louis Althusser as a policeman hails someone in the street by yelling »Hey you!« In that moment, she continues, »the person is supposed to recognize himself both as subject (›you‹) and as subjected to the policeman's authority (›hey!‹).« In other words, within this formula »the categories of knowledge, control, and privilege are established with one single gesture.« However, her main point is that today, in a sea of data and with algorithmic governance, things are more complicated. Indeed, as philosopher and media studies scholar Luciana Parisi also brings up, »machine vision requires no perceptual response or recognition of the world.« Instead, code becomes »the ordered system of cognitions making things happen in the world, both among humans who can (sometimes) understand the code and those who cannot.« Consequently, the ghost is also the code that runs in our machines.

The performative role of our machines is also brought up by Barad, who observes that »apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering.« Barad points out that »representationalism is so deeply entrenched within Western culture that it has
taken on a common sense appeal. It also has a history, they continue, that can be traced back to Democritus's atomic theory, from which there emerges the possibility of a gap between representations and represented, but also to the Cartesian division between «internal» and «external» that breaks along the line of the knowing subject. This is also touched on in Denise Ferreira da Silva’s and Arjuna Neuman’s film *Four Waters Deep Implicancy*, which concludes: «by containing air, water, earth, fire in geometric forms, Plato outlines a mode of thinking that reduces the basis of existing and knowing to lethal abstractions.»

»Critique is presumed to require distance, reflection is presumed to require distance, but distance is a resource administered unequally—I wear my past in my hair and carry it as stains on my teeth. I look at it from a vantage point far away—and feel it tickling under my skin.«

»In the system of knowledge,« writer and philosopher Paul B. Preciado declares, »we are human or animal. Man or woman. Living or dead. We are the colonizer or the colonized. Living organism or machine. We have been divided by the norm. Cut in half and forced to remain of one side or the other of the rift.«

The so common question »Are you a human being?« appearing in the captcha (the Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart), could be contrasted with another question that the Jamaican writer and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter asks: »hat does it mean to be human?« Aristotle’s famous dictum of man »being the only animal that laughs« in the act of tickling through touch pads, sensors, and vibration feedback. In fact, if we look around us, we could perhaps also be reconceived if we return to the fact that he did not mention this in the context of his »philosophy of humor,« and instead it appears in his text »On the Parts of Animals,« while discussing the function of the diaphragm. Here he states that »to be tickled is to be set in laughter« and »that man alone is affected by tickling is due firstly to the delicacy of his skin.« In other words, that human bodies are responsive to touch—that they are affected by other bodies and affect other bodies. We know today that responsiveness to tickling is not unique to the human, but exists among other species too. Equally our sensing machines are participating in the act of tickling through touch pads, sensors, and vibration feedback. In fact, if we look around us, we would discover many forms of affective tickling that take place between and inside organisms, bodies, technologies, and environments. Perhaps it is even time to question the classical assumption that we cannot tickle ourselves to laughter, by following Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, as they ask: »Whom and what do we touch when we touch electrons?« Because, as Barad points out, »matter... cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is.« According to them, polymorphous perversity among self-touching particles is norm rather than the exception, thus putting filth, dirt, muck, grime, mud, mire, sludge, slime, and ooze at the core of life, rather than in the margins.

»Wenn ihr wüßtet, wir dreckig ihr seid. Prost! If only you all knew how filthy you are. Cheers!«

In the traditional modern Western philosophical approach, »difference is seen as to-be-captured, to-be-assimilated, and, eventually, to-be-wholly-eradicated.« The notion of value serves here as a divider, where some things can be destroyed, while others are protected, as Denise Ferreira da Silva and Arjuna Neuman also point out in their film. This is also present in Ferreira da Silva’s theoretical writing, where she exposes the violence housed in knowledge and mathematical reasoning, and where she asks: »Why don’t black lives matter?« A similar cri-
tique can be found in Jack Halberstam’s book *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*, where he shows how the processes of zombification result in what Ruthie Gilmore has called »premature« death for Black people, near extinction for certain animals, homelessness for poor people, and bare life for the incarcerated, the undocumented, and the animals with whom we live. But where he also points out that this zombification produces not a hard and fast distinction between life and death, but new balancing acts between bio- and necropolitical regimes.

Here he follows Jane Bennett’s vibrant materialism through which we can understand the activity of living as a force that does not fully coincide with any specific body which can contest the earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption that coexist with humancentric visions of a universe populated by live subjects and dead or zombie objects.

Elizabeth A. Povinelli, professor of anthropology and gender studies and one of the founding members of the Karrabing Film Collective, brings the bio- and necropolitical forms of »governances of difference« even further with the concept of geontopower, a mode of late liberal governance which operates not only through life and death but through the governance of Life and Nonlife. Through the figures of the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus she shows how late liberalism uses different ontologies of human and nonhuman arrangements of existence for the purpose of extractive capital and settler liberalism. She states: »We can think of these figures as a collection of governing ghosts who exist in between two worlds and points out that capitalism has a unique relation to the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus insofar as Capitalism sees all things as having the potential to create profit; that is, nothing is inherently inert, everything is vital from the point of view of capitalization.«

Thus geontopower exercises a form of governance and killing around life and non-life that especially hits communities and people who refuse to say that soil, rock, river, sand, water, shore and air is not part of the inert other over which humans rule, but rather part of a system of obligated relations.

We’re stuck in the middle of nowhere. We can get land but we can’t start the motor, states one member of the Karrabing Film Collective in their film *Wutharr Saltwater Dreams*, a film which brings up the impossibility of ongoingsness for their Indigenous community in the Northern Territory of Australia, as it is ruled by neoliberal
politics and late liberal settler colonialism. Departing from a concrete situation—a motor failure—what unfolds are three different explanations, from three members of the collective. Rather than standing in opposition, these different positions form a set of entangled currents of their reality. Here the Karabing as a practice is refusing the self-other division through the »otherwise«, a place which is neither the self nor the other, but »the other to the other«, a place of being simultaneously same and different. Within this opens an ethical horizon for difference but without separability, which also Denise Ferreira da Silva and Arjuna Neuman talk about in their film. Many voices speak here in the interstices, a cacophony of always already reiteratively intra-acting stories. These are entangled tales. Each is diffractively threaded through and enfolded in the other. Is that not in the nature of touching? Is touching not by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within?

Raqs Media Collective also explores this entanglement of time, matter, and meaning in their film The Blood of Stars, which starts with a quote from astrobiologist Jill Tarter: »The iron in the hemoglobin molecules in the blood in your right hand came from a star that blew up 8 billion years ago. The iron in your left hand came from another star.« Reflecting on a similar thought, the art-
ist and filmmaker Ester Martin Bergsmark states: »I get very fascinated by all these layers and all these times within me. All the different voices that shape me. [...] In the midst of moments of terror, in the hopelessness and powerlessness, there is a longing, perhaps even desire. There is Erotics. There is a voice under.« 049 We find a resembling thread in Satch Hoyt’s artistic research project »Afro-Sonic Mapping,« where sonic, tactile, and olfactory senses are activated through memory, imagination, and multi-sensory perception and where he declares: »Think of a fluid sensorial blueprint where nothing is heard but everything is said—the silence between the notes. I call it Black Sonic Sensory Perception.« 050 Again, if we, together with Barad, »listen carefully, we can hear the whispered murmurings of infinity immanent in even the smallest details.« 051

tremolo exercise:
tremble from a to b
tremble from lung to knee
tremble from a to e
tremble from a to earth 052

»Tremors.« Steve Reinke and James Richards call out in their film When We Were Monsters, continuing: »It is time to leave the old fourfold behind. The old fourfold of earth, heavens, gods and souls. The earth is ungrounded. The heavens are shifting. The gods are hiding, and souls just hover there mindlessly mewling, yearning and yearning, endlessly thirsting.« 053 The voice that trembles in me is the voice of the border. We understand the world better, « Édouard Glissant writes, »when we tremble with it, for the world trembles in every direction.« 054 It is also somewhere here in the middle of this text that »the camera starts to shake, the whole set shakes, and bells ring ominously as Francis Francine (as himself) continues to shake the breast of Delicious Dolores (played by Sheila Bick),« 055 and images start to sweat, »AND THE TEXT STARTED TO SLAP, SLAP, SLAP,« 056 huckling, chortling, guffawing, giggling, tittering, sniggering, cackling, howling, roaring, tee-heering, bursting, roaring, convulsing, dissolving, splitting, doubling up.
personas states: »My name is Venus flytrap. Spinning stories of contradiction, feminism and fiction. About the righteous and the sick. My name is seething caldron where hot thoughts meet small talk made worse by unshakeable conditions of worth.« Within these practices, complexity, far from being accidental, is a desired outcome. Physical chemist Ilya Prigogine and chemist and philosopher Isabelle Stengers argue in a similar way against the traditional stability, order, and uniformity of classical science, where they envision entropy as an engine driving the world toward increasing complexity rather than toward death. And here Delany’s story starts to really wobble and diffuse: the Fort—with its white porcelain and transparent south wall recalling the scientific laboratory—becomes a public toilet and cruising site, the Galactic Council members and/or scientists become toilet visitors, Bat blurs into Joe and Joe merges into Bat, fumes of toxic antiseptics intermingle with urine and unbreathable fumes from another Galaxy in a different time, the clean becomes dirty, the dirty clean. An incoming policeman smiles and nods back at Joe as they bump into each other at the entrance of the public toilet and cruising site, before apparently remembering himself and frowning (a hint to Althusser?).

In contrast to classic science-fiction narratives, Joe neither gets killed, nor does he kill the Blob. Instead it turns into a sexual encounter: »She was without him. She was within him. She rolled through him. She flowed around him.«

In her essay »Telling Is Listening,« the science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin writes about how communication is often seen as a one-way transportation of meaning from A to B. To oppose this normative and limiting idea, she advocates for another image of communication: two amobas having sex. When two amoebas exchange genetic information, »they literally give each other inner bits of their bodies.«

Karen Barad teaches us that »objectivity means being accountable for marks on bodies, that is, specific materializations in their differential mattering. We are responsible for the cuts that we help enact not because we do the choosing (neither do we escape responsibility because »we« are »chosen« by them), but because we are an agential part of the material becoming of the universe. … Indeed, ethics cannot be about responding to the other as if the other is the radical outside to the self.«
What new forms could emerge when we re-situate ourselves as spontaneously responsive, moving, embodied living beings? What roles do unruly (laughing, vibrating, noise making) moving images, machines, bodies, energies, times and matter play in the world making? How could these non-human and non-conscious agencies challenge our notion of human agency and lead us to other places of power where meaning and matter are intertwined? What new worlds and futures could open up if we accept the possibility of not knowing?

E.I. The Blob is a noisemaking image-organism sensitive to sound and touch, created inside my research project in order to explore new and less hierarchical ways of thinking, being, and acting with the moving image. Its name could stand for Earthificial Intelligence, or simply a mispronunciation or confusion of the acronyms A.I. or E.T., although mostly it goes under the nickname the Blob. As a (non-human) player-character-ghost, the blob has allowed me to rethink the relation to the moving image, to it as an intra-active vibrant body. It has also opened up ways to rethink laughter beyond human laughter, towards it as an unruly force, that participates in the processes of mattering and change. With the Blob I am looking for ways to open up for human, image and machine social relations, where situated forms of response-ability exist. Perhaps the throbbing of unknowable laughter between organisms, bodies, and technologies, systems and times can help us understand how unstable and inhuman we actually are, that we are neither outside the world nor free (to participate or laugh when we decide to), but rather that we are interconnected with everything around us and inside us.

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