

**Holger
Kuhn**

Bielefeld University

ENVIRONMENTS OF CONTROL IN THE FILMS OF MELANIE GILLIGAN

Introduction

Since 2008, the artist Melanie Gilligan has been investigating how the techniques of neoliberal governmentality have intensified in the face of digital environments. This is expounded upon in three video works in particular, all of which establish a critical stance within three different governmental paradigms of control. *Crisis in the Credit System* (2008) revolves around the financial markets as a specific system of control by alluding to the prevailing phantasm of a liberal market idyll in neoliberal thought. *Popular Unrest* (2010) features a central algorithmic data management system, and, in *The Common Sense* (2014), society regulates itself through a decentralized but omnipresent affective network created by environmentally distributed technologies. Gilligan conceived each work as a fictional miniseries, in several short episodes, like the serials

of television and streaming services, and freely accessible on the Internet.

By successively working through these three works, I argue that the ways in which Gilligan presents different formations of control may be analyzed as allegories of historical and technological processes of governmentality, following what Foucault developed in his lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics*. All three paradigms have in common that they do not aim at the production of subjects, but rather at control over their milieux or environments. In order to sketch out more precisely the differences between these three paradigms, I unfold my subsequent analyses of Gilligan's works in parallel with Erich Hörl's "Reflections on the Becoming-Environmental of Thinking, Power, and Capital," which he has gathered under the heading "The Environmentalitarian Situation". Hörl refers to Foucault's "power-historical intuition," in which governmental modes of power are characterized as environmental. However, it should be emphasized that Foucault was still far from being able to grasp the swiftly advancing "spread of neoliberal logics through digital processes." The ways in which Foucault outlined his arguments on environmental technologies of power were based only rudimentarily on the emerging cybernetic cultures of control in the 1970s. His main references are to eighteenth-century liberalism, in particular to Adam Smith's "invisible hand of the market," to which he assigned a central role in his genealogy of governmentality.

Crisis in the Credit System

Crisis in the Credit System is a miniseries comprising four ten-minute episodes that were put online on October 1, 2008, just two weeks after

the investment bank Lehmann Brothers declared bankruptcy. Even though the research, rehearsals, and production preceded the financial

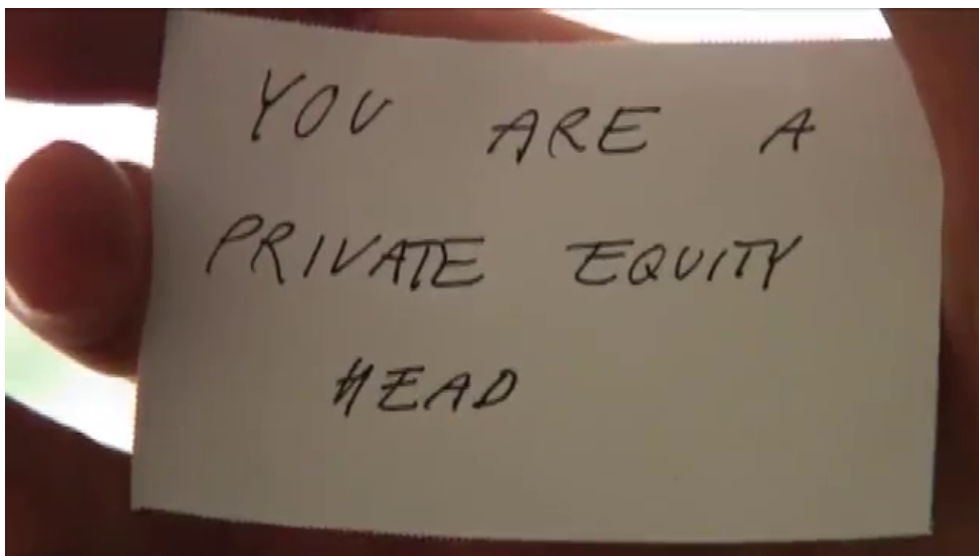


[Fig. 1]. Melanie Gilligan (2008). *Crisis in the Credit System*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

crisis that culminated in autumn 2008, *Crisis in the Credit System* is an unmistakable commentary on the events of that moment.

The series plays out in the colonnades of a wellness spa that is overgrown with leaves. A management seminar is taking place. A small group of young, seemingly exhausted financial analysts are using role-playing and free association exercises to devise ways in which profitable investments can be made in times of credit crises.

However, as soon as the role-playing begins, the setting changes. From one shot to the next, the characters find themselves in a high-rise building. They now populate the glass skyscrapers of the financial world. They tackle sales negotiations -pitches- while taking the elevator and walking through high-rise lobbies. The financial analysts seem much more alive in their natural habitat. A story within the story emerges in



[Fig. 2]. Melanie Gilligan (2008). *Crisis in the Credit System*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

which two investment firms, Evergain and Babel Capital Management, compete against each other. Babel devises a financial instrument, a “secret weapon” called the “everyone trade,” “a complex derivative for speculating on investor sentiment. [...] the most powerful gauge of market feeling ever invented.” The financial analysts want to overcome the crisis by betting on the volatility of their own feelings through trading with different derivatives.

Gilligan’s series asks how society is conceived within capitalist paradigms of control, and how liberal and neoliberal knowledge attempts to transpose chaotic and turbulent global situations into ordered and peaceful systems. In *Crisis in the Credit System*, the discussion of the idyll of the liberal market, which, despite the catastrophic consequences of the globalized financial crisis, still hopes for compensatory processes internal to the market, can be found

especially in some allusions to the notorious paradigm of Adam Smith's "invisible hand."

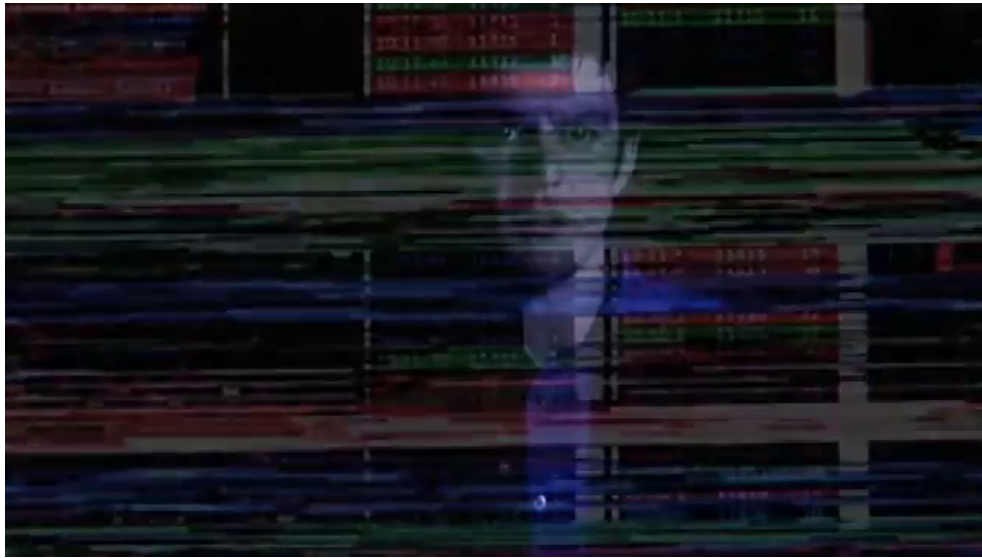
The course instructor alludes to this paradigm in the motivational speeches she uses to fire up the group: "These are incredibly dangerous financial times, potentially the Great Depression's brutal sequel. So think optimal adaptive strategies. [...] Picture everything that's happened with the credit crisis so far as one big brain, and you're the thought processes, accessing this past and making connections." The group is urged to see itself as a networked brain, functioning as a very small sample of all the market participants connected through the globalized financial market. "The market thinks a trillion thoughts, it sends trillions and trillions of thoughts around the world. And it connects billions of lives." Exaggerated enthusiasm for the wonders of the free market can be heard in this quotation, which sounds very similar to formulations by Milton Friedman, to name only one of its more recent advocates. According to Friedman, only the price system, which arises from the unconstrained transactions of buyers and sellers, manages to coordinate "the economic activities of millions".

What are the consequences when the market oversees the connections of billions of lives? The aforementioned quotations parody the liberal ideas of control for which Adam Smith devised his now infamous metaphor. The market brings all exchange processes driven by the interests of consumers into balance, but the controlling hand must remain invisible, and above all it cannot be replaced by the governing mode of a sovereign ruler. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault points out that this is also a problem of representation that is inherently connected to the problem of control and government. Although economic processes seem transparent at first, the "totality of the process eludes each

economic man.” There is a kind of transparency of the regulatory system to itself. But no human agent should intervene in the regulatory process, because there can be no preferential point of view on the whole system. It is “impossible for the sovereign to have a point of view on the economic mechanism which totalizes every element and enables them to be combined artificially or voluntarily.” The invisible hand prohibits “any form of overarching gaze” and it also “prohibits any form of intervention.” Trust in the market mechanism enables a system of control that governs not by governing individuals but by trusting the system’s ability to find balances and equilibria without extensive intervention from any sovereign instance.

Joseph Vogl has noted that, since the eighteenth century, invisible market mechanisms and the spectral obstinacy of capitalist circulation are invoked as “mystifying phenomena” within the field of economics itself, often in the form of allegories or ciphers such as the invisible hand, which has been put aside recently in favor of black swans or black boxes. In her films, Gilligan also uses allegorical figures to denote similar economic paradigms. For example, in *Crisis in the Credit System* she creates the figure of an oracle as a proxy for the invisible hand.

One of the financial analysts has the ability to put himself into a trance in order to process the truth of the market in scenes reminiscent of spiritual séances. His unconscious is “highly networked with the whole of the market.” The oracle explains this ability as follows: The conscious mind is too slow to understand the truth of the market, and to keep up with the billions of thoughts that the market thinks. The oracle claims to have an unconscious that is directly linked to all the market processes. His



[Fig. 3]. Melanie Gilligan (2008). *Crisis in the Credit System*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

unconscious is the market, one could say, because it reveals the truth of the market in a kind of “veridiction”.

But Gilligan’s films are not limited to parodying the nebulous terminology of liberal epistemologies. Her later films, in particular, also chronicle the more recent technological metamorphoses of the capital-form, which intensify the governmental technologies of early liberalism.

From the milieu of the market to environmental control

Before I come back to this, however, I would like to situate more precisely the significance of the invisible hand and the liberal market theories of the eighteenth century in the context of Foucault’s analyses of governmentality. Foucault differentiates the emergence of governmentality from sovereign power and the disciplinary regime. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault still outlines the distinction of sovereign power from the disciplinary regime in terms of panopticism. Sovereign power operates primarily through punishment, while panopticism aims

at the production of subjects and individuals through its various institutions (the prison, hospital, factory, etc.). In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he explains that these two forms of power -despite all differences- have the same target: an individual body of subjects or citizens shaped and constituted in the field of modern visibility. With governmentality, Foucault turns to a type of power that operates on a fundamentally different level, a type of power that regulates the processes of life and the living that do not work at the level of singular bodies and individuals, but their milieux or environments. It controls a society “in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, [...] in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals.”

The concrete designation of governmentality as an environmental technology of power can be found in some short remarks from Foucault’s lecture of March 21, 1979. The lecture was dedicated to American neoliberalism and above all to the Chicago School. It details the tendency of neoliberalism to extend the principle of the market form to all social processes in the form of micro-markets. The quoted passage deals with how the problem of drug crime is treated according to the ratio of neoliberal governmentality, not through punishment (sovereignty), and not through exclusion or inclusion of the allegedly non-normalizable (disciplinarity), but through market incentives. Consequently, within the market for drugs, it is not the individual subjects who should be regulated but rather the rules of the game of this environment. Incentives should be created to make drug use so expensive for non-addicts that it

is not worthwhile to use drugs, and so cheap for those who are already addicted that they do not have to become criminals. Foucault is astonished that the entire typology of figures to which he devoted the critical efforts of his earlier books (the criminal, the sick, the insane, etc.), simply no longer played a role in the sources he analyzed in this lecture, to be replaced by a more fundamental anthropology of homo oeconomicus: all human beings are assumed to be “‘responsive’ to some extent to possible gains and losses,” regardless of whether they consume drugs, commit crimes, attend to their educational or retirement needs, or enter into love relationships. In the following lecture, on March 28, 1979, he therefore turns again to the eighteenth century, and traces the genealogy of both this anthropology of homo oeconomicus and the neoliberal paradigms of control back to the ways in which governmental rationality manifested itself in that century. The anthropology of homo oeconomicus is determined by a form of subjectivity he calls the “subject of interest,” as conceived by the empiricists Hume and Locke. As opposed to the theories of contract, summarized by Hobbes and Rousseau, the subject of interest knows no negativity, no asceticism, no self-control, no restraint. It knows no law and no normativity; it is ultimately based on the unprincipled and unjustifiable interest in self-preservation, the avoidance of pain, the choice of that which is more pleasant.

From the eighteenth century on, all kinds of liberal ideas of government have asked how non-governable individual interests, that can be brought into (non-linguistic and asignifying) communication with each other only through exchange and trade, can be transformed into a systematic general framework in which laws emerge, and in which “private vices” are turned into “public benefits.” This predicament emerges most clearly in the metaphor of the invisible hand. What this non-optical mode of government should consist of, however, is the reason for the

numerous questions about liberal modes of government (*laissez-faire*, i.e. the government (of society) by non-government (of individuals); the liberal “market idyll,” or the notions of equilibrium found in the various liberal price theories). A basic principle of governmental rationality is insisted upon in all of these elements. The subject of interest and the milieu, to which its governability is limited, cannot be considered separately. “The priority given to economics, trade, and market forces create a milieu in which the desires and interests of homo economicus regulate and control themselves, balancing and offsetting each other in the process.”

Recently, it has been argued that Foucault’s fleeting remarks on the environmentalization of power can be used to decipher the signature of contemporary power formations. Building on Brian Massumi, Erich Hörl proposes understanding environmentality “in terms that expand on Foucault.” With governmentality, Foucault hints at a formation of the power/knowledge complex that differs from the disciplinary regime. The power technologies of discipline comprised enclosing, parceling out, hierarchizing, and they aimed at producing subjects via normalization and the exclusion of what cannot be normalized. However, the “*general movement of Environmentalization*” is characterized by a “different form of intervention, a kind of nonintervention.” Exactly this characteristic already marks the liberal knowledge of the eighteenth century, promising the control of subjects not through direct intervention, but through intervention in the milieu of the market. What is decisive for the description of our contemporary situation is that a form of control emerges that regulates and manages “molecular and no longer molar, forms of individuation and subjectivation.” The process of

environmentalization, through which a formation of power is actualized, and which has been approaching in the form of governmentality for some time now, must be formulated “in parallel with the spread of distributive media technologies and cyberneticized environments” “whose basic problem consists in capturing and controlling, in managing and modulating behavior, affects, relationships, intensities, and forces.” It is from here that the critical task of critiquing governmentality should begin. A productive starting point would be to elaborate on Foucault’s fleeting observations on environmentalization, linking them to questions of valorization and exploitation by capitalist forms of power that establish relationships and affects as relationality, and exploit them on a molecular level, establishing “modes around which -and this is central here- a new behavioral economy establishes itself.”

Upon first glance, Melanie Gilligan’s *Crisis in the Credit System* is an attempt to illustrate, with filmic means, the financialization of the economy, which resulted from the neoliberal deregulations implemented in the 1970s, and which finally reached a tragic climax in the crises of 2007 and 2008. But it is also important to note that the series, with its indirect references to the invisible hand, also introduces the topics of liberal and neoliberal control. This interest in governmental paradigms is, however, more evident in the later films *Popular Unrest* and *The Common Sense*.

Popular Unrest

In the miniseries *Popular Unrest* (2010), a centralized computer system called the “Spirit” takes the place of the invisible hand. Via this figure, three new aspects are introduced into Gilligan’s allegorical thinking about governmentality. The Spirit functions above all as a kind of

artificial intelligence, whose algorithms improve themselves through machine learning and whose governmental control is increasingly better adapted to all possible environments as a result. In order to do this, it relies on digital data collected from all levels in the world of the film. As a result, the Spirit reaches into the field of biopolitical control. It collects fitness data, health data, elicits the emotional and affective states of the subjects, monitors physical and cognitive work processes, and intervenes in the reproduction of individuals and the population as a whole by controlling, predicting, and preempting these processes. The Spirit also functions as a digital currency. Everything is made equivalent and comparable through omnipresent measuring. The Spirit's algorithms decide which work, which self-improvement, which emotional state, which communicative behavior is the most profitable, and create all possible incentives in order to encourage the individual subjects to act in the desired way. The audience, along with the characters, are constantly confronted with cynically exaggerated and yet familiar slogans and calls to understand themselves as human capital or self-entrepreneurs. Episode 1 introduces the viewer to the world governed by the Spirit by showing a dialogue in a call center. A man who is worried about the rankings and scores attributed to him by the Spirit calls there and receives the following answer: "Many of your market indicators are low, though you're good on your energy and output profile, part-time schemes and home labor scores. The Spirit has to give you a double C rating, but it could be worse." The Spirit's algorithms blatantly give scores to everything and everyone.

Formally, Gilligan allows very different genres to collide in *Popular Unrest*. While one scene appears to come from a fictitious documentary,

the next consists of dramatized narrative sequences. An animated video-game-like sequence, which later turns out to be an advertising clip for the Spirit, asks about possibilities for resistance against the Spirit. Still in this first episode, a lonely heroic figure penetrates a kind of control center. There, an older female figure, sympathetic with the resistance, explains the difficulties this undertaking is confronted with.

“Man: How... how can I stop the World Spirit?”

Woman: You can't stop the Spirit. It's everywhere, everyone, everything. No one controls it. It doesn't control you. It's merely the sum total of all interactions between everyone on earth doing exactly what they please every day. All the Spirit does is count.

Man: But we need to overthrow the system.

Woman: Fine, here. *(Gives him a gun.)*

Man: What's this for?

Woman: Stop the Spirit. Pow!”

Putting a bullet in your own head would be the only means of escaping the Spirit. Resistance is futile.

After the viewer has been situated in the world governed by the Spirit, the following plot unfolds. Two glitches have crept into the Spirit. First, there are unpredictable knife attacks all over the world. As if coming out of nowhere, a knife held by an invisible hand executes individuals in horrible bloodbaths. Second, the Spirit's malfunction also produces unpredictable community formations, called groupings in the series. People gather everywhere. They are brought together by an incomprehensible feeling of closeness that makes them feel a connection

to the other group members without explanation. In the main, *Popular Unrest* follows one of these groups. The group is contacted by neuroscientists who want to research the emotional behavior of the group and its individual members through a series of stress tests. It quickly becomes apparent that the neuroscientists are agents of the Spirit, and that the supposed glitch was deliberately induced by the Spirit to investigate the emotional, social, and affective relationships of the group, in order to create more efficient algorithms.

Gilligan formulated the plot of *Popular Unrest* with Foucault's governmentality lectures in mind. In doing so, she translated the market and its apparatuses of control into algorithmic apparatuses of control. Various points in the plot are very close to Antoinette Rouvroy's observations regarding the functioning of algorithmic governmentality. Algorithms, as Rouvroy implies, operate precisely on the level that Foucault tried to conceive as environmental. It is the explicit goal and promise of those algorithms used in crime prevention, health management, marketing, lending, the selection of job applicants or in the insurance industry to be dependent no longer on juridical forms of judgment, their symbolic and linguistic forms of representation or their subjects (which is equivalent to no longer be dependent on the power formations of sovereignty and discipline). They operate in a "mode of government appearing to disregard the reflexive and discursive capabilities (as well as their 'moral capabilities') of human agents, in favor of computational, preemptive, context- and behavior-sensitive management of risks and opportunities". Algorithms that process and structure large amounts of data, and look for patterns in order to create profiles and scores, perfect the environmental behavioral control that



[Fig. 4]. Melanie Gilligan (2010). *Popular Unrest*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

Foucault sensed, although he was only able to outline it on the basis of environmental psychology and its “behavioral techniques”.

But there is another side to this. As Gerald Raunig posits in his book on *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution*, in the era of algorithmic governmentality (or machinic capitalism, as Raunig calls it) capitalism is no longer concerned with individuals, but rather with dividuals. Following Gilles Deleuze’s *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, the disciplinary regime was concerned with individuals and masses. But in the regime of control, “[i]ndividuals have become ‘dividuals,’ and masses [have become] samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’.” As Raunig notes, the reference to banks sounds oddly misleading, since it makes you think of the bank as a concrete space with counters, clerks, and so on. But one should instead think of databanks or databases, which confront us with “infra- and supra-individual” data-traces, as Rouvroy puts it, or with “dividual data flows”, as Raunig explains: “The reality of

today's dividual data sets, enormous accumulations of data that can be divided, recomposed and valorized in endless ways, is one of worldwide streams, of deterritorialization and of machinic expansion, most succinctly expressed as Big Data."

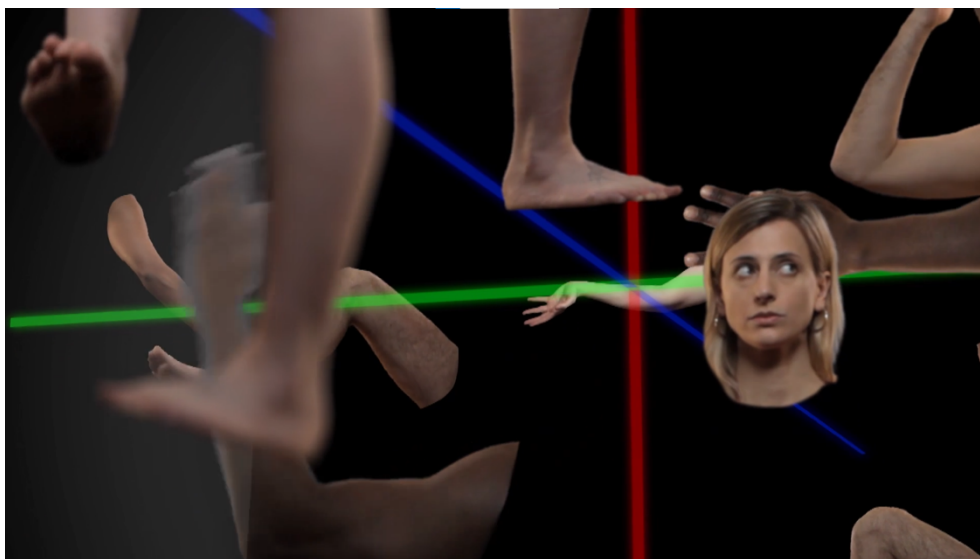
Accordingly, *Popular Unrest* doesn't emphasize the individual as a possible center of its narrative universe. The individual simply doesn't count here. The Spirit is not concerned with individuals (it only traces pre-individual or trans-individual data streams), nor is the series, which is why it is not so easy to follow its narrative structure. We learn nothing about the motivations of the individual figures or their private feelings or thoughts. No story unfolds in which the protagonists assert their subjective goals, unless as parody. In the meantime, it seems as if a kind of revolutionary collective subject is forming within the groupings that will take up the struggle with the Spirit. The reaction of the neuroscientists is scornfully blunt: "Stop the Spirit? What do you want, Communism?" (episode 4).

Popular Unrest is concerned with the dividual, and it oscillates between what Gerald Raunig calls the "dark side" of the dividual (an "increasing obligation and self-obligation of the parts to participate") and an understanding of the dividual that becomes part of a molecular revolution. One of my questions is whether the series helps us to delineate the 'brighter' side of the dividual, the one that helps us devise practices "as emancipatory, as not governed *in that way*, as not valorized *in that way*," in order to "develop cooperations that are not compliant *in that way*." I think that this is what Gilligan had in mind initially when she developed the series. These questions are also discussed among the members of the ominous 'groupings' in the series. Unfortunately only the

“dark side” of the dividual appears in the narrative. In a world governed by the Spirit, the dividual only emerges as entangled and valorized in machinic capitalism.

This allegorical story that Gilligan tells us begins with a multiplicity of new collectivities. We watch the emergence of these groups out of nowhere, their sense of togetherness that cannot be rationally understood, and their inexplicable knowledge of their togetherness. Later we find out that the groupings and the impossibility of understanding their sense of togetherness are the narratively irrecoverable symptoms of an epistemic shift that does not conceptualize individuals, but that traces their patterns of behavior. It does not ask any hermeneutical questions, it does not ask for signifying semiotics. As is learned in Episode 1: “All the spirit does, is count.” It counts data and uses it to develop preemptive strategies that valorize these data in machinic capitalism. Only in the fourth and final episode is a group informed that their mysterious knowledge was the result of a minor pattern correlation: “There was nothing special, just a random comparison in the system. [...] I think it was something like you all said yes to the same magazine subscription.” The group members are then asked to enter the Spirit. They leave the space of cinematic representation, despite this being totally implausible in the narrative, and continue to exist as patterns of data.

Their data profiles have now become completely identical with all other levels of their existence; they no longer need visible (or individual) bodies, and now consist of subsets of dividual data that can be recombined and valorized in multiple ways. “In many situations it appears as though machines were not penetrating into human beings as much as humans are being drawn ‘into the machine.’ I [...] want to



[Fig. 5]. Melanie Gilligan (2010). *Popular Unrest*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

become part of the machine, append to it.” But how can one append to the machine? And how is data actually captured when appending to the machine? *Popular Unrest* avoids the question of the concrete media technologies that make the collection of data possible in the first place. The omnipresent tracking devices, the so-called Internet of Things, ubiquitous computing, etc., are omitted. An apparatus of control is realized through these environmentally implemented technologies that could be described as capture capitalism, which crystallizes the latest manifestation of an environmentally operating governmentality.

The Common Sense

Gilligan addresses this issue in *The Common Sense*, her most recent exploration of the historical and contemporary conditions of the art of environmental control and government. *The Common Sense* depicts a world in which the processes of capture are fully embedded in the

relations between humans and machines. In the world of *The Common Sense*, a decentralized control paradigm is deployed that operates quite explicitly through the modulation of affects. Gilligan investigates the subtle and horrific aspects of these paradigms of control insofar as they are enmeshed in the reproduction of life, in the perfection of management practices, and in the generation of human capital.

The main narrative element in *The Common Sense* is not the financial market, as in *Crisis in the Credit System*, or a centralized mechanism of control, like the Spirit in *Popular Unrest*, but rather a fictional technology that allows the subjects' affective environments to be given over to self-regulating processes of control. In the science-fiction world of the series, which takes place in an indefinite future, this technology relies on a small device called the Patch.

The Patch is put into the mouth like a wafer, making the articulation of affects and emotions by way of linguistic, visual, or other external media unnecessary, as they can be experienced directly by other people connected to the Patch.

For those outfitted with the Patch, it is everyday horror. Imagine an email system in which the sender not only senses when her mail arrives, but also how the recipient feels about it, and thus can even understand what influence the mail has on the recipient's entire existence—and this immediately and irreversibly—with a snap of a finger. The Patch also captures the infra- and supra-individual traces of data that the individual does not have conscious control of. It measures “low blood sugar, stress, work stress” and acts as a kind of mental fitness tracker. The Patch creates a milieu of complete affective networking in which human and non-human agents are connected with each other through feedback



[Fig. 6]. Melanie Gilligan (2014). *The Common Sense*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

effects and resonances, triggering mutual physical, somatic, emotional, and cognitive reactions, and thus ultimately controlling each other.

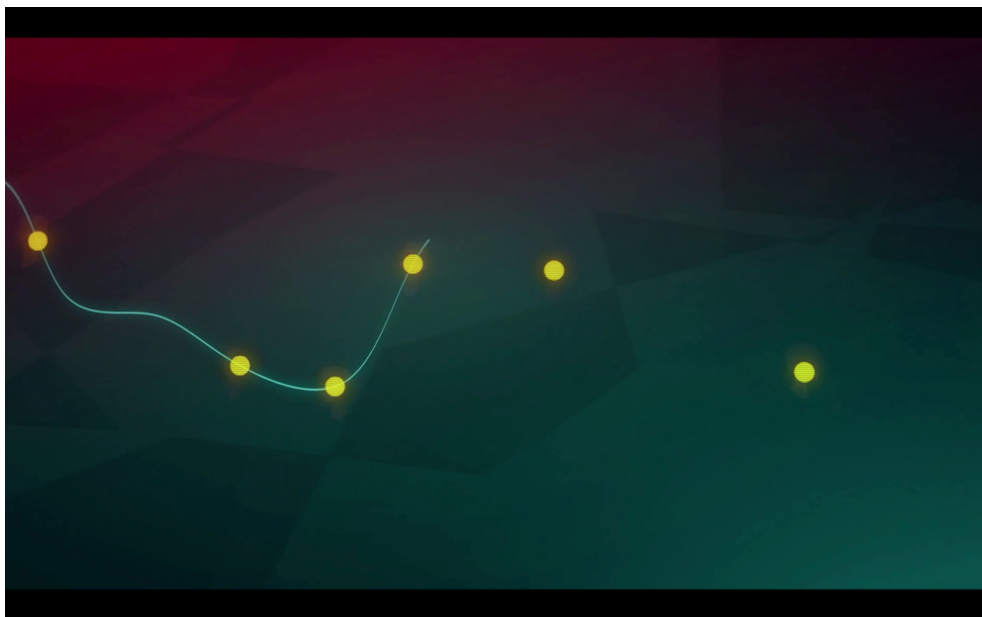
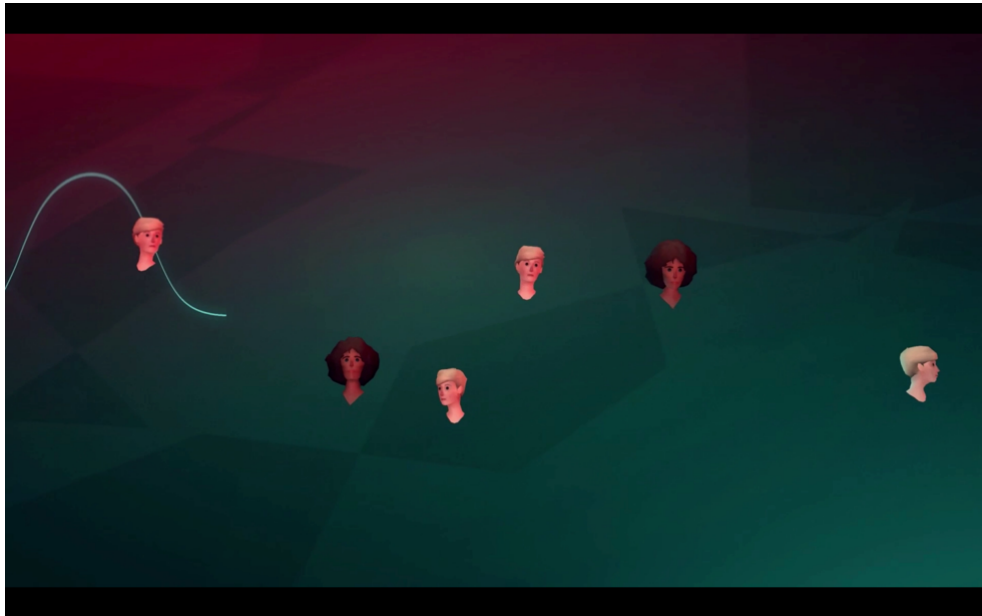
Gilligan plays through this scenario in some obvious fields. The Patch's technology not only transforms education into a comprehensively controlled optimization of human capital, it also generates new possibilities for the exploitation and extraction of sex work, service work, and care work.

Even unborn babies are outfitted with Patches so that any comforting feelings in the womb can be capitalized on: "Login to feel the rejuvenating brain waves of life before birth." The series concisely shows how labor processes can be controlled, monitored, and optimized with the Patch. The advantages of the Patch are advertised as follows: "Studies show that if I receive my superior's frustration via entrainment [Patch



[Fig. 7]. Melanie Gilligan (2014). *The Common Sense*. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

technology] I'm 94% more likely to adjust my behavior to appease him. It gets straight into your employees' limbic system. They'll do anything to make the manager happy." Unlike in a disciplinary regime, Patch technology does not aim at generating productive subjects. Instead, these are controlled by asignifying semiotics. Taking up Guattari's analyses of "integrated world capitalism," Maurizio Lazzarato has recently emphasized that contemporary capitalism operates on a molecular level that affects the "dividual," i.e. "the non-individuated, intensive molecular component parts of potentialities of matter and machines." People are contiguously folded into machinic assemblages; "they constitute a 'humans-machines' apparatus in which humans and machines are but recurrent and interchangeable parts of a production, communications, consumption, etc." While Lazzarato primarily aims at the role that asignifying semiotics (diagrams, graphs, equations, algorithms, charts, sensory measurement results) play in these apparatuses of control, Gilligan exaggerates such an approach.



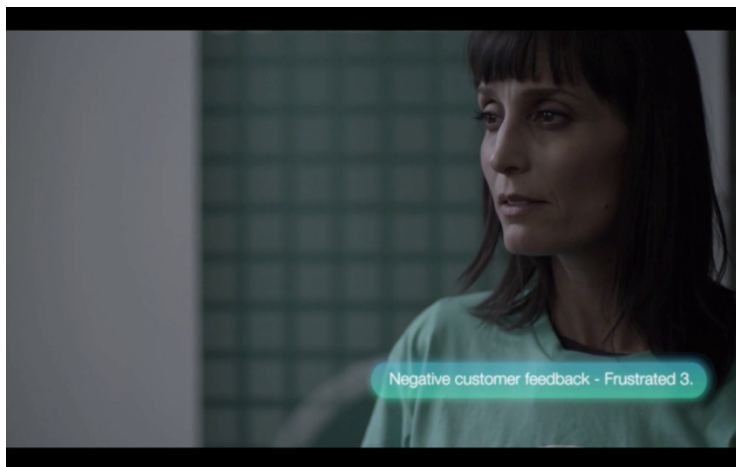
[Fig. 8a and 8b]. Melanie Gilligan(2014). *The Common Sense*. Video stills. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

The Patch insidiously perfects the automation and conformation of all possible working environments by merging the Patch's automated monitoring and its affect control into a single function: "It gets straight into your employees' limbic system."

My three readings of Gilligan's works sketch out a very brief genealogy of environmental processes of control that leads from the invisible hand of the market to environmentally distributed technology. *Crisis in the Credit System* raises the question of how the market, controlled by an invisible hand, functions as the milieu of a subject driven by its desires and its interests. *Popular Unrest* shows how algorithms intervene in the reproduction of life and, in doing so, not only govern subjects, but interpret their infra- and supraindividual data traces as an environment. *The Common Sense* portrays a world in which the processes of capture capitalism are intensified by means of environmentally distributed technologies. The affective environments that transversally intersect the subject can no longer be distinguished from data streams that can be managed and regulated.

The Commons Sense introduces the viewer into a world where the individual is valorized in manifold ways. It is interesting to note that while Melanie Gilligan was working on the films, she had a plot in mind that would be open to a variety of emancipatory ways of appending to the machine: "In my fiction, the sharing of affect is potentially a means of eliminating the need for value and measure, replacing money's externalizing, abstracting function by offering an alternative connective medium." But by introducing an "alternative connective medium," as an environmentally distributed technology, the plot took a rather dystopian turn. As soon as the affects turn into data, the only appearance they take in the series are as diverse feelings of being indebted. As such, these

feelings turn out to be economic debts most of the time. Sometimes the series translates what is being communicated via the patch into written inserts that appear on the video-image, readable by the viewer. In most cases these written inserts inform the characters that although the patch considers them to be dividual data streams, they most often end up being reconstituted as individuals, or more precisely, as indebted individuals.



[Fig. 9a and 9b]. Melanie Gilligan (2014). *The Common Sense*. Video stills. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf.

Someone who gets “Negative customer feedback” is very likely to receive the information “You are fired” only a short time later. A message saying “We’ve updated your history to include job loss” is shortly followed by: “You are no longer a valid loan recipient.”

But perhaps this story isn’t over yet. What we will see “next week on The Common Sense” remains an open question.

Translated by Angela Anderson