

Signifier Fetishism and Biopolitics: Production of Subjectivity in Reading Activity

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ABSTRACT

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer attempts to articulate the process of understanding as a less subjective event, but presupposes a certain subjectivity with his construction of a textual ethics. Such program of de-subjectivation in the notion of reading also has its malaise in its (post-) structuralist variants, especially the idea of self-deriving texts, which I will term as signifier fetishism and describe in its three modalities. Baudrillard's critique of notions of use value and need exemplifies that signifier fetishism ignores the productivity in the realization of use value. By adapting Paolo Virno's arguments on immaterial labor, reading activity can be considered as consumption with its productivity mostly beyond dominant capitalist productive relations. Referring to the notion of biopolitical production from Hardt and Negri, a tentative characterization of reading as production will convert the issue of hermeneutic subject into the one of becoming-subjectivity.

KEYWORDS

Reading; Signifier fetishism; Use value; Immaterial labor, Biopolitical production

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer resorts to Aristotle's statements on ethics to describe the process of understanding by constructing his own version of dialogue theory. In his "textual ethics", the practical ethic principle for the text as a *Thou* oppresses positively and productively heterogeneous and even contradictory elements in the process of interpretation. This oppression derives from the presupposed homogeneity and coherence, the supposed nature of a rational subject, in his core notions of text, tradition, and complete understanding at last. Therefore, the mode of ethical dialogue is to some extent self-betraying in consideration of its claim of de-subjectification: "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition.*" (Gadamer 290) In order to avoid the mystifying effect of the theoretical humanist metalanguage in "textual ethics", a Foucauldian approach to describing discursive events and related non-discursive practice would help to recognize the process of understanding by dismembering the anthropomorphizing effects in philosophical hermeneutics.

However, the analysis of reading as discursive events must not be distorted by a quasi-structuralist myth of self-producing texts and signs. This paper reveals how three seemingly anti-humanist modalities mystify reading activities and how we might clarify reading productivity in reading activities by adopting the mechanism of production and consumption. With texts or writings considered as means of production offering re-readability, reading activities would be formulated according to a certain production of subjectivity in the notion of biopolitical labor.

1 Signifier Fetishism: The Self-derivation of Text

To better understand the mystifying tendency mentioned above, we shall begin by pointing out its core attribute: the worship of the self-derivation of “text” in understanding activities. It neither excludes non-discursive practice nor simply denies “socio-historical factors” beyond discourse. On the contrary, it invokes these factors as subsidies and supplements to construct and consolidate the autonomy of the “text”. The first modality in the tendency is least exorbitant in terms of its impacts on the practice of interpretation, whereas the misrecognitions it contains are more multifaceted. The modality is seemingly closer to the one of traditional philosophical hermeneutics yet consists in a presupposed distinction which is undoubtedly a discursive consequence of modern disciplines of subject. One of the models of this modality is the “text-theory” formula as the conceptual support of interpretations of literary works. While textual interpretations and studies in accordance with this modality often encounter conventional suspicions for the risk of “overinterpretation” (these suspicions presume that the text in itself consists of some unconditional restrictions regardless of any particular purpose of study), there are no necessary tactics and consequential flaws or fallacies inherent to these interpretations, and many widely respected studies can be construed under the “text-theory” formula.

The first modality in this tendency bears, perhaps, few impacts on interpretation practice itself, yet it entails multifaceted distortions on interpretation. This modality, or what I will coin as “text-theory” formula, at first glance, is close to traditional philological hermeneutics for its pre-differentiation of textual genres. It is nonetheless a result of the modern construction of academic disciplines and fields. Though one of the recurrent criticisms of this formula is that it might lead to over-interpretation (the idea of over-interpretation presumes that the text in itself consists of some unconditional restrictions regardless of the purpose of any study on it), there are no necessary or inherent flaws of this formula as an interpretation tactic and many widely respected studies can be construed in terms of it.

The problem of the “text-theory” formula lies in its implied dichotomy of the “material” and the “tool”. With the name of “text” is bestowed on the “object” of study (a single or a set of literary works), it miraculously contains an inexhaustible thingness, that is to say, the text always seems to hold something from its interpreter, whether the text arcane or lucid, or its general ideas univocal or equivocal. No matter how much effort the reader pays for it, the text is unwilling and even unable to reveal its secrets: the infinite treasure hidden in its nebulous kernel. In sharp contrast to texts, theories are beams of light or diverse tools we use to dissect the chaos, visualize the invisible, and discern the indiscernible. Theories, being read, may seem obscure or impenetrable at first but are believed to function in their transparency and plainness in contrast to their targeted texts. Nevertheless, it seems that the work of any theory (even all theories combined) is incompetent to drain the secrets of a single text.

To put one more step forward, we might even say that theory, in the productive chaos of texts, discovers the counterpart of the real. Among the findings are the political, the economic, the ideological, spatial/temporal formations, modernity, *Zeitgeist*, the libido investment, and various aliases of authorship, i.e. “the real” beyond the diverse and inexhaustible text. As the extreme understanding in this modality, it is only “text” that provides potentially productive raw materials to be disassembled and processed. “Theory” is just that which just imposes confinements on the “text”. Theory is the angle of light or a parameter of forces. It is a homogeneous whole without content, though this supposed “whole” is actually only the result of arbitrary but prudent extraction and truncation.

The second modality that worships the self-derivation of texts abandons the absolute distinction between text and theory, and regards both as configuration of signs or codes. There are still

functional differences between them: a "theory" is not only a structure of organized signs but also provides a set of normative coding approaches to rewriting "text". The process of interpreting the text is thus like using an ax handle to hew another. This hardly means that "text" has no somewhat "original" codes or principles for self-organization. Its possible codes, however, are not normative enough in comparison to the coding approaches in "theory" on account of the absolute heterogeneity conceived to be essential for the "text" (Any negation to this heterogeneity of a certain text implies a condemnation that "it is not literature"). There are always, in a "text", evasive lands beyond organizing principles, and remains formidable to any coding approach: no coding approaches from "theory" are competent to draw a boundary for the productivity of a "text" through the act of rewriting. However, rewritings resorting to the intervention of "theory" is significant and even indispensable for the reason that a "text", despite its inner richness and heteroglossia, is ignorant of skills of self-expression and thus maintains factual silence. The function of coding approaches is not conquering or subjugating, and any other discourses that generate relations with a "text" and arouse interpretations do not confine or permeate it, but help it to produce. The peculiar producing is not a demonstration of "theory", but by "theory" and beyond "theory", which even contributes to promoting "theory". The function of coding approaches is not adding content, conquering or subjugating. Coding approaches do not confine a text but to enforce or deflect certain elements of a text so as to better present the text or help the text to produce or self-produce. The fact of producing thus does not serve to prove the validity of a theory, but uses it, even to its limits, and thus develops it.

As for the third and the strongest modality, the domain of sign or discourse will expand to the extent that is unrealized and thus only implicit in the first two modalities. In the third modality, not only the operating of "theory" becomes operations in codes, but also the interpreter is regarded as an effect of the discursive operation, a nexus on which systems of discourse intersect and interact in their concrete embodiment. The third modality may address such queries: Is not human mind supported by forms of language, discourse, and sign? Is not what the interpreter does nothing but playing the role of a third set of signs or discourses, which mediate the first ("theory") and the second ("text")? Is not there no essential difference among them, since what the interpreter does are also results of some total structure prior to him or her as a subject? Invoking a fictional subject with no actual agency (he could neither invent discourses nor he alter the rules of any discourses on his own) in the whole endless process of textual and semiotic self-production and self-derivation: is not it, as structuralist critics would put it, too "anthropological"? Is not the interpreter an unnecessary entity invoked only out of respect for a certain hermeneutic convention or convenience (which is the ideology of so-called natural attitude)?

The three modalities discussed manifest different versions we plan to clear away through theoretical critique. They constitute a somewhat progressive sequence: firstly, the most experiential and confounding one as "material-tool", and then the more homogenized one with a rather thoroughly structuralist attitude in terms of "rewriting", and at last the one aiming for drastically "anti-humanist" theoretical expressions by virtue of sign and discourse. From the first modality to the third, the semantic boundary of the term "text" is gradually expanded and takes what serves as "text" and "subject" into its denotation (as materials, elements of symbolic rewriting, and components of discursive operation).

Though the three modalities exemplify different attributes of texts, what they share is the

obsession with the self-productivity of text, which I term “signifier fetishism”.¹

It is in the first modality that we recognize the firmest component of signifier fetishism. In this modality, the event of reading is simplified as the ephemeral incarnation of an abstract structure. The category of “text” is trapped as the epithet of a specific literary work, but it still has similar functions to the total differential structure of language. The self-sufficient structure, like capital, constantly reproduces and extends itself. While this is the consequence of a series of processes, the acts and relationships that generate the consequence are crystallized as an immutable nature in the closed structure of “text”. In comparison with the first modality, the second and the third expand the content of the self-production, and thus merely re-affirm this nature in different scopes (the third modality provides the most complex mechanism to embody the nature). What persists is the from-signifier-to-signifier process, in which the interaction among signifiers generates new signifiers. So-called “understandings” and “new experiences” in reading are nothing but the proliferation of signifiers.

It is in the first modality, or text-theory formula, that we recognize the most consolidated components of signifier fetishism. In the text-theory formula, the event of reading is reduced to some momentary and fragmentary incarnation of a given text. Text in this context can be regarded as capital that constantly extends and reproduces itself, by which the real acts and relationships that generate the “product” are thus crystallized as certain innate properties of the closed structure of “text”. Similarly, the second and third modalities discussed though expanding the category of text, nevertheless reaffirm these properties in even more complex forms. What persists is the interaction among signifiers that produces new ones. The so-called “new understanding” and “new experience” are but results of ever-proliferating signifiers.

Criticism on abstract objectivism in philosophy of language (Vološinov 45-82) sheds light on the problem of signifier fetishism, for it misrecognizes the effects of concrete reading practice as the incarnation of the properties of conceptual structure that is itself the result of induction and abstraction. This is exactly what commodity fetishism does when it attributes real social relationships to properties of things. The importance of signifier fetishism with regard to the issue of theoretical “anti-humanism” lies in the fact that the self-deriving text functions as just like a mystifying human subject for its immanence of inexhaustible creativity. What might be helpful for the current study is to first reveal how signifier fetishism functions in non-discursive or real-world relationships and then come back to the reading process.

2 Consumption and Production: A Depiction of Reading Activity

Baudrillard’s discussion on the signifier fetishism in economic activities is thought-provoking for our task, for it not only provides the signifier fetishism in reading activities with its counterpart in economic activities but also modulates concepts of production and consumption and thus is conducive to our analysis of features of reading activities as discursive events. While there are seemingly urgent theoretical requirements to recognize discrepancies between these two “signifier fetishisms” by prudent scrutiny of the differences between economic activity and reading activity (the demarcation between the two sorts of activities is not unconditionally appropriate, and thus tactical in our discussion), the consistency to the least extent between the two “signifier fetishism” is of more importance: the faith in the self-productivity of the system of the sign supersedes the perception of real relationships and constructively shapes the formation of logic in real activities.

¹ The term “signifier fetishism” Baudrillard uses to describe the systemic rules of consumption acts is relevant to but not coincides with issues in our discussion. The following section of the paper partly reveals the relevance.

The obsession with objects in economic activities, in which people feel bewitching force and bountiful joy (happiness, health, fashion, safety, etc.) is not so much a recognition of pure use value of objects, but rather an intuitive acceptance of the function and effects of "sign-object" in signification. In this account, the subject's obsession with objects is above all the result of its being interpellated by the sign-object system, i.e. the subject is obsessed with signs of real objects instead of the real objects. It is in the system of meaningfully differential signs that a subject confirms its infatuation with codes rather than physical substance. Therefore, the object does not have meanings or forces in itself but receives them from the system. The system of the sign-object in Baudrillard's notion of signifier fetishism is a sanctification that abstracts consumption away from the actuality of concrete labor. Consumption is not autonomous and reasonable activities guided by the abstract individual out of its own needs but under the guidance of the meanings generated by the system of signs. It seems that consumption establishes its own logic independent from production (and the use value as its consequence): the notion of signifier fetishism permeates the term of (exchange) value and then makes the term of use value somewhat illusionary and reducible. In the field of exchange dominated by signifier fetishism, object, as sign-object, is reduced into exchangeable sign/value (Baudrillard 69-79). By virtue of the meaning-dominating effect of signifier fetishism, Baudrillard's theoretical practice displaces the function of "use value": if "need", the definitive and qualifying factors of "use value", is nothing but an (illusionary) derivative from exchange value and in the last instance from the system of the sign value, use value is nothing but sign value that pretends to be real value endowed by the producing process.

There are three noteworthy aspects of Baudrillard's description of signifier fetishism. First, the theoretical effect of the notion of signifier fetishism contains an oxymoronic structure: it summons a subject that is a "non-lone loner" or a "lone non-loner". The nexus here is the transformation of the mode of relations, which can be explicated by resorting to the comparison between the form of exchange relevant to sign-object and symbolic exchange (such as the exchange of gifts): "The object-become-sign no longer gathers its meaning in the concrete relationship between two people. It assumes its meaning in its differential relation to other signs" (Baudrillard 66). The alteration here indicates that the foundation of meaning-effect has transformed from the multifold concrete relationship between two subjects to the system of signs through which meanings are assigned to the individual. As for the individual, he who experiences this meaning-generating mode has only himself to be concerned. What must be restated is that though the system of significations has its prior existence to individuals and interpellates the individual as subject according to its own rules, still, the system itself is a result of numerous consuming practices. A system that is prior to individuals, and supposedly supersedes individuals conceals the fact that it depends on individuals' or the collective's experience to form itself. We will elaborate soon that the mystification of this signification system provides a functioning mode of signifier fetishism in reading activity.

Moreover, Baudrillard's critique on the concept of "needs" leads to an illusory autonomy of the subject, that "sign-object" system controls the subject's consumption. His critique will help us trigger a disputative moment, by which the issue of "production-consumption" can be superposed on our discussion of reading activities. Extending the critique of political economy to the critique of use value, Baudrillard argues, "Needs are not the actuating (*mouvante*) and original expression of a subject, but the functional reduction of the subject by the system of use value in solidarity with that of exchange value" (Baudrillard 155). The highly structuralist statement excludes the notion of the transcendental subject through negating entirely autonomous subject, and construes the subject as a spontaneous (i.e. ideological) attitude towards the effects of the structure. Referring to this statement, we will heuristically draw in a seemingly opposite notion and further our discussion by inducing first the apparent conflicts between them; This notion, based on the term of immaterial labor, treats consumption somewhat as a creative activity.

In the notion of immaterial labor, the production of communication and subjectivity is an integrative part of the process of general production, by means of which the production-consumption relationships based on traditional industrial production are rewritten. Consumption activities are thus not merely acts of eliminating commodities but are positive in terms of production by virtue of extensive, multiple, and differential communications. In the fields of advertisement, visual/audio media, software, and so on, not only production itself demands great attention to needs in consumption (by communication), but also the process of production-consumption itself contains a kind of communication. According to the argument of immaterial labor, the production of "aesthetic/ideological" products (whereby we see "text" and the issue of reading activity) maintains, even in conditions of commodification, the creative relations between authors and receivers. The receiver of aesthetic/ideological products has dual productive functions: on the one hand, the receiver is a component part of the process of production; on the other hand, by "receiving" the product, the receiver endows products with "a place in life" and "allows it to live and evolve": "Reception is thus, from this point of view, a creative act, and an integrative part of the product" (Virno 145).

To analyze the discrepancy between notions of the non-autonomy and the creativity of consumption, we will draw in the third notion from Baudrillard. The notion tends to dislocate the boundary between production and consumption with a peculiar strategy:

Hence, it is vain to oppose consumption and production, as is so often done, in order to subordinate one to the other, or vice versa, in terms of causality of influence. For in fact we are comparing two heterogeneous sectors [...]

On the other hand, if one conceives consumption as production, the production of signs, which is also in the process of systematization on the basis of a generalization of exchange value (of signs), then the two spheres are homogeneous — though, at the same time, not comparable in terms of causal priority. The structure is that of the mode of production. (Baudrillard 83).

The conclusion then is that *"it is consummativity that is a structural mode of productivity"* (Baudrillard 84). It is by addressing the homomorphism of consumption and production, consummativity and productivity that the two terms cooperate closely to maintain the order of production. It is clear that notions of Baudrillard and Virno respectively dislocate the boundary between production and consumption in different spheres: the former focuses on the productive effects within the system generated by consumption activity operating according to the system of the sign-object, and the latter focuses on the intervention of consumption, by means of feedback and pre-feedback into the production process, and the creativity generated from the activity of reception.

What has been discussed above, at least in a negative way, indicates that if composition is considered as a sort of production (at least mental production), then neither Baudrillard's nor Virno's statement of production and consumption is appropriate for a convincing description of the reading activity.

Baudrillard's notion of consumption does sustain the necessary prudence towards the potentially ideological function of the term "use value". And the political economy of sign reveals the operation of sign-object and its relevant meaning system. These, however, result in the theoretical limit of the term of consumption in its reasoning: it is out of focus concerning the problem of actual "use". In other words, this term of consumption is still the one in the field of domestic economy in statistics, which comes to an end at the money-for-commodity moment of the settlement of the account. In this sense, the consumption of writings merely means purchasing or

borrowing books (in forms of paper, the electronic...), in which books are considered as commodities, but consumption of books does not involve reading activity, the "use" of writings. It indicates that the "mode of production" depicted in terms of "productivity" and "consummativity" is nothing but the dominant mode of production, which means only the over-arching economic system is considered here. According to the critique of the contemporaneous by Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, there are various modes of production co-existing in a certain social formation. (Althusser 107-108; Poulantzas 70-73). Therefore, the analysis of reading activity should focus on the significant gaps that remain in Baudrillard's discussion.

The term of consumption concerning immaterial labor mentioned above is problematic as well for the sake of the analysis of reading activity. In his discussion of aesthetic/ideological production, Virno deploys a new set of terms, "It is more useful, in attempting to grasp the process of the formation of social communication and its subsumption within the 'economic,' to use, rather than the 'material' model of production, the 'aesthetic' model that involves author, reproduction, and reception" (Virno 143). Consequently, in several significant paragraphs, the set of terms of "reception", "audience" and "the public" replaces the set of terms of "consumption" and "consumer", with just terms of "production" and "product" remained.

In fact, the change of terms from political-economic study to communication studies or reader theory is supposed to be expedient, which means it is supposed to work as a theoretical detective device. Once it detects immaterial labor production, the critic should return to terms in political economy. The change of terms should not be overlooked. In the statement that "Reception is thus, from this point of view, a creative act and an integrative part of the product" (Virno 144), it is only by not using the term of consumption, that is to say, by using reception as replacement of consumption, that reception could be viewed as a creative act. In any given framework other than the aesthetic one, there is no statement demonstrating the direct creativity of consumption. It is even harder to expound how "consumption" can be "an integrative part of the product", unless the "consumption" is replaced by "reception". This indicates that "reception" here refers to, in immaterial labor and its production, processes or elements beyond the field of "consumption", which have been concealed or omitted due to the author's cease of using terms of political economy.

Thus a further step must be taken for what has been discovered in effect but not properly observed. In our "reverse transformation" from the terminology of communication back to the one of political economy, the pivotal is to point out the "creative act" that endues products with "a place in life" contains the investment of effort of receivers, the practice of understanding, interpretation, and appliance in different manners. In short, it contains labor: "reception" itself is downright a producing act. "Reception involves both production and consumption. The consumption here is not the one that produces signs, but refers to productive consumption, the consumption of means of production in the process of production. Resorting to the term of productive consumption helps us comprehend the paradox in explaining the production of social communication by one section of production. If "reception" endows a product with "place in life", there should be a product beforehand to bear the enduing (the product always-already has its physical formation as so to be received). And thus it is paradoxical for the act of enduing to be "an integrative part" of the product. According to the explanation that "reception" involves dual attributes of both consumption and production, the production of social communication consists of two successive processes of production, in which the product of the former is the means of production of the latter. The production of social communication and social relationships in this context is the consequence of both processes. Reading activity, as a discursive event, is also a two-fold process of both consumption and production. The consuming-for-needs mode of personal consumption cannot explicate this two-fold process for it excludes the production beyond personal

needs in the process, the production of social communication, social relationships, etc.

The description of reading activities as process of production may seem ridiculous for the possible reason that we have not discerned the condition of this production in the instance of productive relations. The nexus of the problem is not whether the process generates any fruits of labor (surely it does, which will be discussed later), but the habitual tendency to recognize outcomes of labor by the form of commodity in which they are exchangeable for profits, and to recognize, in the last instance, according to the relations of production in the dominant mode of production. It is common experience that, under many circumstances, the outcome of reading-production can be transformed into tangible products: the inner language and discourse produced by producers can be embodied by various forms of writings, recordings, videos, and face-to-face talks; in the reading-production dominated by aims of work, outcomes of reading are explicitly or implicitly "realized" in acts, decisions, and communications afterward. Admittedly, these "realization" demands other processes of labor to realize, which implies that it is difficult for the reading-production itself to be recognized as production in the given dominant mode of production for its lack of "visible outcomes". It must "show results", i.e. the exchangeable form of commodity ready for value accounting, so as to be "production" in the logic of the dominant mode of production. In this way, the so-called "personal and autonomous reading" shall not be considered as production, whether the book is a "serious work" and however the mental and physical effort is invested in reading activity.

What's more, the recognition of "autonomous reading" as mere consumption is limited by the logic of commodity, which overlooks other modes of producing activities. The use value generated by reading-production derives from the producing of subjectivity in the process of labor by the production of communications, social relationships, imagined relationships and the improvement of intellect (the proliferation of discourse, the shaping of structures of feelings and libido impulse, etc.), and by, in Althusser's words, the reproduction of relations of production. The use value has theoretically the potential to influence, directly or indirectly, any possible activity and people, whether the way it functions is measured in terms of exchange value. This means that this product has, firstly, the attributes of what Hardt and Negri would call the common. With these basic attributes it is then under some circumstances transformed into forms of private ownership, such as texts with copyright and labor constructs.

The argument above does not confound the experiential fact of the individual with terms of the object of recognition (such as production and relation of production). Reading activity is always a social activity and involves several spheres of materiality (Beetz 68-69). The analysis of reading activity should be theoretically based on the historical forms of individuality rather than the transcendental subject with agency. The wording of "autonomous reading" can be misleading in itself for it is not a pure "act of an individual", but moments emerge from the gaps of the dominant relations of production, showing the possibility of alternative relations of production. The understanding of reading activity as the a purely personal act (and the distinction between the personal life and social life) is here the ideological device veiling the gaps by selectively omitting relevant sources of the common (can language be owned as property?), functions of social relations and finally the producing activity in reading.

3 The Activity of Reading-Production as Biopolitical Production

The various kinds of possibilities in temporal and spatial differences between the activity of reading-production and its former process of writing-producing activity are at large based on the fact that reading activity does not deplete the writing productivity, i.e. the "re-readability" of the

writing. The “re-readability”, the reiteration, roots in writing’s call for absence, for it indicates something beyond the means of communication between the writer and the receiver. The absence here implies not that the receiver is simply not in the presence of the writer, for this is nothing but a faraway and much delayed presence or re-presence, which is only mistaken to be absence. In terms of absolute absence, writing is re-readable in the absence of any perceivable writer or receiver, distant from the scene of its composition and isolated from writer’s intention or intended meanings. That is to say, at the moment of writing, it can pull away all subjective and objective references without diminishing its re-readability. To put it extremely, chopping a writing into pieces or relocating certain segments of a writing would not damage its re-readability. (Derrida, *Signature Event Context* 1-24). This indicates that writing, as the means of production in the process of reading-production, provides general re-readability in differential manners, of which the various forms of temporal and spatial differences are just an aspect.

There are no abstract reading activities, and the reading-production in general is nothing but an ambiguous expression for a series of differential events with singularity. A scholar’s reading of classics in his or her study, a white-collar worker’s scanning of web novel on the subway, a superior’s examining of a report from her subordinates, a child’s scrutiny of the instruction of his new iPad, a demonstrator’s seeing a banner faraway, an idler’s impatient glance at a random page in a new tome, a man’s recognition of spam before deletion.

In different events of reading-production, the same reading material can function differently for readers. Here Derrida’s description of text is pertinent,

What has happened, if it has happened, is a sort of overrun [*débordement*] that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a “text,” of what I still call a “text,” for strategic reasons, in part—a “text” that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines)—all the limits, everything that was to be set up opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference—to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth) (Derrida, *Living on* 83-82).

The operation of the text in the discursive event is always the one not restricted within discourse itself, but the one in the activity of reading-production achieved by differential conditions. The key is not to re-draw the boundary of the text but to investigate the possible normative system of the mobile boundary. Neither the re-readability nor the mobile boundary derives from the marvelous nature of the text; they are not the self-emergence of the thing-in-itself, but the convenient and abstractive expression of possible relations. The definition of the writing and its reiteration by the term of absence is in fact to define reversely through the conditions and circumstances in presence, i.e. to define by the lack of presence rather than by conceiving the non-presence itself. Just like all the means of production, texts and discourse do not operate autonomously but operate in the process of becoming a series of relations, an assemblage. An appropriate approach to discuss the reading activity here is supposed to not concentrate on the stable substantiality of texts and discourse, but on their effects and traces, i.e. what “becoming-text” is “doing”.

In consideration of the mobile boundary of the text in the reading-production and the relevant indispensable conjunction of both categories of immaterial labor and materiality (the two are dialectically complementary), one of the feasible approaches is to employ the more deterritorializing concept of biopolitical labor (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 103-115).

Biopolitical labor involves various sorts of labor beyond the production of material products and across the boundaries of politics, culture, and so on. According to Hardt and Negri, while there are obvious similarities between immaterial labor and biopolitical labor, biopolitical labor has its emphasis on the more inclusive field of production of subjectivity (through the production of ideas, signs, images, affect, social relationships, etc.) (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 169-178). Biopolitical labor can not only grasp the condition of individual subjects but also describes the becoming of the concrete subjectivity with both singularity and the common.

With the concept of biopolitical labor, the analysis of issues concerning the hermeneutic subject is rewritten as the investigation of becoming-subjectivity in the reading-production. There is no transcendental subject or subjectivity, but the process of subjectifying, which means the organization and assemblage of non-subject elements.

Becoming-text and becoming-subjectivity are not mutually distinct entities, but different names of one and the same "doing". In this sense, one approach of theoretical anti-humanism demands a standpoint not dependent on given modalities of the subject or human body: matters can be considered as elements as the agency as well (Puar 49-66).

We shall attempt to describe the aesthetic aspect, in reading-production as "form", and its effects on the becoming of subject, with the "content of the text" in the horizon of cultural criticism heuristically suspended. Some readings are pleasant, and some are depressing...The "content" of reading cannot convincingly account for all the various consequences of the production of subjectivity in the singular configuration of reading-production. It is even not the dominant factor under many circumstances. Reading always operates in the network of relationships of the real and their relevant imagined ones. To put it in a rather traditional Marxist manner, producing activities are always achieved in their relations of production and relevant ideology. We are always already reading in specific manners and relations, with presupposed projections (at least) of its outcomes. And this projection, as the complex intersection and enfoldment of aspects such as "for-what", "how-to" and "what to do with outcomes", participates in the reading-production.

If the "autonomous reading" is pleasant, then what makes the pleasure possible? Is "autonomous reading" possible in itself? Is the reading-production, in its ultimate form, free from commodification and exclusive private ownership? Maybe it is possible to depict the genealogy of "autonomous reading" and its differential historical forms.

In dominant discourse nowadays, autonomous reading, with its false facade of "recreation", "self-improvement", "self-discovery" and other sorts of spiritual enrichment, can be recognized as non-producing or only producing singular "lived experience", so as to reproduce the hegemony of dominant relations of production. However, we could regard it as the alternative producing activity in the gaps of dominant relations of production with its utopian potentials—it announces with the pleasure of labor beyond the dominant mode of production: this pleasure should belong to all human labor.

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