To Transform the Body Online

Productions of subjectivity between the body and practices of written text in an online message board forum for self harm support

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Abstract

The question of the human biological body and technology has been of major concern within posthumanist theories emphasising the co-constituting relationship between materiality and social discourse for the productions of subjectivity. Online space cannot be thought of as liberating the mind from the materiality of the body, but instead seen as effected by the body and affecting the body in return. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari has been used to argue that the body is implicated in online practices for the productions of subjectivity within posthumanist discourses. In this theoretical master thesis, the aim is to investigate the productions and transformations of the subjectivity of self harm between the biological body of the subject and practices of written text in an online message board forum for self harm support. Methodologically, a functional hermeneutics is constructed from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage in order to engage empirical material generated from observations of the message board. The empirical material is interwoven with a theoretical exposition of Deleuze’s philosophy. By the concepts of force and affect, it is concluded that texts on the forum are constituted as bodies. However, the practices leading up to such constitution of bodies would not be considered corporeal. This is further theorised in the concept of the assemblage with particular emphasis on a proposed distinction in Deleuze’s philosophy between bodies and language. These bodies of texts function to create new forms of expressions and enunciations on the forum, and may theoretically be said to transform the biological body of the subject. The concept of expression functions to form the ethical backdrop to transformations of the body in the online space of enunciation. By the relations between bodies in the assemblage of self harm support, expression envelops these bodies in a supportive world. It is through the relations with other bodies in the assemblage that words form the expressive world that envelops all bodies in that world, thereby transforming them. This is further deepened by considering Deleuze’s ontology of the actual and the virtual, where it is proposed that online space is actual in that enunciations are materialised in bodies of texts which in turn create virtual ideas and new possibilities for expression and enunciation. It is argued both with and against posthumanist readings of Deleuze in regards to information technology that bodies and materiality are constituting factors of subjectivity along with language, insofar as the body is theorised as transformed incorporeally.

Keywords
Assemblage, body, Deleuze, hermeneutics, online, self harm, subjectivity
## Contents

**Introduction** ........................................................................................................................................... 4  
Research focus ......................................................................................................................................... 9  
Posthumanism and Deleuze – Bodies in new spaces ................................................................. 10  
The body and its incorporeality ........................................................................................................ 16  
**Philosophy as methodology: Studying transformations** ................................................................. 20  
Ethical considerations ......................................................................................................................... 22  
A functional-assemblagic hermeneutics .............................................................................................. 23  
**To Transform** .................................................................................................................................... 25  
To transform I – Forces and affects of a body-subject ..................................................................... 26  
To transform II – The Agencement ..................................................................................................... 34  
The reciprocal separation of the world ............................................................................................. 37  
Incorporeal transformations ............................................................................................................... 46  
To transform III – Expressing other-worlds and the ethics of actual-virtual syntheses ................. 51  
Deleuze’s conception of the Other – Enveloping worlds of expression ......................................... 54  
The functions of collective agencements of self harm support ....................................................... 56  
**Discussion: a new virtual reality?** ................................................................................................... 57  
The methodological agencement and virtual futures ........................................................................ 66  
**References** ......................................................................................................................................... 69
Introduction

And you really will have to make it through that violent, metaphysical, symbolic storm. No matter how metaphysical or symbolic it might be, make no mistake about it: it will cut through flesh like a thousand razor blades. People will bleed there, and you will bleed too. Hot, red blood. You’ll catch that blood in your hands, your own blood and the blood of others.

- Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive. Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity...

- Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Ever since the advent of the internet the question of the body has been extensively discussed and theorised. According to internet discourses in the late 1980s and early 1990s, computers and the internet were said to finally relieve us from our limited biological bodies and allow our minds to enter into the vast cyberspace of virtual reality with seemingly endless possibilities. These discourses can aptly be called “cyberutopian” (Brians, 2011; Brophy, 2010). The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari has been widely used in such discourses to argue for such a liberation of mind over body; or rather, to create new virtual bodies in cyberspace. However, their philosophy has also been employed to direct critique against cyberutopian discourses of a disembodied self that can seemingly escape the flesh (Brians, 2011:117-8). Within the field that I will refer to as posthumanism, it is instead argued for an interwoven complex of both the material world and discursive practices that rejects any mind-body dualism (Brians, 2011:127-8; Braidotti, 2006b). When theorising about the body and technology within this posthumanist field, Deleuze’s philosophy has been used to argue for such a co-constituting relationship, according to Ella Brians (2011:133) and Rosi Braidotti (2006a; 2006b:37). This would entail that what takes place on the internet is both **effected** by the corporeal body in front of the computer in a material surrounding, and that the body is capable of being **affected** by online practices in return.

In research on how young people interact online to discuss sensitive topics, interviews with individuals who practice self harm disclose the fact that it is the invisibility of the body in online interaction that allows them to talk more openly and freely (Johanson, 2010:148-55). The topic of self harm seem to highlight and evoke the body in online interaction, yet at the same time it is precisely because the body is experienced as invisible to other individuals that allows for a certain reworking of the body of self harm (ibid). This can be understood as a paradoxical dilemma: although the body is experienced as absent, the material, biological body would nonetheless be affected and implied in a specific online space. A posthumanist framework might be able to shed new light on such a
paradoxical relationship, hence why this is chosen as point of departure for an investigation into the body and practices on the internet via the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze.

Different theoretical frameworks than posthumanism have been used to argue that the material world is affected by practices in online interaction, and vice versa. Within sociology, Michael Hardey (2002) has posited that online identities (avatars, nicknames, etc.) have consequences for offline identities (gender, ethnicity, etc.), as well as offline identities effecting types of online identities. In line with the posthumanist critique of cyberutopian discourses, Hardey questioned the idea of a disembodied subject who could simply escape gender and other identity markers when entering cyberspace: “embodied lives, identities and material circumstances of users are themselves significant in affecting patterns of access to and use of the internet” (Hardey, 2002:581). However, Hardey’s sociological perspective (from Anthony Giddens and Erving Goffman) would go in a quite opposite direction than what I aim to propose in this thesis. According to a posthumanist perspective, following Brians (2011) and Braidotti (2006b), it would be problematic to consider a distinction between offline and online identities, since that would, again, re-inscribe a dualism that posthumanist theorist have sought to critique.

The question concerning the body and information technologies can ultimately be traced back to the question of body and mind. By engaging the question of body and mind, one is also engaging in the question of subjectivity. Subjectivity I refer to how we come to constitute ourselves as subjects in the world, and what the conditions are for our sense of self in that world. The question of subjectivity and the relation between mind and body find its contemporary roots in French philosopher René Descartes in the 17th century, when he famously postulated the phrase cogito ergo sum. With the poststructuralist turn in continental Europe in the latter half of the 20th century, massive critique was raised against the Cartesian notion that the human subject was to be found in the mind alone by the power of autonomous thought, the body being only an empty vessel. The inspiration for this critique was the rising influence of philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Baruch Spinoza in the poststructuralist turn. Gilles Deleuze, greatly influenced by Nietzsche and Spinoza, set out to reverse the Cartesian notion of subjectivity to turn his attention toward that which produces thought and effectively gives rise to a consciousness that we might call an I or a self. Deleuze’s critique of the phrase “I think, therefore I am” was that it presupposes an “I” that thinks the body and is thus superior to the body (Deleuze, 1994:85). In Spinoza, Deleuze found a parallelism of mind and body: what happens to the mind also happens to the body, and vice versa (Deleuze, 1990:19). In studying subjectivity following Deleuze, one would therefore direct one’s attention to the productions of subjectivity outside of the individual subjects of thought or sociological identities (see Hardey, 2002). That is, it seeks to study the unconscious conditions for subjectivity that may give rise to a conscious subject; the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” are therefore not to be equated with one another. Following Deleuze’s philosophy against a Cartesian subject, contemporary feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2006b:42) has proposed a posthumanist approach in which she argues that both discourse and materiality are entangled with each in the production of subjectivity. The posthumanist stance, she argues, would however go against a strict poststructuralist or postmodernist stance which has rather emphasised discourse and language as constituent factors of subjectivity. Instead she turns specifically to a posthumanist reading of Deleuze in order to consider both materiality and discourse as co-constitutive.

1 That is not to say that other disciplines and philosophical traditions also raised critique against Descartes. I merely intend to show that the philosophical framework I employ here has been one of the major traditions of Cartesian critiques.
of subjectivity. Braidotti’s posthumanist approach, inspired by feminist techno-science studies in the vein of Donna Haraway (1991), also takes into account the ever rising development of technologies in society, to consider technologies as constitutive material forces of subjectivity. If we cannot exclude the material world in the productions of subjectivity, in this philosophical tradition, that would also entail the human biological body of the individual subject; the question of the body and technology thus become central for our understanding of subjectivity in contemporary society.

Within studies of technology and subjectivity, Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) concept of the assemblage has been evoked to think of the co-constituting nature of both material and discursive conditions for subjectivity. Indeed, Braidotti (2006b:37) has called it an entanglement of social codings \(^2\) and materiality. David Savat (2010:425) has also linked the concept of the assemblage to understand subjectivity in relation to new technology; that is, the assemblage is what accounts for both social and material aspects in the production of subjectivity that is now implicated in complex formations of technology. This conception of the co-constituting factor of both social and material aspects can also help us view the body of the subject in a different light. I will return to this connection between the assemblage and the body of the subject throughout this thesis, but the following quote from Brians functions as a point of departure for this investigation:

> [Deleuze and Guattari] suggest that ‘the body’ is always more than its biological parts or fleshy boundaries. By opening the body beyond the limits of the flesh, to include social and cultural codings, Deleuze and Guattari displace the body from what we traditionally think of as the ‘material’ realm, that of biology, while precisely insisting on its materiality (Brians, 2011:134).

The question I propose in conjunction with this quote is how to study these social and cultural codings. It seems to me that what needs to be taken into account if we are going to open the body up to more than its biological materiality, then we rigorously need to study the distinction Deleuze and Guattari (2004:95) make between assemblages of bodies and collective assemblages of enunciation outlined in the work *A Thousand Plateaus*. As I will attempt to show throughout this thesis, Deleuze also makes this distinction throughout his career. I have taken the concept of the assemblage as a first example of such distinction, and will argue that this distinction follows from his previous work in the book *The Logic of Sense*, where a rigorous distinction is made between corporeal causes and incorporeal effects (Deleuze, 2004:7-9). I would also argue that this follows from Deleuze’s ontology in his doctoral thesis *Difference and Repetition* between actual things or state of affairs, and virtual ideas or possibilities (Deleuze, 1994:208-9, 260; Williams, 2003:7-8). By considering posthumanism in the vein of Braidotti (2006b), I believe it is fruitful to combine this posthumanist account of the co-constitution of materiality and discourse with a methodological approach that studies the relation between these distinctions in any given assemblage.

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\(^2\) Both Brians and Braidotti use the word “code” when referring to social practices. This is influenced by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983; 2004) use of the word, and implies a whole theoretical exposition that will not occupy this thesis. Instead, when I read Brians and Braidotti I substitute the word “code” or “coding” for “social” and/or “discourse” as it pertains more to the problem I present here.


The field, or assemblage, in this thesis will be concerned with an online message board forum for self harm support. I chose this field because it consists largely of what I would propose are collective assemblages of enunciations, and thus my emphasis on the distinction from that of bodies and materiality. The topic of self harm highlights the material body significantly within these texts, and it is by taking into account a posthumanist reading of Deleuze by Braidotti (2006b) and other feminist studies of body and technology that we may also come to understand the role of the body in these practices of collective assemblages of enunciation.

When discussing subjectivity in posthumanist literature, as well as by Deleuze and Guattari themselves, two words are continuously ever present: production and transformation. Again, I will build an account of these two terms by considering the distinction between the assemblages of bodies and assemblages of enunciation, where production is given to the former and transformation given to latter (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). There is a complex interplay between these two that function in conjunction with each other. The general understanding of it can be summed up by saying that bodies produce enunciations that transform these bodies in turn, allowing them to produce something new. Productions of subjectivity were also of central concern for Guattari (1995) himself who linked it specifically to new media and information technologies. This I believe further acknowledges the importance of employing Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy to subjectivity, body, and technology, with an emphasis on the practices of written text that so depend on forms of semiotic productions (Guattari, 1995:36-7) that transform our subjectivities in new ways.

Transformation is thus a central concept for this thesis: it is a question of how to get from one state to the other by the process of transformation; the two states as such are therefore not of primary importance, but rather the process in between which effectuates each state. It is also here that I place my pedagogical problem. The problem is transformation, and pedagogy, as I view it and employ it here, is the very process of transformation, or transformation as process. Subjectivity, when viewed as a process of transformation, is, for me, a pedagogical problem. It is a question of “learning” in the sense of being transformed by pedagogical relations in a field of existence, and also of producing these transformations by the use of practices extending beyond anthropocentric structures to consider the wider complexes of which “we” are only a part. Learning, as the transformation of subjectivity, is not within this theoretical framework merely considered a cognitive issue, or a process that only takes place in consciousness. Learning and pedagogy can also be considered as a question and problem of worlds. It is a question of what is possible in this world, not what is possible solely within the mind of the individual subject. What is more, the individual mind, or rather, psyche, is this world where transformations are made possible. This leads to ethical consequences for a pedagogy of worlds and transformation, and begs the questions of (1) of what world is the transformation part of, and (2) is this even a world, or a structure closing the world off? In the third section of this thesis I will engage these ethical considerations further. Suffice it to say that the pedagogical relations theorised as productions and transformations of subjectivity are of central concern which raises ethical question beyond an anthropocentric world to a world of relations, beyond intention. Pedagogy as truly posthuman, that is what this thesis sets out to investigate.

I therefore aim for this thesis to primarily be a theoretical investigation. That is, the research focus and questions are primarily of a theoretical concern in order to develop new ways to theorise on the relationship between the body, subjectivity and practices of written text on the internet. This
theoretical investigation is done in a process of close engagement with empirical material of the message board forum for self harm support, as the connection between theory and empirical material will make the theorisation more productive and clear. The empirical material produces new understandings and new theories that can also inform the theoretical and philosophical framework in return. As a consequence, the thesis does not follow the traditional structure within the social sciences. Instead, I attempt to synthesise the philosophical framework by continuingly intertwine the theoretical exposition of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, with the empirical material generated on the specific message board forum. This constitutes my analysis and occupies the three sections titled “To Transform”. In order to do this, I will attempt to sketch out a hermeneutic methodology in the section “Studying Transformations” that I believe can be extracted from the concept of the assemblage as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in the work A Thousand Plateaus. Hermeneutics, as I understand it and employ it here, is not be thought of in the line of Gadamer and Ricoeur, but rather something entirely different derived from Deleuze’s study of Nietzsche (Deleuze, 1983). This hermeneutic approach is inspired by Ian Buchanan (2000) and Fredric Jameson (1983), who has suggested that Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, primarily in Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus, offer new ways to interpret text, which is of significant concern for this thesis that largely relies on empirical material consisting of texts.

This investigation is built on the conundrum of parallel realities and distinctions, of the physical and metaphysical, but applied to an empirical field and analysis of everyday life in contemporary western society. The quote from Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami that started off this thesis establishes a metaphysical field, metaphysical as in elaborations on the physical, movements and events which happen to the physical, yet still in a different dimension than the physical itself. It establishes the possibility for entering into this metaphysical space to experience the cuts of a thousand razor blades, no matter how metaphysical they might be, they are still real and will make you bleed regardless of their meta-physicality. Murakami himself also opens the novel Kafka on the Shore with a brief, almost schizophrenic inner monologue/dialogue (think Tolkien’s Gollum rather than Beckett’s Molloy/Moran) in which the quote presented above is highlighted in bold font. “The Boy named Crow”, as this prologue is called, is the boy living inside and around the protagonist Kafka Tamura telling him these words as a primer to the events that will later unfold. The boy named Crow can be said to inhabit the incorporeal, metaphysical field adjacent to the corporeal physical field that is Kafka in his body. And this metaphysical field is violent, or at least capable of affecting the body of Kafka despite its being metaphysical; that is, the incorporeal can transform the corporeal.

I then presented a largely enigmatic quote from Deleuze and Guattari that speaks of self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive.6 The subject matter of that quote, however, speaks more of a way to live an ethical life than of self harming or destructive practices per say, of which I am concerned with here. By connecting these two quotes together however, their relation produces something entirely new and more relevant for this thesis; or, in fact, it is the problems of this thesis that enter into the relation between the two quotes above: the metaphysical field of which we may posit practices on the internet, the blood in this field that relates to the message board forum for self harm, and a way for the body to open itself up and transform these self-destructive practices into

6 This concept is “the body without organs” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Even though it pertains perfectly to the problem of the body and self harm, it does so on other terms than in a methodological study between language and body in a social field. I have chosen to not include this concept in my analysis as I believe the concept of the assemblage is more suited for discussions of this sort.
something new and positive; a way out through the blood in the metaphysical field. Perhaps Haruki Murakami’s literature has gained such popularity because it engages with the notion of paradoxical parallel realities that might speak of some fundamental changes in our social world today, brought on by the infusion of information technologies into our everyday lives. Murakami’s literature is not a fetishism of some disembodied virtual reality evident in cyberutopian discourses. What has happened since the advent of the internet is something entirely different: we haven’t left our bodies behind and instead have come to terms with the fact that such fantasies will remain perverted fantasies. Yet *something* has undoubtedly happened to our bodies. Perhaps Murakami’s works speaks for this realistic uncertainty of where to place our bodies in these times of information technologies, and I also believe that the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari can make us view this uncertainty in different ways from what we are used to.

**Research focus**

The problem outlined above of how to think the body in relation to subjectivity and information technologies has been greatly theorised within posthumanism primarily by Braidotti (2006a; 2006b), Brians (2011), Brophy (2010), Haraway (1991) and Hayles (1999; 2006). The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze has been an influence for emphasising an entanglement of the body and social discourse against a transcendence of mind over body (Braidotti, 2006b:37; Brians, 2011:130). This has been done by employing Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) concept of the assemblage (Savat, 2010). However, posthumanist theorists have largely overlooked the rigorous distinction Deleuze and Guattari (2004:95) make between the machinic assemblage of bodies and the collective assemblage of enunciation. I will attempt to argue that both these kinds of assemblages are needed to take into account the productions and transformations of subjectivity concerning the body and technology, with specific emphasis on the latter.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to investigate the productions and transformations of subjectivity between corporeal bodies and incorporeal enunciations of written text in an online message board forum about self harm. In other words, the aim is to understand how productions of subjectivity may theoretically transform the human biological body by practices of written text in an online message board forum by using the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Concerning the broader problem outlined above between posthumanism and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, four research questions can be worked out:

1. How can the subjectivity of self harm be transformed in practices of written text in an online message board forum?
2. How is subjectivity produced in an online message board forum, and how can it be identified?
3. How can we understand the relationship between the assemblages of bodies and assemblages of enunciation in an online environment?
4. How can we understand the concept of the body in relation to practices of written text in an online environment?

The questions are in hierarchical order where the latter question is seeking grounds for the former. The first question encapsulates the broad focus of the thesis; the second question specifies the broad theoretical framework and directs it to an empirical enquiry that can answer the first; the third question deepens this framework by further specifying theoretical concepts that can answer the second question; and since the theoretical framework employed and problem sketched out concerns the body,
this is taken as the fourth and final question to give grounds for the proceeding questions and broader focus. The analysis and philosophical exposition is then ordered accordingly the other way around. I will begin by discussing the body in the fourth question, then relate this to the concept of the assemblage and also to the terms production and transformation, in order to pave way for the first overarching question which also concerns the broader focus of the thesis. The concluding discussion will also follow this structure, starting with the fourth question and working its way up to address the focus and problems addressed here.

Concerning disposition, I will first lay out a background and previous studies to show how posthumanism has dealt with subjectivity, body and technology by using the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. Here I will go into more detail concerning the compatibilities and incompatibilities between the two fields in order to argue for the turn I instead suggest within the philosophy of Deleuze to engage the questions posed in this thesis. I will then present the specific methodology I propose that takes into account the distinction between bodies and enunciation within Deleuze’s philosophy. This is a theory-method approach in which I aim to extract a method out of the philosophy employed with the empirical material. Thirdly, I will present my theoretical-empirical synthesis where a greater account is given of Deleuze’s philosophy in conjunction with my empirical material. I start with Deleuze’s relation to the concept of the body to understand the grounds for thinking the body in relation to subjectivity and technology. After lying out that ground, I proceed to give an account of the concept of the assemblage as worked out by Deleuze and Guattari in the work *A Thousand Plateaus*, specifically concerning the distinction they make between bodies and enunciation. This lead to the concluding theoretical-empirical exposition where I wish to apply an ethical perspective derived from Deleuze’s use of the concept of expression, the virtual and a re-working of the notion of the Other as constructed by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. Finally, I sum up my investigation to answer the research focus and questions in a concluding discussion where I will propose a different theory of the virtual with regard to information technologies from the philosophy of Deleuze, related to my empirical analysis.

**Posthumanism and Deleuze – Bodies in new spaces**

In order to answer the questions raised above, we need to consider how posthumanism has theorised on the matter of the body and technology in greater detail, in what constitutes the prior researches this thesis takes as point of departure. That is, what does the relationship between the human biological body and new technologies entail for the productions of subjectivity from a posthumanist perspective? As mentioned above, a cyberutopian discourse that proposes the liberation of the mind over the body re-inscribes the idea of a transcendent subject that would go against the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (Brians, 2011). Instead, when addressing the issue of productions of subjectivity, feminist posthumanism find in Deleuze and Guattari a materialism of body, technology and social codes (e.g. discourse) that would take into account the actual materiality of the body without proposing a transcendence of the mind. The question is how posthumanism has conceived of such theorisation. I believe it is within this tradition we can more acutely see how the employment of a Deleuzian philosophy would distant itself from other studies done in the field of body, technology and subjectivity (that is, against narratives and identity constructions evident in sociological and ethnological researches). This section will mainly be occupied by a discussion on posthumanism in regards to the theorisations of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles. Some of these
previous researches specifically use the philosophy of Deleuze as a critique of a subjectivity built on a mind-body dualism; this critique however takes various forms, and I will attempt to sketch out how these critiques work and with what aspects of Deleuze’s philosophy that has been used to argue for such critiques.

Rosi Braidotti (1996;2006a;2006b), as well as feminist theory in the vein of Donna Haraway (1991), have proposed a form of posthumanism which puts the body in a complex relation with a material and discursive world for understanding subjectivity. For Braidotti and Haraway, this kind of materialism would not only question the fact that knowledge has been built on a conception of humanity as a transcendent mind over the body, but also to step out of what we think we know about what it means to be human in terms of the materiality of the body. Effectively, Haraway fused the human body with technology to form her concept of the cyborg. According to Braidotti (2006a:197) Haraway emphasises that any theory of subjectivity must take into account the biology and materiality of the body; a break with the distinction of humanity and technology, and instead thinking the two as co-constitutive for subjectivity.7 Braidotti (ibid) states the following of the connection between Haraway, the posthuman condition and technology: “in the historical era of advanced postmodernity, the very notion of ‘the human’ is not only de-stabilized by technologically mediated social relations in a globally connected world, but it is also thrown open to contradictory redefinitions of what exactly counts as human.” Although I will not specifically follow Braidotti (2006b) in a theorisation of a posthuman nomadic ethics,8 she does point out the role of the body in connection to contemporary technologies as ultimately compromised of a complex and paradoxical network:

The representation and interpretation of techno-bodies therefore expresses fully the paradox of the contemporary subject, namely of a body that is invaded by technology, is bombarded by visual bits and bytes of information but also feels horror, pain and despair at these fundamental invasions of what used to be called his or her bodily integrity. Methodologically, the return of the “real body” in its thick materiality spells the end of the linguistic turn in the sense of the postmodernist over-emphasis on textuality, representation, interpretation and the power of the signifier. (Braidotti, 2006b:50).

I would like to take Braidotti reasoning here as point of departure for theorising on the importance of the body and technological mediated social relations, as I focus on the specific practices within these social relations that to a very large extent is mediated by ways of written text. In her definition of the posthuman, which I am following here, we cannot think of subjectivity as solely a linguistic or discursive practice or place too much importance on a subject-centred interpretation of text; the body and the material world also play a fundamental part in this co-constitution of contemporary subjectivity. Braidotti (ibid:30) also argues that information technologies and biotechnologies are “equally co-present in driving home the spectacular effects of contemporary technological transformations”. My emphasis is not on what Braidotti calls bio-technologies9 but rather on what she

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7 I will not be discussing or using the concept of the cyborg in detail, but it is central as an historical background on body and technology.
8 Indeed, Ian Buchanan (2011:9-10) has recently criticised Braidotti among others for taking Deleuze and Guattari’s explanation of how desire works for how life and society ought to be; they confuse, Buchanan says, this “ought” from what Deleuze and Guattari theorised as that which simply is.
9 This term is strongly linked in Braidotti’s reasoning to Haraway’s cyborg; bio-technologies therefore refer to technology that somehow is materially inserted or is operating materially on and in our biological bodies; pace makers, prosthetics, etc.
calls information technologies. I follow Braidotti (ibid) in that “All technologies have a strong ‘bio-
power’ effect, in that they affect bodies and immerse them in social relations of power, inclusion and
exclusion”. For the purposes of this thesis, it is not of interest to discuss bio-technologies and cyborg-
ism (in the sense of the term Braidotti uses here, as well as Haraway’s definition of it) for a discussion
on social media and information technologies concerned with written text. It seems as though the
quote above encapsulates perfectly my entire problematic enquire where a question will be raised
concerning the concept of the cyborg in another context than a bio-technological one.

The concept of the cyborg has however come under scrutiny even within posthumanist theory that
instead employs the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari in theorising about the body and technology
in relation to subjectivity. Diane Currier (2003) took Haraway’s concept of the cybernet to critique by
invoking precisely Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage. The critique is aimed at
Haraway’s dualism of body-technology, which Currier argues is essentially a humanistic view of the
world that doesn’t break up the composition or the organisation of the terms “body” and “technology”,
which she argues a Deleuzian approach would and is necessary to move away from Cartesian
dualisms. Instead, she finds in the concept of the assemblage this breaking up of substances in favour
of a multiplicity that already functions within the terms themselves. However, when considering the
importance of relations in their own right.10 and specifically points out that the terms of the
relation do not change themselves (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006:41), the terms “body” and “technology”
would remain intact as they are the terms constituting the necessary relationship to begin with. It is
therefore difficult to follow Currier’s (2003:31) assessment that “Technology does not meet body” in a
Deleuzian philosophy. By that same token, it is also difficult to understand Deleuze’s philosophy as
two seemingly opposed propositions can be found in his work: one pertains to a breaking up of
dualisms in favour of more complex composition of “multiplicities”, while the other proposition
would have the two terms of the relation intact in favour of the exteriority of the relation itself. I
believe however we can arrive at a compromise, and it is this: we should take both aspects into
account when faced with an example such as “body” and “technology”, such that the terms themselves
remain but also so that the relation between the two is given priority, thus constituting the multiplicity
of and the assemblage that we want to arrive at as essentially made up of “lines” and not points. I will

10 When considering the concept of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari (2004:23) specifically state that it is made
up of lines instead of points. This, in my view, has to be considered in light of the importance of the relations
themselves as between two terms. Deleuze and Parnet (2006:41) take the example of a glass and a table and say
that neither term is changed when altering the relation, either by placing the glass on the table or moving it off
the table. In what might be directed at what they see as misunderstandings of their philosophy on part of their
own followers, Deleuze and Parnet (ibid) insist that “One may object that the glass is perhaps altered when it is
moved off the table, but that is not true. The ideas of the glass and the table, which are the true terms of the
relations, are not altered. Relations are in the middle, and exist as such.” It would however be of importance to
note that this “dialogue” between Deleuze and Parnet was published in 1977, three years before Deleuze and
Guattari’s Mille Plateaux in which the concept of the assemblage is worked out properly; it is therefore quite
plausible that Deleuze changed his view of the “assemblage”, “relation” and “terms” between these two books.
There are on the other hand evidence to support that he did not, when considering, for example, the importance
Deleuze and Guattari (2004:28) places on relations themselves as independent and their “perpendicular
direction”. Also, to go back to the dialogues with Claire Parnet, we see the concept of the assemblage contrasted
against psychoanalysis (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006:51-2) and with striking similarities to Deleuze and Guattari’s
theorisations of it three years later. It would also be of interest to consider the theorisation in the Dialogues with
Claire Parnet to be an echo of Deleuze’s first book ever published in 1953, Empiricism and Subjectivity: an
essay on Hume’s theory of Human Nature. In the translator’s introduction to the English edition, Constantin V.
Boundas opens with a quote precisely from the dialogues between Deleuze and Parnet, a quote which
emphasises the “middle” (Deleuze, 1991:1) and the “externality of relations” (ibid:7); Deleuze himself also
repeatedly emphasises that “Relations are external to their terms” (ibid:98-101).
go into detail about this further on. It is sufficient for the moment to show that Deleuze and Guattari have been of interest for studies on technology and subjectivity concerning the body, and that the concept of the assemblage has been evoked to view subjectivity in a new light as our human biological bodies are entered into new relationships with technology. However, studies employing what Deleuze and Guattari termed collective assemblages of enunciation have been largely overlooked in a posthumanist discourse.

Although Braidotti (2006b:37) seems to be perfectly in line with my enquiry, studying the relationship between body and technology with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti does put emphasis on materiality while at the same time postulating Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is a “recognition of the entanglement of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces in the making of the subject.” This sort of account of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is in my view a rather simplified notion of the complex relation between corporeal bodies and materiality, and incorporeal transformations Deleuze and Guattari (2004) call collective assemblages of enunciation. As I will attempt to show throughout this thesis, Deleuze and Guattari make a clear distinction between materiality and language, or what they refer to as enunciation. What I want to emphasise is that Deleuze, alone and together with Guattari, is always ready to make distinctions between different forms that can be said to constitute subjectivity. It is such a distinction, that between the collective assemblages enunciation and assemblage of bodies, that I want to investigate further in this thesis. However, posthumanism, which has discussed the body and technology and the implications of their relations for the productions of subjectivity, serves as a background to such a discussion, given its important philosophical and ethical strides in the field. The main issue for me is to emphasise instead collective assemblages of enunciation in an empirical field, the practices of written text on an online message board forum.

Concerning posthumanist subjectivity in regards to information technology, text, and the body, N. Katherine Hayles is a philosophical figure with whom one would have to engage with since her body of work has covered great lengths in that field. Her approach focuses specifically on text and computerised information. Also she criticises Haraway’s cyborg and pertains to a move beyond or towards a distribution of subjectivity and cognition that are “more far-reaching than the figure of the cyborg allows” (Hayles, 2006:160). Instead, Hayles puts forth what she calls “cognisphere” where not just human minds are connected together by a network of relations but also computers; we thus come to share our minds in a new collective “sphere” of thoughts, or what Hayles calls “distributed cognition”. Hayles argues that this has consequences for subjectivity and everyday life:

More subtle are the changes in subjectivity that the cognisphere is bringing about. Shifts in reading practices suggest a movement from deep attention to hyperattention; incorporation of intelligent machines into everyday practices creates distributed cognitive systems that include human and non-human actors; distributed cognition in turn is linked to a dispersed sense of self, with human awareness acting as the limited resource that artificial cognitive systems help to preserve and extend. (Hayles, 2006:162).

At first glance, Hayles’ project seems fitting for this thesis. She discusses the biological body and information technologies with emphasis on the virtual, in a direction “toward embodied virtuality” (Hayles, 1999:1) in which she calls the construction of subjectivity that which doesn’t entail a material fusion of biology and technology, but instead a questioning of the conditions for this embodiment
when information technologies places the body outside of immediate experience of interaction; and it is this aspect that she deems posthuman (ibid:4)\textsuperscript{11} where the body is now compromised, not left behind by a mind that floats out into cyberspace, but placed in a new intimate relationship with text and “virtual space”. Hayles project may be of interest as an empirical backdrop, but is unfortunately largely irrelevant for a Deleuzian philosophical approach. As I will attempt to show, a Deleuzian approach will be concerned with \textit{unconscious}\textsuperscript{12} productions of subjectivity, rather than cognition. Again, I will go into detail on the relation between the body and the unconscious further on when specifically discussing Deleuze’s philosophy, but both Braidotti and Hayles serves as points of departure for the importance and contribution of a posthumanist discourse on the body and technology regarding changes in subjectivity, be it in a material sense concerning bio-power of new technologies or a cognitive sense concerning text and virtual embodiment.

Yet it is precisely this complicated problematisation that I will attempt to sketch out in the theoretical section to follow. How can we understand “embodied virtuality”, and what does it mean for subjectivity to be bodily constructed by information technologies that philosophically doesn’t separate the mind from the body? Even though the framework developed by Hayles serves no immediate purpose for this thesis, it does point to a problematisation of body and technology, as well as body and text (Hayles, 1999:29). But the problem as I see it in these previous researches is that importance is placed on “the body as mediated” instead of “the body as mediated”. It is this mediation\textsuperscript{13} that I wish to explore, the conditions for it and the implications of it. We are undoubtedly dealing with a multiplicity of bodies and materiality in different forms, but we cannot stipulate a correspondence of change and transformation on either sides (the biological body corresponding to the technological body, the textual body, the representative body, etc.), nor make the two sides converge in on each other, within a Deleuzian framework. The rest of this thesis will make this paradoxical relationship of central concern and leave the question open for investigation, perhaps to arrive at a conclusion where both sides can be accounted for in themselves.

We remain however, for the moment, within the critique posthumanist theory has posited against a separation of body and mind within discourses on information technology. Around the internet first became available to the general public there was a rise of what Brophy (2010) has called discourses on “cyberutopia”. As I have shown in the introduction, it was stipulated within cyberutopian discourses

\textsuperscript{11} On this very page however, Hayles gives an erroneous account, in my view, of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the body without organs. This suggests her distance from the philosophical framework I wish to employ in this thesis, but Hayles nevertheless deserves to be discussed as a background to the problem I wish to explore, albeit in a different theoretical light.

\textsuperscript{12} The unconscious for Deleuze and Guattari (1983) is the productive and completely positive field of desire in the human psyche; that is, it doesn’t mean anything in particular except being the productive and creative force we all find ourselves being driven by. In contrast to Freud, who believed the unconscious to contain prohibited thoughts and ideas that were repressed by the preconscious (pressure from the unconscious “up” toward the conscious that the preconscious represses, thus giving rise to feelings of anxiety), Deleuze and Guattari (ibid:129; 338) view ideas and conscious thoughts as applying pressure or inhibit the productive forces of the unconscious. The unconscious is seen by Deleuze and Guattari as \textit{actual} and doesn’t contain anything that can be adequately represented by \textit{virtual} ideas. Conscious thoughts and ideas do not represent the unconscious, but it is rather the unconscious which is the actual production for certain thoughts and ideas.

\textsuperscript{13} The term “mediate” is unfortunate to employ in relation to a Deleuzian philosophy. As I will argue further on, Deleuze’s philosophy would critique any form of mediation in the favour of the power of expression to separate itself from its content and become something entirely different on its own accord. The implications of the “body as mediated” would thus be understood on the grounds that it impossible for anything to remotely be considered as being mediated in the first place.
that we could finally be free of our bodily limitations and escape out into a “virtual reality”. Brophy (2010:933) argues however that the notion of a cyberutopia reinforces the mind/body dualism of a Cartesian character. She takes up the schism between body and language, but puts emphasis on the materiality of the body in her assessment: “material elements of the ‘real world’ are inherently bound up in and with technologies of the virtual” (ibid). This approach goes against a social constructivism that she argues privileges language in the production of subjectivity (ibid:936). Brophy instead turns to Grosz’s account of a Spinozist understanding of the mind and body, and also Butler’s theory on performativity. Brophy (ibid:937-8) then uses the synthesis of Spinoza-Grosz-Butler to accompany physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad’s ontology of “intra-activity” and builds this on the notion that “One cannot engage in, on or with the medium without one’s body”. Again, in a similar vein as Braidotti, Haraway and Hayles, Brophy’s emphasis is on materiality and the body. If Brophy puts forth a theory of the body and technology in a discourse on materiality using as grounds for this a chronological synthesis of Spinoza-Grosz-Butler-Barad, then I wish to instead explore the conditions for the body as ultimately compromised in a medium where studies have shown that it is the absence of the body in direct communication that enables new forms of interaction (Johansson, 2010:148-55). We might follow the materialist account given by Brophy as well as Currier (2003) and agree that the body is implicated in enunciating practices online where the body is discussed extensively (e.g. the topic of self harm, Johansson, 2010), yet I would beg to question whether or not such an account gives us methodological credence to study how the is implicated and transformed by enunciating practices; and what is we react and respond to online? How are we to be corporeally affected if our communication is mediated and our bodies not directly given in interaction? What I find in Deleuze is a theory that complicates the schism between mind and body, or body and language, that I believe addresses this question of the problem of the body in communication that is dependent on enunciations of written text; and this is by the concept of the assemblage.

Brians (2011) has furthermore directed critique against various discourses on cyberutopia (which she also argues reinforces the mind-body dualism or at least the transcendence of mind over body) and argues for a cyber-corporeality through Deleuze’s philosophy. Nevertheless, in similar manner of Brophy and Currier, she focuses on the materiality of the body (ibid:117-8). Brians expresses the wish to maintain a Deleuzian discourse and suggests “there are good reasons for maintaining fidelity to Deleuze’s materialism and his repeated rejection of any transcendent worldview”.14 She also wishes to locate Deleuze’s thought exclusively in one side of what she presents as two discourses on cyber theory: one which argues for a transcendence of the mind over body into a “virtual reality”; and the other which argues for a posthumanist materialism, which would be occupied by Deleuze according to Brians (ibid:118-9). I would instead beg to question positioning Deleuze on either side of such debate, and instead leave the question open to investigate if there is not indeed aspects of Deleuze’s philosophy that would also seem to complement a posthumanist materialism proposed by Brians (ibid) and Braidotti (2006a;2006b).

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14 This ignores the fact that Deleuze’s first published work in 1959 presented a theory on “transcendental empiricism”. Of course, Deleuze’s thought and notion of this underwent many changes since then, but there are few scholar’s, particularly within posthumanist discourses, who deal with this side of Deleuze. Instead, often enough a “materialism” is hailed as opposed to a dominant transcendental thought. Such a debate is not of interest for this thesis however, as is why I chose to present a background on this debate as a stance for me to take before exploring my own enquiry.
Brians (2011) does however approach Deleuze with similar interests as I do: on the body in terms of affects and force as well as his ontology of the actual and the virtual where emphasis is placed on the virtual. Brians doesn’t however take into account how Deleuze’s philosophy may be of help regarding the way information technologies are reliant on written text for communication. Of course, pictures are a big part of the internet as well as digital materiality in general and possibilities for video broadcasting, etc., but this does not omit the fact that written text and language still plays such a large role in our practices of everyday life, something an emphasis on materiality, biology and neuroscience (ibid:139) perhaps fail to sufficiently take into account. I do not wish to dismiss Brians important discussion on Deleuze and the body regarding information technologies, but the question concerning written text and enunciation needs to complement this important research emphasising the materiality of the body and how it is transformed by these new technologies. But that does not mean that we shouldn’t also consider his emphasis on the distinction between bodies and enunciations (or, language), and his theorisations of what enunciations have for kind of effects on us.

The body and its incorporeality

One of Deleuze’s (1994) concepts that have been vigorously used when discussing the body and subjectivity in internet discourses is the concept of the virtual. Brians (2011) has emphasised the concept not be confused with a “virtual reality” (as within a cyberutopian discourses, where the virtual is seen as a kind of transcendence of mind over body, and the body is seen as a burden and limitation; or even for a virtualisation of the material world) but rather as a field of potential and possibilities to happen to actual state of things; the concept does not concern a distinction between a “real world” and a “virtual world”, as the virtual is as much real as the actual (Deleuze, 1994:208). Marks (2006:205-6) has pointed out one particular case in which French media theorist and philosopher Pierre Lévy has used Deleuze’s philosophy to argue for a “virtualisation of the body” in which, in light of previous discussion on posthumanism, the realisation of the body goes from a actual state of material things to a virtual state in a digital field. The problem with this sort of account of Deleuze’s ontology, as Marks goes on to show, is that despite its ambition to provide a “reality” of the virtual, it nevertheless posits a dichotomy of reality between an actual material field and a virtual digital field on the internet, and understands the former as grounded in physical materiality and the latter as a disembodied existence, or a transcendent existence; and it is exactly this problem that Marks (ibid:206) points to within cyberutopian discourses using Deleuze’s philosophy that has to be over-bridge. When Braidotti (2006b) posits subjectivity as essentially corporeal and relates this to information technologies, we can view the body as being affected and compromised in a digital network of affects, the body now

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15 These concepts will be dealt with further on, yet they are important to mention this early on to present the background and previous research concerning Deleuze, the body and technology.
16 These terms are however precisely the terms Deleuze sought to critique by instead invoking the concept of the virtual. I use these terms here as a nominal introduction to the concept, as Deleuze (1994:260) himself also used the word “possible” to convey the meaning of his use of the term “virtual”. In the concluding sections of this thesis however, a more rigorous and thorough explanation of the concept will be discussed.
17 In the theoretical section to follow I will more clearly explain these concepts in the philosophy of Deleuze; they are, however, impossible not the mention this early on for an understanding of the background and previous researches into the topic.
18 The only process of reality for Deleuze is a process of actualisation and never a “virtualisation” (Deleuze, 1994:207-8,251). Practices on the internet are as much actual as they are virtual, as real as any material reality. Yet I clearly wish to place emphasis on the concept of the virtual in regards to information technologies, as well as question if practices are corporeal when engage with such technologies. We will explore this complex relationship in the later stages of this thesis.
entering into relationships that form new capacities of being affected; but what we miss in such a
discussion is the necessary parallelism of body and language, or enunciation, that is essential for all of
Deleuze’s philosophy. In short, what needs to also be accounted for is the incorporeal in and around
our corporeality if we are to have a Deleuzian approach, without falling into the traps of cyberutopian
discourses by placing the actual on the body itself and the virtual on digital technologies. I will explore
this theoretical relationship between the actual and the virtual (see note 16 above) in the third
analytical section as well as the concluding discussion to answer my research questions.

Brain Massumi (2002) took this incorporeal problem of the body and subjectivity to be the task of a
ten year project, after translating Deleuze and Guattari’s monumental *Mille Plateaux* to English: to
theorize the body with movement, not as a positioning or solely material entity (an essential
corporeality), but as thinking the body with movement. He saw it as no other way out, the corporeality
of the body with the incorporeality of movement, a paradoxical relationship that is the very foundation
for a production of subjectivity. Within feminist theory we can also find this turn towards the
incorporeal. Claire Colebrook (2000) critiqued contemporary feminist theory to overemphasise the
body and materiality, and instead employed Deleuze’s philosophy in a way sympathetic with the move
this thesis presents: “If corporeality has been traditionally associated with what is substantively
removed from mind, in order to establish mind as a separate substance, what needs to achieved is not
the embodiment of mind but the de-corporealization of existence, including the body” (Colebrook,
2000:39). She goes on to warn against an overemphasis on corporeality that excludes the forces of the
body (ibid:40), and relates this to a problem of ethics that has to be re-evaluated in regards to
information technologies and the mass media:

What needs to be addressed, though, is neither the propriety of corporeality, nor the liberation into
the virtual, but the gap between the two. This would mean that ethics is not a question of deciding
the proper relation between the real and virtual, but in each case questioning the event of the
incorporeal. What is the force of this particular incorporeal event – this image, this sense, this gaze
and this representation? (Colebrook, 2000:42).

This quote can be seen as a springboard for the problems and questions presented in this thesis. Such
an approach calls into question an ethics that has to think in terms of an immanent parallelism between
language and body, an ethics of the virtual that at once dismisses cyberutopia as well as an emphasis
on corporeality (against Brophy, Currier and Brians), and turns toward questioning the “the event of
the incorporeal” that puts mass media at the heart of subjectivity, as Félix Guattari (1995:4) has said.
Guattari took contemporary technologies to be of central concern for what he also called the
productions of subjectivity, and this notion of production can be linked to Deleuze and Guattari’s
(1983) concept of the unconscious as a machine of production (against Hayles’ “cognisphere”). This is
later echoed when Guattari (ibid) postulates that technologies and productions subjectivity works “not
only within its memory and intelligence, but also within its sensibility, affects and unconscious
fantasms.” This is also what we are occupied with in this thesis: how technology can be viewed, not in
isolation or in and of itself, but rather as within a machine (not a “technological machine”, but rather
as something productive and functioning), this machine now not only distributing and transforming
our consciousness, but also transforming our capacity for feelings, our bodily capacities to be affected
by other bodies in mediated spaces; in short, our unconscious that is the production of the forces and
affects of the body. But Guattari did not believe “the body” per say to be of central concern for
productions of subjectivity with the advent of new “complexes” of technology and social formation, he rather saw “corporeality” as something that needed to change:

These complexes actually offer people diverse possibilities for recomposing their existential corporeality, to get out of their repetitive impasses and, in a certain way, to resingularise themselves. Grafts of transference operate in this way, not issuing from ready-made dimensions of subjectivity crystallised into structural complexes, but from a creation which itself indicates a kind of aesthetic paradigm. One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way an artist creates new forms from the palette (Guattari, 1995:7).

Technologies, or technological complexes, were, in this quote, seen by Guattari as immense potentials for reconfiguring our subjectivities by “getting out of” or corporeal repetitions of habit in everyday life. He seems, along with Deleuze, to emphasise and priorities that which is in some way not corporeal; priority is given to practices that always move out of our corporeal existence, to not be fixed by the current state we find ourselves in. But subjectivity, in light of feminist theory and posthumanism, must also take into account its corporeal conditions and materiality of existence; this theoretical impasse, as it were, seems oddly paradoxical. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari have inspired a posthumanism that critiques Cartesian dualisms, and on the other hand we see Deleuze and Guattari themselves continually priorities that which is not corporeal, but rather that which sets the corporeal in motion. How are we to account for these paradoxes of subjectivity, where we are at once grounded in our body as well as when our body is only the result of movement and affects? Returning to the studies of Brian Massumi, one of his main points is that the body has to be affected by something other than the body itself, and these are the affects and forces around and within it that forms and conditions the movements of the body; they are inseparable from the body and define any given body, but are not the body itself:

The charge of indeterminacy carried by a body is inseparable from it. It strictly coincides with it, to the extent that the body is in passage or in process (to the extent that it is dynamic and alive). But the charge is not itself corporeal. Far from regaining a concreteness, to think the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension of the body. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal (Massumi, 2002:5).

The body understood in relation to movement then is in this instance first characterised by a spatial order of parallel “sides”: one corporeal, the other incorporeal. But movement is also, according to a Deleuzian philosophy (following Immanuel Kant) subordinate to time, which abruptly puts emphasis on the incorporeal side and prioritises it as the dominant force, or active force in relation to the reactive body which is carried along with no real agency of its own. Agency however, is an unfortunate term to use in this instance, as Massumi clarifies how we can understand the relationship between the corporeal and incorporeal as a parallelism instead of an hierarchy of forces:

One way of starting to get a grasp on the real-material-but-incorporeal is to say it is to the body, as a positioned thing, as energy is to matter. Energy and matter are mutually convertible modes of the same reality. This would make the incorporeal something like a phase-shift of the body in the usual sense, but not one that comes after it in time. It would be a conversion or unfolding of the body contemporary to its every move (ibid).
This not only shows how the incorporeal time and corporeal space is parallel each other, but also that the incorporeal is “contemporary” to the body’s materiality. However, Massumi specifically says that the incorporeal does not come after the body, but he leaves out the question of whether it comes before the body, such that a clear priority would be given to the incorporeal. It does seem however as though his whole project leans toward such a direction, but I would leave such questions unanswered and remain within a contemporary parallelism between each sides. Massumi (2002:30-1) also connects the body with the virtual, as we’ve seen has been done in previous research, but he does it not to evoke a philosophical hierarchy of materiality over transcendence. He does however, use the term body-subject (ibid:3), since he still makes it clear that there is no transcendence of mind over body, but rather a parallelism where the subject is the body in its incorporeality. I will therefore use the term body-subject throughout this thesis. I will also show how “the subject” can only be corporeal in a Deleuzian philosophy. For Deleuze, as I hope to make clear further on, the subject is neither the central organ of agency in a wider structure or system, nor a complete intact identity of being. It does seem that Deleuze places importance on the time which carries space forward, and that the subject can only be grasped in spaces, such that a “subject” is only a temporality fixed in corporeality, in “repetitive impasses”. This question will however be left open for the moment, and figure as a theoretical enquiry to Deleuze’s philosophy further on. The question also, I want to stress, puts emphasis on the pedagogical issue at hand: what is called learning would here be considered transformation of subjectivity, or rather the process of transformation. This transformation is all around and within us in our everyday lives; pedagogy doesn’t stop outside of institutional walls, but is always carried out in our practices which produces new forms of subjectivity and new possibilities for transformation.

The paradoxical relationship discussed here will be the central focus for the rest of this thesis; the relation between the corporeal body and its incorporeal movement that we will come to defined as force and affect. The body is however the central site for the temporality of subjectivity, and also in a parallel relationship with its incorporeal movements and time. It has become apparent that discussing the body using the philosophy of Deleuze immediately takes us out of its thick materiality. As been noted by Hughes (2011:1-2) that in extensive studies of Deleuze and the body, it quickly slips away into something other than the body itself. It is taken up rather as a problem than a concept in order propel into a discussion about movements, forces and affects; and this is also telling for the problem facing posthumanist research concerning materiality in favour of the non-material when maintaining a Deleuzian ontology. In my reading of Deleuze, the paradoxes of the forces around and within in the body cannot be dichotomised so vigorously. The incorporeal is always within the corporeal, but on a separate and distinct metaphysical plane; in short, a paradoxical parallelism needs to complement studies already done concerning the body and information technology using the philosophy of Deleuze.

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19 With such claims I mean that we cannot attribute the same conditions to the causes of both planes, as would amount to a representational thinking where we can tell that, for example, the conscious is representing the unconscious. Instead, Deleuze (2004:7) places a fundamental importance on the separateness of corporeal causes and incorporeal effects, of which I will discuss in detail further on.
Philosophy as methodology: Studying transformations

The methodology of this thesis is intrinsically interwoven with the theoretical framework that attempts to answer the question of how subjectivity is produced and transformed on a message board forum for self harm support. The background of a posthumanist perspective inspired by Deleuze has provided interesting philosophical discussions about the relationship between body and technology as it regards questions of subjectivity. Yet I have found it difficult to derive a methodological approach from these posthumanist studies. Therefore, I have instead turned to a philosophical tradition more akin to cultural studies and hermeneutics in the vein of Ian Buchanan (2000). In the concluding section of this thesis, I will attempt to synthesise these two approaches, feminist posthumanism and hermeneutics, in order to synthesise something new out of this combination of approaches. In this section, however, I will detail the process of generating my empirical material, critically discuss this material and relate this to my theoretical framework. I will also introduce, construct and critically discuss the methodological approach I propose best can answer the problems presented earlier.

Furthermore, I wish to have a Deleuzian approach to this entire investigation, which would also speak of a methodological purpose carrying the thesis forward. This methodological purpose consists of letting the theory employed affect the empirical material generated (that is, to let the theory allow for the empirical material to emerge in a new light), as well as to let the empirical material affect the theory in return (that is, to let the empirical material allow for the theory to emerge in a new light). 20 In other words, a reciprocal transformative practice is hoped to be carried out in the ongoing analysis that characterises the disposition of this thesis. It needs to be repeated at this point that I do not intend for this to be primarily an empirical analysis by applying a certain theory (in order to “explain” the material). It should rather be emphasised that this is first and foremost a theoretical thesis where I aim to arrive at a theoretical understanding of a particular problem, and not to simply explain or interpret a given case of study. Even though the latter is hard to avoid (given my seemingly ambivalent approach) I wish to emphasise that this investigation is first a foremost a theoretical one.

In keeping with the theoretical framework of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) then, the studying of transformations has been done by the method of observations of the activities on the message board in question. Screenshots were taken to account for the message board as a whole: the posts made, responses to it, pictures accompanying the texts, as well as the timeframe of the post. More specifically, the expressions of physical acts on the message board in form of written text, such as cutting oneself or resisting to cut oneself, will be analysed in relation to what those texts in their turn expresses and the responses made to those text. The translation of the posts from the Swedish to the English language was made entirely by me during the research process. 21 As mentioned above, the

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20 I want to stress this importance on a fundamental empiricism while at the same time remaining within a theoretical investigation. Since Deleuze conceived of his philosophy before the advent of the personal computer and the internet, I believe our time and world also has something to say to his philosophy, not just the other way around. If the latter were the case, we would not have a Deleuzian approach to research.

21 Since English is not my first language, this raises methodological issues and questions of distortion of the original posts. I have attempted to follow the context of the posts as closely as possible when translating, instead of simply translating word for word, since that would make the posts unintelligible.
methodological purpose and disposition of this thesis will interweave the empirical material with the theoretical and philosophical discussion. First, the purpose is foremost a theoretical investigation where the empirical material generated serves to both be informed by the theory employed and itself inform the theoretical framework. Second, in keeping with the theoretical framework of the philosophy of Deleuze, this methodology was chosen to be in compliance with the concept of the assemblage. That is, I view the message board forum as an assemblage, or rather, a field of assemblages. The concept of the assemblage can be said to be the centre piece around which the entire thesis pivots.

In preparation for this thesis, the specific website was chosen on the grounds of its focus on support for individuals who practice self harm. Contact with an administrator the message board forum and member of the organisation was first made via email. After our conversations via email and phone, it was agreed that material could only be generated during a two week timeframe. Further contact was made with the organisation that runs the website via an emailed letter of consent (see appendix i). It was announced by an administrator on the forum that the message board was being observed by me during the two week timeframe between April 8th and April 27th 2011. This has an important ethical aspect to it, since the organisation that runs the website wanted full transparency to its users, and also wanted to limit the timeframe so that users that might have been put off by the forum being observed could feel secure knowing when and how the forum was being observed. As such, the method of taking screenshots provided the information necessary to make sure no post other than during the stated timeframe was taken into the research process. Methodologically, the concern of this limited timeframe is that the material generated cannot provide an entire overview of the assemblage that is the forum and website studied. Also, a post on a forum can be alive for a long period of time. This means that a thread started two months before the timeframe for observation might get responses and create new discussions between users within the timeframe; I can therefore only consider these posts made during the timeframe and not the initially started thread. I can however consider the headline for the thread started months before the allowed timeframe, but not the initial post itself. As such, each post and thread will be considered for itself by its particular circumstance. It will however be related to other threads, but I will have to state the particular circumstances of each thread in question. This has the consequence of the material being “hacked up”, and made appear somewhat abrupt.

An immediate problem occurs with such approach in relation to my research focus and protests may be raised: how can one study what happens “offline” (i.e. the body behind the screen) if one is only to observe what happens “online” (i.e. post made on the forum in written text)? How will the question of the incorporeal meeting affecting the corporeality of the subject be answered? My methodology has to be clarified, and it can be divided into two parts, although not necessarily chronologically ordered: one empirical analysis, the other a theoretical analysis. The empirical part accounts for the online observations of what is actually happening on the internet forum, mapping expressions/statements on the message board in order to understand what kind of responses they produce and affect other responses (what is said, how it is said, what responses are made). As such, I cannot make any assumptions about what happens to an individual’s body “behind” the screen. If, for example, a post on the message board expresses concerns about cutting oneself, uplifting and supporting responses are made and the individual then expresses thanks as they now have made it through without cutting oneself, we can never actually know if this is true or not. For the purposes of this thesis however, such concerns are irrelevant. What is of empirical interest is the expressions made on the message board; the body is here highlighted through written text (hence why the field of self harm is of such great
importance to this thesis), as well as other materials evoked in the posts (a certain place, an institution, etc.). But the research question at large cannot be answered empirically by this method alone; a theoretical dimension has to complement the empirical analysis if the purpose of this thesis is to be fulfilled. As mentioned above, these complementing parts will be interwoven throughout the thesis, and then concluded with a theoretical discussion.

Concerning the disposition of the sections to follow, I will in the first section (“To Transform I”) discuss how Deleuze uses the body in his works on Nietzsche and Spinoza. It is here that one comes up against the concepts of force and affect. This will be related to the empirical examples generated on the message board as well as to the previous research sketched out in the previous section. In the second section, I will discuss Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage and how this relates to my empirical field, as well as applying this concept to the posts on the message board forum. It is this concept that my methodology is built upon; it is both inspired by the philosophy and social theory behind that particular concept, as well as an attempt to employ the concept itself as it is my contention that it is well suited for this kind of empirical analysis. In the third section, a deeper investigation into Deleuze’s ontology is made that furthers the previous discussion on the forces and affects of the body as well as the concept of the assemblage accompanied by empirical examples and discussions. This third act will discuss the concepts of the “actual” and the “virtual”, as well as the problem of expression as related to an ethical consideration of the body and practices on the internet in the productions of subjectivity.

Ethical considerations

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic that occupies the message board forum, this website will not be disclosed by name. By that same line of reasoning, the names of the users on the message board will also remain anonymous. This has been done in accordance with one major study that concerns discussion on self harm on the internet. Anna Johansson’s (2010:15-9) doctoral thesis discusses the problematic relationship between the researcher and a seemingly public field of study that is the internet. On the one hand, the discussion on a message board forum may be openly accessed publicly on the internet and therefore free to the researcher to gather as he or she see fit; yet on the other hand, and Johansson (ibid:17) is quite clear on this point, the users on the message board might not be in agreement with the use of their activities on the internet for academic research. As such, and as I’ve mentioned before, outmost discretion and transparency was made in my gathering of material on the message board in question. Thorough discussions were made between me and an administrator of the forum, as well as with the members of the board of the organisation that runs the website, in the form of a formal letter of consent. After the agreed timeframe for the gathering of material was set, I made a public profile on the forum detailing who I was and what my intents were, along with contact information. Then, it was publicly announced on the message board that it was being studied by me during the entire timeframe. By this practice, I hope to engage in the problematic ethical aspects of internet research; the new and heterogeneous field and discourse of what is public and what is private. I believe it is important to study this field on its own terms, while at the same time not intruding on the privacy of the activities taking place on a specific website or message board.
A functional-assemblic hermeneutics

Another problem with this sort of methodology is the fact that it hasn’t been sufficiently done before, and this might beg the question of its legitimacy. Many attempts have been made to map out the assemblages of this or that field, but few, if any, have taken the specific approach to written text and practices of everyday life that I have taken here (see the proceeding section on previous employments of the philosophy of Deleuze in relation specifically and exclusively to the body concerning information technologies). Jessica Ringrose (2011) has also employed the concept of the assemblage in analysis of empirical material, albeit in a different methodological direction than the one presented here. Her approach shows that the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari is applicable to research of written text online, but her emphasis is similar to the one Brians (2011) has proposed in terms of how to understand the body of the subject in online practices. It does not present us with a methodology to understand the relationship between written text online and the physical, biological body of the subject and how this creates new forms of subjectivities. Instead, my emphasis aims more towards the analysis of written text; the question is how the concept of the assemblage can provide a useful tool for such analysis. For this, I have instead turned to Ian Buchanan, who presents Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy as a new form of hermeneutics22, or a “hermeneutic programme” (Buchanan, 2000:3), and this is referred to throughout his book which presents an “applied Deleuzism”. The term “Deleuzism” is not something I will be aligning myself with, but rather take note of Buchanan’s attempt to view this philosophy methodologically. Buchanan links this hermeneutics to the concept of the assemblage which is why it is of importance for my approach here, but he takes it to a “macro level” of analysis in utopian theories of society. I am, on the other hand, merely interested in a limited case of collective enunciations related to a certain local composition of bodies; not political or utopian aspects of the concept of the assemblage.23 Buchanan’s analysis is theoretically concerned with literary criticisms on capitalism in the film Blade Runner; this particular analysis was, in my opinion, less an applied method of the concept of assemblage than a further theorising about the consequences of capitalism and the utopian use of the assemblage as concept for society.24 As such, I have to be clear on the fact that I take inspiration from Buchanan’s methodological use of the concept of the assemblage, but I am not trying to replicate his particular analysis of culture.

What, then, is hermeneutics as I understand the term and employ it here? I am inspired by Buchanan’s approach, yet not in full compliance with it (since there are many Deleuzian concepts Buchanan builds upon that I do not discuss here, and as such it would be problematic to simply copy his approach to mine). Buchanan (2000:4-5) builds his argument for a new form of hermeneutics around the already discussed critique of representation and structuralism. It essentially boils down to this: how does one

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22 Buchanan wasn’t the first however to suggest the hermeneutics of Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus. In The Political Unconscious, Fredric Jameson (1983:6-7:43) attempted to construct a new political interpretation of literary texts by focus on how a text functions, its mechanics, rather than its meaning per se; it is, according to Jameson, by shifting focus from solely the meaning of a speech act or symbolic act, to the function in the wider social “assemblage” that Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus gave a tremendous inspiration for. However, his focus, along with Buchanan’s, still resides on just that, literary texts and cinema, and not on empirical material. My shift comes at this juncture, from literary criticism to social empiricism.

23 This would take into consideration the other axis of the assemblage, which is concerned with the relationship between what Deleuze and Guattari (2004) call territorialisation and deterritorialisation. These are, unfortunately, not of concern for this thesis.

24 Granted, Buchanan (2000) specifically views the concept of the assemblage as a utopian one, and he uses his analysis as such. I, however, would be cautious against such a highly theoretical conception of the assemblage to suffice itself to tackle the perils of capitalism, and instead approach everyday life with this concept as a methodological background.
analyse what is said without presupposing that what is said represents that which says it, or that of which it speaks? In other words, how do we not mistake causes for effects, as Buchanan (ibid) concludes that this is Deleuze’s critique of Freud,25 and aptly asks instead how a text works and not what it “means” (ibid:41). On the other hand, Buchanan (ibid:97) is insistent on calling it precisely a hermeneutics because it is impossible to shine away from the question of the “meaning” of a text. Deleuze (1983) himself also vigorously uses the term “interpretation” in is study of Nietzsche. Yet, again, it is difficult to apply this method to empirical research instead of literary criticism; in literary texts it is quite possible to map out the meaning and context of certain concepts the author has worked with. This would become problematic within empirical research of social practices, and raise further ethical considerations. Therefore I would propose that any “meaning” of a text produced in social practices that we take in empirical research, be coupled and derived from its function; that is, what does this text do, how does it work, in relation to what, and what does it set in motion (even if we confine ourselves to theoretical or hypothetical discussions about its implications)?

My approach can briefly be summarized in light of this: building on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari in the books _Anti-Oedipus_ and _A Thousand Plateaus_, I have tried to follow their approach as closely as possible to my specific research inquiry; this entails a critique of representation and interpretation from psychoanalytic and linguistic/semiotic perspectives as emphasised by Buchanan (2000). When interpretative analysis built on representation and structuralism (such as linguistics or psychoanalysis) says “This means that” (using the signifier-signified relationship, usually the symbolic father/mother/etc.) or when it asks “What does it mean?”, one instead asks “How does it function, with what does it function, and what does it do?”. In my own terms, this could be called a _functional-assemblage hermeneutics_. This methodological conceptualisation binds together the fact that Deleuze and Guattari saw themselves as “strictly functionalist” (Deleuze, 1995:21), as well as the concept of the assemblage and Buchanan’s proposal of the hermeneutic programme Deleuze and Guattari construct in their philosophy.

Regarding the disposition of the analysis and theoretical discussion to follow below, each section has its own terms corresponding to this type of hermeneutics. The first section concerns the terms “forces” and “affects” of how to understand the term “body”. The second section concerns the relation between bodies and enunciating practices, between “content” and “expression” in the overall concept of the assemblage. The third section concerns Deleuze’s underlying ontology of the “actual” and the “virtual” as well as the ethical aspects of the concept of expression. By this line of reasoning, then, I believe there _already is_ a method contained within the book _A Thousand Plateaus_ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). What I find sorely missing in Deleuze studies is an account of this method, not just theoretical or supposedly “applied” cultural theory (where “applied” usually means “how do we analyse this book, film, or architecture, in terms of the implications of capitalism?”). I believe there is not just a philosophy in the works of Deleuze; there is also an immensely important, albeit difficult, research methodology. This thesis is an attempt to account for a Deleuzian methodological approach to social research.

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25 In the following sections, I will show how Deleuze and Guattari (1983) reverse the Freudian model of the psyche. Buchanan (2000:4-5) has summarised it with great clarity that when Freud places the Oedipus complex to be residing in the unconscious, Deleuze and Guattari instead say that it is the Oedipus complex that is imposed on the unconscious by the practice of psychoanalysis. As such, Freud sees the Oedipus complex as the cause for a certain desire, when in fact, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the Oedipus complex is only an effect imposed by a representational interpretation by the analyst.
To Transform

To what are we dedicated if not to those problems which demand the very transformation of our body and our language? (Deleuze, 1994:192)

In the quote above, taken from the seminal *Difference and Repetition*, published in 1968, Deleuze is attempting to theorise a movement of transformation that carries both our body and our language along new paths. Further still, he also proposes this to be the very function of life, to let ourselves as individuals be taken up by this transformative life that changes not only what happens in our body, but also the language we use that may transform us in return. In our present day of information technologies that occupy most of our everyday lives, this transformative approach seems ever the more a pressing matter. Guattari (1995:3-5; 1996: 193) has clearly said that subjectivities has occupied him to larger extent because of the rise of mass media, and that subjectivities have come to play a dominating role in history, now being “globally diffused”. This shows that the philosophy here employed is not ignorant of forms of media, even though Guattari’s analysis here is limited to “mass media” in the 1970’s and 1980’s and his work with Deleuze places importance, albeit in a negative light, on technology throughout history. I do not wish to simply copy Deleuze and Guattari’s “media analysis” in this thesis, but rather use the philosophy they sketch out in a field that they themselves had no access to (the internet). I merely intend to show that they were interested in forms of media and productions of subjectivity, which I hope clearly motivates the connections I make between my empirical field and choice of theoretical framework.

I begin by discussing how Deleuze engages with the notion of the body, and how he takes it up as a model for thought. As will become apparent, the human biological body is viewed by Deleuze by the same criteria as any other body, yet without displacing or absolving the proper term that is “the body”. My focus, as I’ve pertained to earlier, is however on the human biological body of the subject and how it relates to subjectivity in an everyday life infused with information technologies. I will therefore refer the term “the body” to that particular body unless stated otherwise. I will take as point of departure Deleuze’s discussion about the body from his works on Nietzsche and Spinoza, to then carry that discussion into the second part concerning the concept of the assemblage and the framework of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). In the concept of the assemblage, or agencement, a split will be made between the composition of bodies and composition of enunciation; by the latter Deleuze and Guattari mean the use of language but not in a linguistic sense. This will form a discussion about the separateness of words and things as I attempt to relate this to a practice of enunciation on the internet that produces a subject of self harm. The third part will carry this separation further theoretically and discuss the distinction Deleuze makes between corporeal causes and incorporeal effects, as well as the two realms of reality that is the actual and the virtual; again, this will be related to a discussion about enunciating and expressing practices on the internet vis-à-vis the biological body of the self harming subject, and the other bodies and contents that are produced and evoked within the enunciations and expressions on the internet forum. As already mentioned, this is also my “empirical analysis” since the empirical material I have generated will be interwoven in these

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26 Although the body also plays a large role in Deleuze’s book on Leibniz, this thesis will not be dealing with Deleuze’s conception of the body in that particular book, nor the development and change of the concept from his work on Nietzsche and Spinoza to that found in his later book on Leibniz.
theoretical discussion to let both the theoretical inform the empirical, and the empirical inform the theoretical in reciprocal manner.

To transform I – Forces and affects of a body-subject

We have as point of departure the conceptual relationship between the subject and the body in terms of subjectivity as being fundamentally corporeal. Massumi (2002:4) calls this a body-subject because of the importance of the body for the sensation and movement of a subject. It also feeds into feminist theory and the placed importance on what is called corporeal subjectivity. We cannot, it is concluded from such discussion, separate the body from the mind in a hierarchical relationship (see Haraway, 1991; Braidotti, 2006b). Likewise, Deleuze (1988:18) saw in Spinoza a parallelism between mind and body where neither have power over the other; that is to say, the body as such is not given credence over a supposedly “transcendental” mind; instead, Deleuze sees them as two sides or lines running parallel to each other, but without converging in on each other (ibid). From Spinoza, Deleuze (ibid:19) develops a framework in order to understand that we only experience the effects of compositions of bodies, and not their immediate cause. That is, the effects constitute one series (e.g. our knowledge of our bodies) and the causes constitute another series (i.e. the compositions of different bodies). These compositions that Deleuze speaks of, I will attempt to argue further on, will later flow into the concept of the assemblage in the book A Thousand Plateaus, which will occupy the succeeding section.

We must however return to the question of the functions of a body in keeping with our methodology. In a Deleuzian sense, the human biological body can be understood on basically the same grounds or criteria as any other body, and this criteria is force; here it is established that no precedence is given to the specifically human biological body, and instead that any form of body might be defined by these criteria. One of the philosophers Deleuze turns to in many of his books is Nietzsche. Deleuze finds in Nietzsche, as well as in Spinoza, a special power of the body and the unconscious, and that is also why I have turned to Deleuze’s book on Nietzsche to see how he engages with the concept of the body. In the book Nietzsche and philosophy, Deleuze (1983:40) discusses Nietzsche’s theory of the body as defined by active and reactive forces in the following manner:

Every force is related to others and it either obeys or commands. What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body - whether it is chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship.

From this definition we can now begin to understand the “human” biological body in a different light from what we are used to. What is central to understand, and what I want to point out at this stage, is that we are philosophically engaging with the incorporeal aspect of the human body’s corporeality that breaks up its limits and possibilities (not its physical limits, but its limitations for movement), following Massumi (2002). Even though the relationship of forces is constituted by material relations, these relations in themselves are, in my understanding through a Deleuzian philosophy, of the body but not it. Force, in this sense, should not be understood as something pertaining to a physical law of force (e.g. of gravity), but rather as an encompassing field that makes bodies come into being and movement. The concept and definition of force allows one to view the body not in terms of what it is (the “body” here concerned is the biological one of flesh and blood), but rather how it functions within larger arrangements of bodies. It is in this instance that Deleuze (1988) also turns to Spinoza, and
specifically the question Spinoza asked of “What can a body do?” The answer that Spinoza gives us, Deleuze emphasises, is that we can never know what a body can do since its capacities and forces exceed our knowledge of them. It is here that Deleuze takes up the body as a model for thought, since he is interested in these underlying conditions for thought to occur, as well as the conditions which transform our very body and language (Deleuze, 1994:192); as such, we cannot be content with preconceived notions of what we know of the body, since the body itself alludes us; we have to accept our subordinated consciousness to our bodies, and instead create practices that allows for the transformation of our bodies.

To the characteristics of a body Deleuze (1983:40) takes as examples (chemical, biological, political or social) we might put in place what is central for us at the moment to investigate: biological, social, technical and digital; these are what I in this thesis want to define as corporeal bodies, belonging to the corporeality of subjectivity; as any form of content, substance or quality. The relationship of forces that establishes a human biological body can now be seen as more than simply human. Taken together, a human body is nothing more than the product of forces coming together in an unequal manner; active forces dominating reactive forces, which sets a body in motion and connects other forces together in an active-reactive synthesis. My body now suddenly becomes more than my skin or my organs: it becomes the function of a relationship established by the unequal relationship of forces. In such a way, for example, my body is the relationship of forces established between itself and the computer and the interactions with the computer software. This in turn is connected to a vast political and social body flowing through the individual biological body in front of the computer screen. If we take this as our departure for a discussion about the production of subjectivity, we can see how subjectivities are “subtly” transformed and shaped by the new relationship of forces in a social and technical body-machine; subjectivity now begins to take shape in the relationship between forces that constitute a body, and as such the body is central for our understanding of subjectivity. The body cannot, however, be reduced to its corporeality. Forces need to be taken into account when discussing the body, and in this way the body is now comprised of both corporeal and incorporeal aspects; Massumi said it all very clearly about this fundamental relationship of body and force: forces are not the body itself, but rather “Of it, but not it.” (2002:5).

For now, I would like to linger on the concept of force to discuss my empirical material. What, then, is the body of “self harm” in regards to practices on a message board forum on the internet? It is not of primary concern for this thesis to discuss a phenomenology of self harm, or individual experiences of self harm, but ultimately what texts on a message board forum can help us understand about the relationship between the corporeal body which sits by a computer, move in space and time, and practices of writing posts of texts in an online message board forum. In preparation for this analysis, I initially categorised the material by themes; however, these themes will not be disclosed in their entirety, but rather interwoven with the theoretical discussion, in order to more accurately attend to my research questions. One of the themes that emerged in this categorisation was that of “fear”. As one post says,

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27 By “machine”, I take Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983:5) definition of it as something that functions by interrupting flows. In this sense, they also understand the human biological body as a machine and not an organism. This has a functional meaning and is not to be confused by a technological machine. When I say “social and technical body-machine” I mean the relations between the body and the technology of the computer and the social body surrounding and enveloping the subject. For Deleuze and Guattari (1983:286-7), there is no difference between vitalism and mechanism, and the body is properly a machine before being an organism.
I think that whomever you talk to on this forum will answer that fear is something central in their lives. The fear of not fitting in, the fear of doing something wrong, the fear of someone getting angry at me. My god, I am still afraid.

This post is in response to a thread started before the timeframe of this study, and it is titled “My illness awareness”. Is it a valid conclusion to say that fear is a force of the body of self harm in this regard? This post speaks in an authoritarian voice and says that anyone on this particular forum will probably testify to the fact that fear is a central part of their lives. But I am hesitant to call fear itself a force, or if this is the force to be defining the “body” that is of interest for the purposes of this thesis. Instead, I would like say that fear is the resulting effect of the relations that are formed between certain practices and entities for the individual subject; however, I am only interested on what happens on this forum, and not whatever may take place outside of it since I can’t have empirical access to those things. All I can say is this: the relations within the text between subjects and objects (e.g. “not fitting in”, “someone getting angry at you”) result in a theme of fear that emerges within the text; both implicitly and explicitly. These relations are the forces that result in a fear that the post above suggests is a big part of what it means to be dealing with depression and self harm; of the body, but not it (Massumi, 2002:5). One post in this thread suggests that fear is a question of personality,

I’ll answer the same way on fear as on destructiveness: it is a personality trait. I don’t think I’ll ever get completely free of it, but I am getting better and better at controlling it instead of it controlling me. What I wonder is why so much of your fear let go when you got more ill?

The last sentence is a question directed at a previous post not within the timeframe for this study, but a response appears that gives an account of why the fear seemed to let go when the “illness” got worse,

I really don’t know why the fear let go. But some blocks disappeared and in conjunction with that the staff at the hospital said that I was psychotic. Of course I thought they were wrong. But I had been so deeply afraid of talking and I had been afraid of becoming psychotic. I did begin to talk but that had more to do with my therapy contact looking so nice so I couldn’t believe it to be dangerous to talk to her in any way. And the things I said and did got them to react. And because I had been so afraid to become psychotic but now I actually got to hear that I was precisely that. I mean, I thought it would feel terribly confusing to be psychotic, but I felt completely normal. Or I mean like it felt completely natural. I didn’t feel normal. I’ve never felt normal, but it felt natural. I don’t know if I can explain it better than that.

Between these posts we can trace themes of fear, trust, personality, destructiveness, control, psychosis, and normality. What can be considered common in these three posts is a coming to terms with fear of destructiveness and normality. All three posts express that “the fear” will perhaps never be completely gone, and that all you can do is learn to control it. The aspect of control is echoed in the last post which expresses the feeling of being diagnosed with psychosis as “natural”. The three posts form a synthesis of themes that binds them together; and this binding, or synthesis, considering the theoretical framework, is made possible because of the forces involved in each text. In this practice then, we can see that the corporeality of the subjectivity that is “self harm” also has a textual dimension; that is, it is written text that is producing this subjectivity on the message board. Text would in this instance be considered to be materialised.
This leads to the question, should text be considered a body or a force? Given that Deleuze and Guattari (2004:89) take the word “body” in the broadest sense of the term, it would also suffice to say that the text appearing on the message board, in so far as it constitutes forces that come to define other bodies, would be considered a body in the broadest sense of the term. I wish to maintain however the separateness of all the bodies here constituted. I believe we would have to maintain their respective forces, to see them for themselves, but only in so far as to relate them to each other. However, saying the text produced on the message board would be considered a body is not the same as to say that the practice and the process leading up to a materialised body of text (language or enunciation) would also be considered a body, or a corporeality, nor even entangled with a corporeality as is Braidotti’s (2006b:37) posthumanist reading of Deleuze. I am strictly pointing out that no such conclusion can be made at this point; all that can be derived from this discussion is that the text as it appears on the message board, for itself, would by definition be considered as a body that is part of the production of forces which in turn would define other bodies; among them the body of self harm support.

Themes that could be said to “embody” these textual bodies above I would suggest are the following: fear, control, personality, institutions (in terms of the staff at the hospital in the latter example above), psychotic diagnosis, normality, and what is natural to feel in a situation. These themes would also be considered “bodies” following Deleuze and Guattari’s broad sense of the term (that representations are bodies too). What is happening on the other hand is that other bodies come into play within the enunciating practices, effected by forces within and around them; but it would not be the biological body itself of the subject. I would instead argue for the incorporeal forces at play in defining bodies in the broadest sense of the term, including the body of self harm of the individual subject behind the screen. There are numerous incorporeal aspects at work in the text that cannot be attributed to bodies themselves or the text itself, but rather to the forces alive within the text. What does it mean to be moved by a text? I would say it entails something along these theoretical lines.

In Deleuze’s study of Nietzsche, which I argue follows throughout his oeuvre, there is an unequal relationship between the reactive consciousness and the active unconsciousness of forces and bodies. We cannot have adequate knowledge of our bodies and the forces defining our bodies, yet we must be able to acknowledge their existence, our subordination to them but also the possibility of changing these active forces. The notion of force is developed by Deleuze through his reading of Nietzsche as inserted into bodies: consciousness is merely a “symptom of a deeper transformation”, and “always the consciousness of an inferior in relation to a superior to which he is subordinated or into which he is ‘incorporated’” (Deleuze, 1983:39, emphasis added). The importance of ideas and consciousness contra unconsciousness in this discussion about the body lies in the fact that, returning the notion of active and reactive forces, we can only be conscious of reactive forces. Deleuze insists: “the real problem is the discovery of active forces” (ibid:41); the active forces is the body; the reactive forces is our consciousness of our body. Hence my methodological approach to consider relations between bodies in an empirical field, instead of interviews with individual’s that would only disclose the reactive forces which are the subject’s ideas and thoughts about his or her body; this would not, according to a Deleuzian framework as I have laid it out here, reach the problem of active forces.

What is of even more importance, active forces are, according to Deleuze’s study of Nietzsche, that which makes a subject or a self: “The body’s active forces make it a self and define the self” (ibid:42). If we are to study the productions of subjectivity, as Guattari (1996:193) puts it, the body has to be
taken into account, but this should be without positing the materiality of the body as the fundamental aspect, or a fusion of the human body and technology, nor a study of how individuals create meaning and thoughts about their own bodies. Instead, we have to ask “what makes a body a body in this particular field?” and find in this the active forces that defines the body’s transformational power; what is deemed “reactive” here must be studied in relation to the active forces in order to be considered a force; “The only true science is that of activity, but the science of activity is also the science of what is necessarily unconscious” (Deleuze, 1983:42).

Here we clearly see why Deleuze places so much importance on psychoanalysis and the studies of the unconscious. Yet we cannot practice a hermeneutics in the vein of Freud, of interpreting the statements of an individual (i.e. consciousness) as adequate expressions of an unconscious (see Buchanan, 2000:4), since we cannot have conscious access to active forces defining a body, and subsequently the productions of subjectivity. This is also why I maintain Buchanan’s hermeneutic approach to Deleuze by developing a form of functional hermeneutics. There is also evidence of this in Deleuze’s (ibid:53;58) discussion of how to interpret active and reactive forces by an “extremely fine” perception”. Interpretation, indeed, comes up against extreme difficulties and needs to be reworked, yet, I would maintain that it will still be a matter of interpretation, and hence a hermeneutic procedure; “To interpret is to determine the force which gives sense to a thing” (ibid:54). How do we place the body at the fore by hermeneutically studying its reactive forces? This comes at the paradox of the nature of forces: it suddenly seem as though there is an interchangeable relationship between these forces in their dominating and dominated states. Deleuze (1983:66) discusses this paradox in Nietzsche:

Here we can recognize an ambivalence important to Nietzsche: all the forces whose reactive character he exposes are, a few lines or pages later, admitted to fascinate him, to be sublime because of the perspective they open up for us and because of the disturbing will to power to which they bear witness. They separate us from our power but at the same time they give us another power, “dangerous” and “interesting”. They bring us new feelings and teach us new ways of being affected.

There is something admirable in the becoming-reactive of forces, admirable and dangerous.

Deleuze takes the example of falling sick of illness that would separate oneself from one’s power to act, but at the same time presents new capacities to act, to view the world and new perspectives. To effectively come to accept this view, one has to interpret these forces according in this two-fold, almost paradoxical manner (ibid:67).

In another way to understand this in relation to the concept of the body, Deleuze (1983:62) brings together the forces of Nietzsche with the affects28 of Spinoza; “The more ways a body could be affected the more force it had.” It is this possibility for the body to be affected by other bodies that become a central problem both for Deleuze and for us in this particular enquiry. Deleuze (1988:123) is very explicit in his interests of defining a body and asks how Spinoza defines it: “a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also

28 Affect could be related to “cause”, or a kind of strike, an infliction or affliction, something that is active and not merely reactive or passive. As a body affects another body, it causes that other body to do this or that, etc. Further on I will elaborate on Deleuze’s peculiar understanding of cause and effect relationships. Philosophically, for Deleuze, as we will notice on the next page here, effects are results of causes, but do not belong to the same corporeal realm as causes. In this way, we suffer effects but are affected by causes.
defines a body in its individuality.” Deleuze (ibid:124) further insists: “You will define an animal, or human being, not by its form, its organs, and its function, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable.”

Still clinging to the notion that the biological body of the subject is not immediately present in an online environment of communication, the interesting aspect for us to investigate is how can the biological body of an individual subject be affected by another individual’s biological body in an environment that is not immediately inhabited by biological bodies? We have to turn to what Deleuze (1990:146) finds in Spinoza as a second kind of affect: “relating no longer to the body itself, but to what happens in the body; no longer to the soul (the idea of the body) but to what happens in the soul (an idea of what happens in the body).” We have here “ideas” as a central term to be related and discussed to our empirical material. The soul is defined by Deleuze, through Spinoza, as the idea of the body, and by stipulating such an idea, we find ourselves having an idea of an idea of the body. The idea of an idea of the body is the effect that gives us a sensation of self, and this can only be reached by an idea of external bodies (but not the body itself).

If we have a knowledge of external bodies, of our own body, of our soul itself, it is solely through these ideas of affections. They alone are given us: we perceive external bodies only insofar as they affect us, we perceive our own body only insofar as it is affected, we perceive our soul through the idea of an idea of an affection. What we call an ‘object’ is only the effect an object has on our body; what we call ‘me’ is only the idea we have of our own body and our soul insofar as they suffer an effect. The given here appears as the most intimate and vital as well as the most confused relation between our knowledge of bodies, our knowledge of our own body and our knowledge of ourself. (Deleuze, 1990:146).

What seems to be needed then, for our purposes here, is a study of how, in each empirical instance, we can suffer an effect, the conditions of it, and the nature of this effect. In the last sentence quoted above, we identify three steps: (1) other bodies, (2) our own body, and (3) ourselves. I believe it is in this chronological synthesis we can understand how subjectivity is effected. It should firstly be concerned with what other bodies we can have knowledge of; secondly of how this gives us knowledge of our own body; and thirdly how this gives the effect of a “self”. For our purposes and empirical material then, to what extent can it be said that texts on the message board forum be related to affects? Or, do practices on the message board forum function as affections? What would in that case be defined as a body, and what can the texts on the forum tell us about what kind of effect (i.e. subjectivity) is being caused?

In a thread titled “My letter of insight”, the original post is a relatively long “letter” detailing how a relationship has ended and how that person was all this individual lived for; the post goes on to describe how setting up a part time goal helped in a state of depression and self harm; the former partner is this part time goal. I am only briefly summarising the contents of this letter since it not of primary importance for our purposes, but nevertheless serves as a necessary background to what follows:

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29 I say “effected” because subjectivity would, given the definitions above, only be an effect of affects; subjectivity itself, or the subject or a consciousness, cannot, by this philosophy, be understood as an affect.
Now you have gotten to know some of my dark secrets. Perhaps I’ve taken up 10 minutes of your life. These 10 minutes may have meant many different things for you. Or maybe nothing and that’s okay. But I hope that you have had some sort of new, small view of life, if just for a short while. In any case you now know that you can do the same thing as I have done. Write an anonymous letter and send your secrets to someone you don’t know. Sometimes it can feel a little better just to let some stuff out that is weighing down. Things you perhaps don’t dare tell anyone you know. Perhaps you don’t wanna get a response, only a chance to tell. I think you dearly for the time you have spent reading this letter.

There is an accompanying picture to the post under the field “Author”, as well as a name.

There are several responses to this post:

Difficult to write an answer here, but I’ll try: I see it as a privilege to have read your letter. Thank you for your trust. You have a fantastic way of writing and thought provoking insights. Thank you!

Another reads:

I also want to say Thank you for letting me take part of this letter.. It moved something very soft and pretty inside, with that beautiful language, and the strength in you for sharing this true story, and the advice..

The original poster responds:

Just felt that I wanted to share some thoughts. Thanks for the responses :D [smile emoticon]

Two more responses appear:

Just wanted to show that I’ve read and that I also thank you for having read your letter. <3 [heart emoticon]

I have also read it and also want to thank you for sharing <3 [heart emoticon]

This expression of sharing thoughts, a long post of the experiences and feelings of the “body behind the text”, and the subsequent brief responses to this post with the use of emoticons in the shape of hearts and a smiling face, would, by the definitions of what constitutes a body, be considered both effects of bodies (the bodies of subjects, the biological body writing on the keyboard; the body “behind the screen”) as well as themselves bodies since they display the capacity for being affected and creating forces. These posts of texts enter into a material field as well as themselves becoming part of this material field. They display the idea of another body and become our knowledge of other bodies. It has been argued by Buchanan (1997:75) that we can only understand Deleuze’s conception of the body through the Spinozist question of what a body can do, a question that occupies much of Deleuze’s writing on Spinoza; the purpose of this question being to “reconfigure the body as the sum of its capacities” according to Buchanan.

We have to cling to this statement when we consider the body in relation to information technology and the practices that are carried out and materialised as bodies of text on the message board forum.
But it is important to note that a body is only defined by its forces and capacities for being affected by other bodies. If the body of the self harming subject does not have the capacity for being affected, then these bodies of texts are just empty words, and would not be considered bodies; without the force and the capacity to be affected, two unequal forces would not be able to enter into relationship. As an empirical and methodological result of this approach, we can make no assumptions about the nature of the physical/biological body of the subject behind the screen. We can only discuss the message board for itself and what takes place in that space. This is where a functional-assemble hermeneutics interprets the text above as what they do and not what they mean. It is therefore not of interest to discuss the potential meaning of the sentence “Now you have gotten to know some of my dark secrets” and attempt to dig up what these dark secrets might be or the psychological implications of such sentence. Instead, by a functional-assemble hermeneutics, we can understand how this sentence, and indeed the post as a whole, functions with regards to the theoretical question of the body. “Dark secrets” doesn’t mean anything, it functions.

How I come to conclude that affections have occurred, and how the sentences in the posts function rather than project an already given meaning, is solely through the responses given in the thread. The “thanks” that the responses give to the original post I believe create affects, and also speak of affects on behalf of the individual who writes the post. The responses are the effects of the causes that are the affects and forces established in the various relations made between the bodies of text. What I take from this sea of inadequacy in Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, of our condemnation to inadequate ideas of the active forces in the world, is humbleness for the world we are entered into. I believe it is a way to step out of ourselves, to check our subjects at the door and only understand ourselves as mere effects of something larger. We recall: “The body’s active forces make it a self and define the self” (Deleuze, 1983:42).

Brians (2011:134) has attempted to come to a theory of the body in digital field precisely by using forces and affects. But when Brians states that “For Deleuze, these forces have always been ‘material’”, it is difficult to understand this without taking the approach Massumi has taken by discussing the paradoxes of the incorporeal and movement to the materiality of the body. For instance, Brians does not reference Deleuze himself as stating such a claim, but instead relies on Braidotti’s materialist account of Deleuze’s philosophy. As I have tried to show in this section, there is a tendency with such accounts to not concern itself with Deleuze’s emphasis on the parallelism of body and mind, the body and enunciation, and not an entanglement of the two forms. The composition of bodies, the active and reactive forces and affections, later undergo a transformation in Deleuze’s thought. These compositions are given a new name, one which brings the concept of parallelism to work: the concept of the agencement, or the English translation assemblage, is introduced in the collaborative work with Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus. It is this concept that puts a modern spin to Deleuze’s philosophy that

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30 The concepts do not change their meaning however; they are rather carried over to new concepts and incorporated into them. To gloss over Deleuze’s oeuvre for a moment, it is actually quite astounding to see how the meanings of concepts and terms discussed in his earliest writings remain throughout his career. As alluded to earlier and will be detailed in the following pages, Deleuze never strays from his reading of Hume in 1953, and very late in his career in the early 1990s still maintains the important ontological postulation that “relations are external to their terms.” It is quite impossible to consider a break in his publications between different periods of thought, as in Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical periods (although it also can be contested as to how radical this break actually is; but I’m taking it here in its common assumption). There are of course themes and subject matters than can be categorised (history of philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, art), but Deleuze’s thought is remarkably consistent throughout his extremely productive career.
allows us to bring this concept to work when considering information technology, such as the internet, and the performative enunciating acts carried out in that space. This is of concern for the following section.

**To transform II – The Agencement**

There is a discrepancy between the English translation of this concept and the original word in French as used by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. I begin this section by discussing the original term as it is used in the French. This brief passage contains certain theoretical assumptions that will only be explained later on; the reader is therefore asked to be patient when considering, for example, the relationship between forms of content and forms of expression, which will be explained in detail further on.

The French word used by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (or *Mille Plateaux*) is *agencement*, which I will use instead of the English translation “assemblage” (I am however only reading the English translations of all Deleuze and Guattari’s works, and therefore I will stick to the English translation of the words when quoting from these books). As Phillips (2006) notes, the term “assemblage” easily employs itself to evoke something passive, whereas that is not the case in how Deleuze and Guattari use the French term “agencement” as something that has both active and passive aspects (for reasons I will elaborate on in this section). I mean “active” in a *transforming sense*, in that each part connected to the adjacent part is by the very connection creating a relation that is the vital aspect we wish to explore, that also takes into account the affects and forces discussed previously. I will, however, sparsely use the English word “arrangement” for stylistic purposes (to make the text flow more easily with the language I use here), as suggested by Phillips to be a more accurate English term corresponding to the French use of agencement by Deleuze and Guattari. This term also evokes both active and passive senses, which suites the original French term.

I believe it is important to consider some fundamental backgrounds to this concept that first makes its appearance in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). We therefore have to consider that book in relation to its predecessor *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) which deals specifically with a critique of psychoanalysis; Deleuze and Guattari also explicitly say in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the agencement is “fundamentally the unconscious in a person” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:40). Yet on the other hand the concept has a function to the overall composition of bodies in society (ibid:99), and is not merely concerned with the psyche. This can be related to the meaning of a “materialist psychiatry” set out in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983:22-4) against a psychiatry and psychoanalysis that has as its point of departure the Ego and the subject, or as taking a more symbolic approach to understanding the psyche. The agencement and the materialist psychiatry Deleuze and Guattari call “schizoanalysis” is rather a turning away from the subject and the Ego to instead consider the production of the *effect* that is the subject in a social and material milieu. The subject, for Deleuze and Guattari, cannot be considered the source of the production of feelings and thoughts; something other than the subject or the symbolic (e.g. Oedipus) has to be said to produce the unconscious and a sense of self; this is the connections our unconscious makes to the outside, and the productive relationships and capacities to be affected, and the concept of the agencement accounts for this libidinal connectedness.
I would propose that three questions arise from this: (1) why is this relation between the unconscious and bodies/materials in a society of importance, (2) how does this relation work and (3) what does the relation produce? The fundamental aspect to consider, in my view, is that the agencement, as the unconscious, tries to form an ethical relationship between the effect that is the subject and the external world, which essentially would be the world of the “other”. What Deleuze and Guattari have against Freudian psychoanalysis is that they view the unconscious as connected to everything in a production with the outside world, while Freud, as they say, constantly botches any attempt made by the unconscious to connect with the outside world. Deleuze and Guattari (1983:23-4) instead build on the critique of representation and identity that occupied poststructuralism to a large extent during the second half of the 20th century. Psychoanalysis was, according to Deleuze and Guattari, built on a representational thinking that supposed that the conscious of a person was an adequate expression of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis assumed that every expression made by a person could be interpreted to be an expression of an underlying, fundamental structure that resided in the unconscious; this was usually the Oedipus complex. This sort of theory, Deleuze and Guattari (1983:45-8) said, saw the unconscious as something “negative”, that it was always missing some true meaning that could only be inserted by the interpretations of the psychoanalyst; “You see, the pipe is your father”. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari proposed that the unconscious is fundamentally positive in that it produces everything and therefore cannot be interpreted to mean anything in particular besides that which the subject is told to think. Hence Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004:42) stipulation that psychoanalysis botches statements made by individuals.

We are, however, not directly concerned with the aspect of the agencement that deals specifically or exclusively with the unconscious. What is enough for us to understand at this point is that the concept of the agencement is the fundamental building block for the production of subjectivity, not a representation of it. What type of subjectivity that is produced is thus of interest in a study of what agencement such subjectivity is constituted in. It is therefore in terms of the agencement not of interest to speak of object and subject, but instead of multiplicities of lines (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:4), and these lines are best understood as “relations between terms” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006:52). These terms could, for our purposes here, be “the body” and “the computer”. The concept of the agencement has been used when considering this relationship before. David Savat’s (2010) chapter in the anthology *International Handbook on Internet Research* entitled “(Dis)Connected: Deleuze’s Superject and the Internet” provides good grounds to think the agencement, technology and subjectivity together. However, Savat (ibid:434) maintains the arbitrary material distinction between the body as “actual” and the internet as “virtual”, and does not account for the semiotic hermeneutics that Deleuze and Guattari (2004) developed that I believe can help us understand practices of communication by written text on, for example, message board forums. Savat develops a theory of “the superject” consisting of a “virtual existence” in cyberspace. Such use of the concept of agencement re-articulates the Cartesian dualism of cyberutopia, which Brians (2011) has adequately criticised in cyberutopian discourses using Deleuze’s philosophy. We also recall Currier’s (2003:331) study of the body and technology by...

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31 I will return in the third part of this theoretical section to this ethical character of Deleuze’s philosophy. What is crucial to understand is how the other in Deleuze is never the other as another subject, nor an object.
32 I will return to this critique throughout this thesis.
33 “Everything” should be understood as the “psychic object of reality”; desire, Deleuze and Guattari (1983:26-7) is real and has real objects.
34 As I will argue further on, by Deleuze’s ontology of the actual and the virtual, “the body” is as much virtual as “the internet” and the internet as much actual as the body. There are however complexities and paradoxes involved in such a discussion, of which will be of central concern for the third section on transformation.
the concept of the agencement, where she posited that the body does not meet technology in a dualist fashion, but instead are turned into a multiplicity that formed a unique agencement; that both the body and technology are themselves, as terms of the relation, transformed internally, as well as already constituted instead by a multiplicity such that the terms themselves are arbitrary and not essential.

However, considering that Deleuze and Parnet (ibid:41) insist on the fact that terms themselves do not change when entered into a relationship, so too must we consider the biological body of the subject in relation to the computer, the internet, a specific website, etc. It is true that the subject-object distinction is of no importance in the agencement, yet the proper terms of any relation must remain if it is to construct an agencement in the first place (and here the relation is not between subject and object). All these connections and relations are given a specific name by Deleuze and Guattari (2004): the machinic agencement. According to the specific use and context of the concept, it is followed by either “of content” or “of bodies”, and also in a psychoanalytical context as the machinic agencement of desire. This interchangeable use of the concept attributes the same kind of agency to either bodies, content, or desire. I will return to meaning of this further on, but suffice for now to say that the machinic agencement is the overall composition of things that forms the production of worlds; the use of the term “machinic” refers to this sort of production, as for example the desiring-machines that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) speak of concerning the unconscious. However, we have to allow for a broader yet more concrete definition of how an agencement works. The following quote gives us an idea of how the agencement

...necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously (independently of any recapitulation that may be made of it in a scientific or theoretical corpus). There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:25).

Given my discussion above that Deleuze and Parnet (2006:41) insists on the terms of the relation to remain and effectuate an relationship that is now of primary focus of investigation, how is it possible to remain within a conception of “terms” and also speak of a “connection between multiplicities” when bearing a definition of the concept of the agencement? Following Deleuze and Parnet, it is the relation which carries itself off independently of the terms that enter into relationships. What I take from this is that relations are defined between terms in the particular agencement they enter into, but this does not change the terms internally. For the purposes of this thesis, the biological body is not in itself transformed or dissolved or made into the subject of enquiry by its relation to a technology designated “the computer”. Currier (2003) on the other hand, has used Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts to theorise precisely a dissolving of body and technology into a unified agencement that consists of multiplicities instead of terms. Although such an approach certainly is interesting and forms new problems, it is in my view not entirely in keeping with what Deleuze and Guattari (2004:28) say about the primacy of the relation between things:

35 In their discussion of terms, Deleuze and Parnet (2006:41) take the example of a glass and a table. They are quite explicit on the fact that “terms”, here understood as the ideas of the objects glass and table, do not change internally when the relation is altered. They do this to maintain the specific ontological status of the relation for itself; hence my allegory to technology and the biological human body.

36 In the previous section I hinted about how the concept of multiplicity basically forms Deleuze’s conception of the other; we can here see a clear ethical consideration in the concept of the agencement as it fundamentally made up of “multiplicities” and connections.
*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and then back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps the one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.

If we instead shift focus to the relation itself and not the entities that enter into the relation, we can begin to understand what multiplicities actually are, or how Deleuze and Guattari uses this term to build their philosophy. In the relation between “body” and “technology” we are immediately moved away from the body itself to the relation between the body and... and.... and... etc. In other words, relations and multiplicities is how an agencement is created. What then, takes place in the relation, when studied for itself? I believe it is here we should place our focus if we are to study how the subject is both transformed and produced by relations established by connection of multiplicities within an agencement.

It is also here that we would place the concepts of affect and force. Deleuze (1983:40) took from Nietzsche an understanding that any form of body may be defined in terms of the unequal forces it is established as in between. It is important to link these studies together as to avoid a conception of the agencement as something that is “flat” or displaying a symmetrical relation; in fact it is an intense power play between active and reactive forces establishing connections between themselves and by that relation defining bodies. “Multiplicity” would be understood as the relations themselves between bodies, and thus also as forces.

However, and I believe it is at this point that Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy begins to set itself apart and become interesting for our purposes here, the use of language is not considered by Deleuze and Guattari on the same grounds as a material field of bodies in a broad sense of the term. Would language be considered a body? The answer would seem to be no. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) continually and rigorously differentiate between a corporeality of bodies and causes, and an incorporeality of language and effects. We must however recall the critique of a transcendent subject of thought which is not dependent on the material field (as pointed out, it is the very material field in which the unconscious is built upon). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari invoke a reciprocal presupposition between these corporeal and incorporeal fields of reality.

This, I would argue, becomes of greatest importance when considering the internet as practices of mainly written text; how are we to account for both of these field without falling into a false dichotomy of the “real” world and the world “on the internet”, while at the same time accounting for the specifically new practices and conditions for subjectivity by the advent of the internet and social media? It is this aspect of the concept of the agencement that I believe we must turn to, not only in order to discuss the concept in its entirety, but also to empirically account for the productions of subjectivity that new information technologies have brought about.

**The reciprocal separation of the world**

We invoke one dualism only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models. Each time, mental correctives are necessary to undo the dualisms we had no wish to construct but through which we pass. Arrive at the magic
Within the agencement we identify a separation of two dimensions, a *machinic agencement of bodies* and a *collective agencement of enunciation*. But this distinction, although real and of great importance, has a complexity that needs to be investigated further. What Deleuze and Guattari set out to do is not, in my opinion, to arrive at an ontological “monism” where everything would implode in on each other. In the quote above, I would put emphasis on the “necessary enemy [...] through which we pass”. I believe it is on this brink, between two terms of a dualism, where Deleuze finds his vitality, and it is a pressing matter of understanding this dualism as a necessary enemy in today’s technologically infused life of so called mediated social relations; isn’t this an empirical actualisation of this philosophy, the advent of the internet? We will leave the question open for now, but needless to say it does beg of us to theorise about life today in terms of this contradiction; our bodies are becoming mediated, life is “speeding” up, and we use written text to communicate more than ever before. I believe Deleuze’s philosophy through a necessary enemy is poignant for life today. Throughout Deleuze’s works, we encounter this dualism or a “secret dualism hidden in sensible and material bodies themselves” (2004:4).

I will attempt to further this distinction to the digital field of investigation, as well as to map it out in the philosophy of Deleuze. It can be found as a constant theme underpinning his entire enterprise. However, this secret dualism is rarely said of in studies and books published on Deleuze. Besides Currier (2003) already mentioned, Claire Colebrook (2002b:xx) does not mention this relation between the machinic agencement and the collective agencement of enunciation in her guide to “key Deleuzean” terms”. Colebrook does however provide an excellent overview of how language may be understood differently in Deleuze’s philosophy than in structuralism, and indeed how Deleuze is polemically against any form of structuralism (ibid:xii;9;15;19-24;27). Deleuze instead provides an understanding of language as opposed to any *a priori* structure (hence, “language” is instead designated by Deleuze and Guattari as “collective enunciation”). I would extend this exposition of Deleuze’s philosophy in general to the specific concept of the agencement, which continually make a distinction between bodies and enunciation. My wish is to build on the studies of the concept of the agencement which have contributed greatly to an overarching understanding of how it relates to composition of bodies in a society, by focusing on the specific relation between the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation. This, as I will attempt to show, can account for what takes place in online environments, such as a message board on the internet about self harm, when considering it through the philosophy of Deleuze.

Let us consider to the specific wording of the two sides of the agencement, the one a *machinic* agencement of bodies, the other a *collective* agencement of enunciation. Why is the former called “machinic”? This is because it is functioning and producing; it is the forces and affects of bodies that produce things in the world, and this can be related to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) previous theorisation in *Anti-Oedipus* of the unconscious as machinic production of desire. In *A Thousand Plateaus* however, the concept of the agencement can be said to replace that of the desiring-machines; this is how it comes to be productive and “machinic”. In order to understand the dynamic between the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation, we should view it with

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I prefer to use the term “Deleuzian” instead of “Deleuzean”, which Colebrook uses in this instance.
this focus on the unconscious. But the machinic agencement is not only productive of things, bodies, and desire, but also of something that Deleuze and Guattari deem as incorporeal: enunciations or statements. They use the word “enunciation” instead of “language” in order to move away from a linguistic interpretation and structuring of language; according to them, all practices concerning language cannot be located within an underlying universal structure. Instead this practice of enunciation is dependent on the specific circumstance of which it is in; and that circumstance and composition is the agencement. In other words, the machinic agencement is statement-producing, and it is this productive force of the machinic agencement that is relevant for this thesis to consider.

What agencement can be identified as a whole, and of what enunciations are these agencements capable of producing? It is by viewing both sides of the agencement that we can begin to consider the whole. In fact, the coupling of both sides is crucial for Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004:38-43) critique of psychoanalysis, which they argue botches any attempt made by an individual to connect with the outside world. As such, Deleuze and Guattari effectively say that the individual or subject is nothing more than the agencement it enters into;

There are no individual statements, only statement-producing machinic assemblages [...] We can no longer even speak of distinct machines, only of types of interpenetrating multiplicities that at any given moment form a single machinic assemblage [...] Each of us is caught up in an assemblage of this kind, and we reproduce its statements when we think we are speaking in our own name; or rather we speak in our own name when we reproduce its statement. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:40-1).

When considering an empirical field, like an internet message board forum for self harm support, we have to consider the agencement that this field is part of and also creates for itself by its unique connections. It is not the subject or the individual which writes a post on this message board we are concerned with. We are rather concerned with viewing what kind of statements this machinic agencement of different bodies is capable of producing. We ask “What is being uttered here?” Consider the last sentence of the quote above: not only are “we” speaking in a language that is not our individually own, but it is also that “we” are being produced as ourselves when we speak in “another” language (that is, practice any form of collective enunciation). We can see how important enunciation is for Deleuze and Guattari in their philosophy, which urgently needs to accompany studies where they have inspired a materialism where language is implicated in the material world. It is my view that we need to consider this relationship between the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation if we are to understand practices on the internet in particular.

Yet this is a formal distinction (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:75) between a corporeal form, e.g. the biological body of a subject that is sitting by the computer, and an incorporeal form of statements and enunciating practices taking place on a specific website or forum message board. This has nothing to do with the subject as a sole agent producing the statement according to an individual intentionality or desire to express itself. Instead, the corporeal body of the subject is in reciprocal presupposition with what takes place on that particular message board. The subject only speaks in terms of the machinic agencement that is the relation between the body and the message board, as well as between other bodies that connect and come together to speak, not in their own terms, but in terms of the machinic agencement. In other words: to reproduce the statements of the agencement instead of an autonomous subject of enunciation that also produces this particular subject capable of enunciating certain statements, materialising them in bodies of texts on the online message board forum.
I want to caution against an interpretation of this reasoning to mean every person is “taken up” by practices on the internet. Of course, this is not the case and it is clearly evident that every individual person who enters into practice on this message board has its unique life and agencements to bring with it. But what is of interest for this thesis is rather how these agencements that one already brings with oneself to the practices on the message board intermingle with new relations between terms and bodies that are created in the agencement of the message board forum; how are changes between these agencements accounted for?

The distinction between corporeal bodies and incorporeal enunciations is only formal. These forms are called by Deleuze and Guattari (2004:75) forms of content and forms of expression, respectively. It is not a matter, they say, of opposing contents as such with expression as such, because they are always relative one another. When someone expresses something, this expression contains its own relative contents (“I am expressing this...”); this new content that is produced within the expression then has its own relative expression, and so forth. The respective forms of an empirical instances cannot, Deleuze and Guattari say, be thought of as the same thing (e.g. a unified agencement where everything is entangled in each other). They build this distinction of forms on an important critique of representational thinking, in which we would always be able to establish a direct causal relationship between words and things. According to a poststructuralist tradition of a critique of representation (where the most popular figure would be Michel Foucault), the word does not express the content it designates, but instead creates something entirely of its own. This follows from the parallelism discussed in the previous section, where each side has its own conditions where the one cannot be said to adequately express the other (e.g. that the conscious adequately expresses the unconscious). Deleuze and Guattari (2004:74) explain this with the example of Foucault’s study of the prison. We have first the prison as a form of content (that relates to other forms of content such as the school, hospital, etc., and composes a relation of bodies in space). But this form of content is in no way directly signified in, or in correspondence with, the word “prison”. Instead, the form of content establishes entirely different types of words, for example “delinquency” in the case of Foucault’s analysis of the prison in disciplinary. The word “delinquency” now forms the form of expression of the form of content that was the prison, but the two terms neither signify nor are signified by each other. Instead, they are in what Deleuze and Guattari call “reciprocal presupposition” with each other. The question then becomes, how do these two forms function together if they are radically and necessarily separated, yet still presupposing one another? The concept that Deleuze and Guattari construct for this “fitting together” of the two forms is the agencement; “we should never oppose words to things that supposedly correspond to them, nor signifiers to signified that are supposedly in conformity with them. What should be opposed are distinct formalizations, in a state of unstable equilibrium or reciprocal presupposition” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:74). These forms, each on their own, form multiplicities that are now perfectly distinct yet precisely on the line that separates them, yet it is not a distinction between “an interior and exterior, which are always relative, changing, and reversible, but between different types of multiplicities that coexist, interpenetrate, and change places” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:40).

Each enunciation has its corresponding content and expression. Deleuze and Guattari (2004:23) are cautious against viewing the world with such a strict dualism however, without evoking another dualism, ad infinitum, to arrive at a magic “monism” that all would be implicated within. On the other hand, the dualism is real, but, according to Buchanan’s (2000:122) argument, it is purely a relativist
position. This can be found in the fact that every articulation, Deleuze and Guattari (2004:49-50) say, is a double articulation in that each articulation contains both a content (i.e. what the articulation speaks of or contains as an idea, e.g. the urge to harm oneself) and an expression (i.e. how this content is set in motion, how is it articulated and how it functions). However, in relation to the composition of bodies in any given society, the distinction must still remain between bodies and enunciation, or content and expression. It is relative, one could say, in every direction, going from macro to micro level of analysis.

When Deleuze and Guattari are speaking of a “reciprocal presupposition” they are also speaking of this double articulation of every statement. In other words, reciprocal presupposition means that forms of content and forms of expression are relative each other, and that both are produced of what Deleuze and Guattari call double articulation. Here again we can find the hermeneutic programme Buchanan (2000:122-3) suggests links up to the concept of the agencement: the task is to construct agencements of thought (machinic) and of expression and enunciation (collective) that eludes and escapes any form of interpretation that effectively tells the subject what to think and say; in short, obstructing “a clear view of the assemblage, which in reality means, any type of conceptualisation that does not produce the assemblage” (emphasis in original).

When considering our empirical investigation of the body and the internet, the form of content as “the biological body of the subject” and the form of expression as “the enunciations of the subject on the internet” are only relative to that specific relationship, and may change depending on what new relationships are created by the agencements that are established. The website is undoubtedly a form of content itself, as well as the technology that is the computer and the servers that power the internet; what is more, the enunciations and expressions each establish new forms of content and expression relative their relation. Therefore, within the enunciation that is the expression of the body-content of the body-subject and the website, there is also a form of content accompanying the articulated statement appearing on the message board. Often on the message board forum for self harm support, there are enunciations that evoke a certain place or a certain institution. For example, in a thread entitled “The I resisted-thread”, one post tells of the experience of visiting a psychologist,

I was at the psychologist today again. At first I felt uncertain whether I would dare bring up the things I had reacted to. But I took courage and brought it up anyway. But she didn’t think I was weird or strange and she hadn’t even thought that last time either. It became clear that precisely everything she had said had perfectly natural explanations and was not dependent on what she probably thought about me.

It could be said that this post is an articulation, an enunciation; an expression of an individual’s thought, experience, or desire (yet where agency should not be attributed to the individual but with the agencement the individual is part of and comes into being in, as a unique individual). But within this expression there also exists contents. Otherwise any expression (e.g. an articulation, enunciation, or statement) wouldn’t be possible or comprehensible. The content of the post quoted above would seem to be a particular experience of visiting a psychologist. This is what the post is about; i.e. its content. But what an enunciation is about can never be discerned without also considering what the post expresses. We can follow the sentences that tell a story that starts out with uncertainty and anxiousness of visiting a psychologist and ends up with resolving this uncertainty (“she had a perfectly natural explanation”). Within this brief excerpt of a longer post, there is a whole machinic agencement of
bodies and contents; an interaction between two people who intermingle within the institution of clinical psychology, together with the anxiety and uncertainty of expressing oneself in full disclosure. Coupled to this is a form of expression that it is not a representation of the material things evoked in the statement (the uncertainty, the psychologist, or the speaking subject of the post). The content in the post quoted above brings with it entirely new expressions that cannot be found in the contents of the post themselves; the statement on the message board forum for self harm support thus creates new forms of expressions within the larger agencement of which it is part of.

Following Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) concept of the agencement, coupled together with their theorisation of double articulation and reciprocal presupposition between bodies and enunciation, a methodology can be worked out in a respective empirical field. The question is to map the agencement according to the two sides of the agencement. Another thread on the message board that, superficially at least, can serve as an interesting discussion around this reciprocal presupposition of the two forms, is a thread called “I’m standing on the border between two worlds”. One post reads:

I have so much crazy stuff spinning around in my head. It feels like I’m standing with one foot in the healthy world and the other in the sick. One moment I’m so very eager to live, I eat better and hurt myself less and am really fighting. But it doesn’t take long before all the sick thoughts take over and everything falls again. It’s a constant battle within me and I’m constantly balancing on the edge between these worlds and I’m so afraid. Afraid to fall deeper into the darkness, but at the same time I’m so terribly afraid of the healthy, of that which I’m not familiar with. I really want to stay in this safe place that the sick world means to me, but it’s not a life I would want to live. I would want to try a healthy life – but how the hell do you dare to let go? I don’t really know what I wanted to get out of this, I’m just so terribly confused...

We have then in this post alone an entire agencement; but it is also, I would insist, first and foremost an expression in itself. I make this conclusion based on the entirety of the agencement that forms the function of the agencement. The intended function of the agencement, as the website and organisation that runs it expresses, is for individuals who find themselves in states of self harm to share thoughts on a message board in order to help themselves and each other. The post above surely contains its own contents, e.g. pending between a sick world and a healthy world, of a life worth living, the fear of an unknown world even if this world is supposed to be “healthier”.

But the last sentence is telling of the function of the agencement of the message board forum: not knowing what good it will do to write this on the message board, but doing it anyway (“I’m just so terribly confused…”). Two responses are given to this post and the first poster answers back and give thanks for the uplifting comments. This expression, coupled with the content in the statement above, creates a relation to the body of the subject writing the post. There is immediately a multiplicity formed between the subject and the expressions appearing on the message board. Within the theoretical framework it can be said that the subject disappears or is rather caught up in this machinic agencement that prompts that last sentence, “I don’t really know what I wanted to get out of this”. And it is this relation between the body and the expression that forms the agencement that produces statements such as this post above.

At this point, I believe it to be fruitful to return to the philosophy of Deleuze to further discuss the implications for reasoning about empirical material in the way I have done above. In his work The
Logic of Sense, prior to the collaboration with Guattari, I would argue that Deleuze (2004:7-13;29-31;72-6;89;126-9;141-3;150) is largely occupied with this separation of what he called corporeal causes and incorporeal effects. Although James Williams (2008) would emphasise that The Logic of Sense is more extensively occupied by the concept of “the Event” (as something incorporeal), I would argue that this concept is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between corporeality and incorporeality. To begin with, Deleuze (2004:7) takes his departure in Stoicism, which, he says, were the first to think of such a distinction between corporeal causes and incorporeal effects. Bodies, as in the machinic agencement of bodies, are causes of one another, causes for other bodies; “There are no causes and effects among bodies” (ibid). They are however causes of effects, but these effects are not bodies themselves but of an incorporeal nature. It is this separation that is of vital importance if we are to understand what happens in and to the body; it would be of it, but not it.

Yet, what is more intimate or essential to bodies than events such as growing, becoming smaller,\textsuperscript{38} or being cut\textsuperscript{39}? What do the Stoics mean when they contrast the thickness of bodies with these incorporeal events which would play only at the surface, like a mist over the prairie (even less than a mist, since a mist is after all a body)? Mixtures are in bodies, and in the depth of bodies: a body penetrates another and coexists with it in all of its parts, like a drop of wine in the ocean, or fire in iron. One body withdraws from another, like liquid from a vase. Mixtures in general determine the quantitative and qualitative states of affairs: the dimensions of an ensemble\textsuperscript{40} – the red of iron, the green of a tree. But what we mean by “to grow,” “to diminish,” “to become red,” “to become green,” “to cut,” and “to be cut,” etc., is something entirely different. These are no longer states of affairs – mixtures deep inside bodies – but incorporeal events at the surface which are the result of these mixtures (Deleuze, 2004:8).

How can we relate this to our empirical field of investigation? Considering a mixture of bodies that is sitting in front of a computer and writing about experiences of self harm. What happens in this mixture (to resist cutting oneself, for example) is not a corporeal mixture itself but rather an incorporeal event that is happening to and in bodies. To cut, or not to cut, as is evident in the “I resisted-thread” on the message board in question, becomes an incorporeal event rather a corporeal mixture. Against previous research which has focused on the specific corporeal aspect of practices on the internet, I believe there is a consistency between Deleuze’s philosophy and an emphasis on the separateness and specificity of the medium that is practices of written text on the internet and the corporeality that is the biological body of the subject sitting in front of a computer screen. In this empirical example as well as a focus on this aspect in Deleuze’s philosophy, takes us rather away from what previously has been

\textsuperscript{38} Deleuze begins The Logic of Sense (2004:3) by discussing the paradoxes of Lewis Carroll’s Alice, specifically when Alice finds herself “growing”. Deleuze writes, ‘When I say “Alice becomes larger,” I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes.’ Alice becomes smaller in the act of saying that she becomes larger; the event as a verb, following Deleuze’s reasoning here, is a paradox that brings both the past (she was smaller) and future (she becomes larger) together in a present that is no longer fixed.

\textsuperscript{39} Knife cutting flesh is an example Deleuze takes from Stoicism, of which he was greatly influenced by, particularly in The Logic of Sense. It also finds itself quite appropriate an example for the topic of self harm.

\textsuperscript{40} The French word used by Deleuze is “ensemble”, so the English translation is correct in that sense. However, I would argue for a connection between this word and the concept of the “agencement” that Deleuze creates together with Guattari. This would be the machinic agencement, or ensemble, of bodies. Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, sometimes use both “agencement” and “ensemble” for the same connotation.
done in studies on the body and information technology (see Braidotti, 2006b; Brians, 2011; Brophy, 2010; Currier, 2003). Language is granted an important role for Deleuze (2004:11) in relation to bodies and life itself: “it is the task of language both to establish limits and to go beyond them.” It would therefore matter greatly to consider the specific incorporeal events that can be identified in online environments, instead of stopping the analysis of a mere mixture of bodies (even though this mixture is of great importance). We recall that the machinic agencement is statement producing, but that the statements form a different agencement or another side in and of an entire agencement.

It is therefore not of interest to establish a distinction of an interior message board forum on the internet and an exterior world outside of the message board. Instead, and Currier (2003) would be an inspiration for such a discussion, an agencement would consider multiplicities from many different milieus and relations between terms, that then in turn would form the agencement of the message board forum. That is also why the flesh has a persistence even in practices “on the internet”, as Brians (2011) has argued convincingly for a use of Deleuze’s philosophy when considering the body and information technology.

However, the flesh must be considered in relation to the agencement it is entered into and which defines it when the body is engaged in practices of written text on a message board forum. We must consider the relations between forms of content and forms of expression, their relative and reciprocal presuppositions, as well as the collective agencement of enunciation that the machinic agencement would produce in that particular circumstance. We recall our discussion earlier on how texts on the message board could be considered bodies in terms of forces and affects. I would maintain that the text itself is not to be confused with “enunciation”, or the incorporeal form. A text has become a body through the practice of enunciation that is not itself corporeal, incorporeal enunciation has become materialised in a body of text. On the message board forum about self harm support, many enunciations are produced by the agencement of bodies, which are then materialised into bodies of text appearing on the screen. These texts now have forces which in turn will define new bodies entering into this agencement (e.g. the body of “self harm”, or body of support, etc.). I wish to relate this discussion of bodies as forces to the double articulation of every statement/enunciation on the message board. The methodological question becomes: what is the content with its corresponding expression within the enunciation that has now become materialised in a body of text? I would argue from this, that the content of a text also can produce new forms of enunciation. For example, where would we identify the two forms of content and expression respectively in this quote:

I can feel it is difficult to wear short sleeves because of the scars. I’m so afraid of what people might think. Because it is warm now I’ve started wearing short sleeved. My rabbit who lives indoors licks me from time to time and earlier today when she licked me when wearing short sleeves I thought that she probably wouldn’t lick me on the arm if she knew what I looked like (as if a rabbit would care [emoticon]) Of course she licked me anyway. She didn’t ask what I had done. She didn’t treat me any different in any way. She just polished and spread love over an area that I myself had punished. It was so beautiful. [heart emoticon]

The content of this quote would be the story that tells us something about the specific physicality, the actors, and the place; each of these contents is connected, forming what you would call a “synthesis”, using a Deleuzian terminology. The scars on the arm are connected to short sleeved shirts that is connected to the warm weather, which is in turn connected to a fear of judgement from other people
when the scars are exposed by the short sleeved shirt; this fear is connected to the rabbit which
displays no judgment and is exchanged for human contact; this is connected to an intimate act between
the author of the post and the supposed rabbit. This forms the synthesis of content of the post.

By stating that this synthesising approach is in keeping with Deleuzian terminology, it must also be
stated that this is part of my own methodological approach that is in this case inspired by Deleuze and
Guattari’s (1983) account of how the unconscious functions as a productive machine by forming
“syntheses”; again, I do not intend to make a parallel between my methodology towards an empirical
material and Deleuze and Guattari’s desiring-machines and body without organs, but rather view it as
an inspiration for how to think about “bodies” and “content” following their productive nature by
forming syntheses.

I connect the contents in the post together as a synthesis because it is the whole that forms the
corresponding expression of the post, or rather the parts of the content which can be synthesised into a
whole of expression. The expression of the post would seem to be a dislike for human beings in favour
of an animal who doesn’t ask question; “people” is connected with a form of judgment that the rabbit
does not express; instead, the rabbit expresses love in its inability to form judgment and “care” about
the scars. Within two days after it was first posted, the post receives three responses, all very short.
“How nice [heart emoticon],” “Animals are wonderful!” and the last one only consisting of a “[heart
emoticon]”. There is, in other words, a whole machinery of bodies and contents productive of certain
statements and expressions. Within these statements then are double articulations with respective
contents and expressions. We have, it seems, expression as the form that can give bodies in the
agencement motion and new direction. Just by the specific nature of practices on the internet where the
body is not given in interaction there is a specific agencement productive of certain statements. A
statement such as the one above speaks for the agencement, in keeping with the philosophy of Deleuze
and Guattari, rather than an individual experience.

But mustn’t expressions however be allowed to transform bodies in turn? Up to this point, we have
discussed how bodies are productive of statements with corresponding contents and expressions, and
throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s works there seem to be a certain priority of expression over
content; that it is the expression which sets bodies in motion and allows them to be transformed.
Indeed, it has been my intention to produce this kind of philosophical understanding of this empirical
field; we have to understand how bodies can be transformed by something other than bodies
themselves. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) created a concept to complement this machinic production of
statements and collective agencement of enunciation. This concept concerns a certain power of
incorporeal forms that will insert itself directly into bodies (ibid:90), transforming them and their
subject, ordering the bodies anew, allowing for new connections to be made between terms and
multiplicities to be drawn, creating new statement producing machinic agencements. This is precisely
what a reciprocal presupposition would entail: a transformation on both sides, penetrating each other
but never falling into each other. We can never understand a machinic agencement of relations of
bodies and what they produce without also considering what incorporeal transformations are also
affecting these bodies in new and ethical ways.
Incorporeal transformations

One of the most central concepts and aspects of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) is their insistence on the separation of that which is corporeal and that which is incorporeal, while still remaining within a parallelism between mind and body instead of a transcendentalism following Descartes; this also build on a fundamental critique of representation, which is one of central characteristics of poststructuralism. The way they distinguish corporeal things, “bodies” with incorporeal effects and transformations seems to us suite our technologically infused everyday life. We can follow Braidotti (2006b) in her emphasis on the affects of the body in relation to these technologies, and other posthumanist approaches arguing that the body is indeed implicated and affected by information technologies. I have, however, tried to argue that we also have to account for the “incorporealities” that can be said to take place and be produced by these new agencements of bodies with technology. Again, Colebrook (2002a:60) gives a clear account of Deleuze’s concept of incorporeal “sense”

41 coupled to actual bodies. She says: “Sense expresses not what something actually is but its power to become [...] Bodies do not just join together in causal sequences that can be mapped out in advance, for the becoming of sense produces whole new lines of becoming”.

If we follow this to our specific empirical investigation, the first of distinction to be made is obviously that between the corporeal, biological and physical body of the individual sitting by the computer, and the “incorporeal spaces” that are mediated by servers globally that this computer can connect to. But this first distinction is only relative this specific relation; it would be a mistake to think of the spaces on the internet as strictly incorporeal, or even “virtual”; that would lead into a discourse on cyber-utopia which according to Brians (2011) only would reinforce a Cartesian subjectivity. On the other hand, Johansson (2010) has shown that it is precisely because the body is invisible to others in online interaction that the internet and mediated communication on message board forums produce new conditions for subjectivity. I would argue that these new conditions for communication also produce new forms of statements, as I have attempted to show in the discussion above. These statements in turn must be able to affect bodies in turn; how is this reciprocal presupposition accounted for? This is what Deleuze and Guattari themselves described as one of the characteristic distinctions to made within any given agencement, and the nature of the two sides:

Bodies have an age, they mature and grow old; but majority, retirement, any given age category, are incorporeal transformations that are immediately attributed to bodies in particular societies. “You are no longer a child”: this statement concerns an incorporeal transformation, even if it applies to bodies and inserts itself into their actions and passions. The incorporeal transformation is recognizable by its instantaneousness, its immediacy, by the simultaneity of the statement expressing the transformation and the effect the transformation produces (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:89).

The separation that Deleuze and Guattari make between forms of content and forms of expression, related to the concept of agencement, relies on their use of the terms “corporeal” for the machinic agencement, and “incorporeal” for the collective agencement of enunciation. Indeed, this is how they characterise an agencement: “in a social field we distinguish the set of corporeal modifications and the

41 The concept of sense is one of the most central to Deleuze (2004) understanding of the power of language and what he calls “the virtual”. I will go into detail on the virtual further on, but suffice it to say that Deleuze’s understanding of what makes “sense” to us necessarily has a virtual dimension that does not refer to the actual thing itself. Unfortunately, I will not go into detail on Deleuze’s conception of sense, suffice it bear to mention his philosophy of the incorporeal.
set of incorporeal transformations” (2004:95). Again, the Stoic example is given of knife cutting flesh, which in a superficial way relates to our problem concerning the subjectivity of self harm:

When knife cuts flesh, when food or poison spreads through the body, when a drop of wine falls into water, there is an intermingling of bodies; but the statements, “The knife is cutting the flesh,” “I am eating,” “The water is turning red,” expresses incorporeal transformations of an entirely different nature (ibid; emphasis in original).

If we consider this quote closely we can begin to understand the implications of applying the concept of the agencement to empirical research. We first have to distinguish the intermingling of bodies within the agencement. In terms of our empirical material in this thesis, that intermingling would be all the human biological bodies sitting by a computer, connected via servers on the internet, the website on the internet that is the message board forum for self harm support. By the functions of information technologies considered in a larger agencement, the “subject of self harm” is also one of the bodies in the intermingling of the agencement and brings with it many more bodies and is immediately functioning within the agencement of the message board forum. These bodies would then be: the particular biological body of the self harming person that has scars on it, usually on the arms, the tools used to inflict this pain, the everyday life of this individual like visits to the hospital, dealing with work and family relationships. Of course, I cannot make any assumptions as to the truthfulness of the empirical material I have generated from the message board; I can only identify what is present in these texts. But the statements, I would argue with the concept of incorporeal transformations, nevertheless have a certain power within the agencement that is producing the subjectivity of self harm, or a process of coming out of a state of self harm.

We can then relate this reasoning to our empirical examples on the message board forum of self harm support. However, the posts made are often written in past tense, and not in the exact moment as the examples Deleuze and Guattari give to the status of incorporeal transformation (the instantaneous moment of deciding whether or not you are a child, for example). Rather than “this is happening now” (e.g. “I am cutting myself now”), there will often be accounts of “this happened then” (e.g. “I cut myself yesterday” or “I resisted cutting myself”). This is precisely why Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy can shed new light on what takes place in discussions on the internet: the statement is always an instantaneous incorporeal event. Given the asynchronous nature of internet communication, this instantaneousness becomes a multiplicity itself: it happens as a person writes it; it happens as another person reads it; and the cycle is multiplied by each person entered into this particular agencement. The past tenses of the statements have always an instantaneous effect no matter their past tense; they are always a telling now, a multiplication of worlds.

Felt like shit last night, and it was really close that something went wrong but I really didn’t wanna do something stupid so before it went too far I called the mobile team and they came and picked me up, I slept one night in the psych ward and was released this morning, rested and harm free. And yes, I feel much better today!

There are in these instances incorporeal transformations occurring by the very act of writing these accounts of resistance against the “urge” to hurt oneself. Writing that last short sentence for instance, expresses an incorporeal transformation of a subjectivity of self harm that is in transformation from a state of “shit” to a state of “feeling better”. A subjectivity of self harm on the way to recovery would in
this theory be understood as incorporeal transformations rather than a strict corporeal production; this is made possible by the agencement that is the message board forum of self harm support, which presupposes the relation between the terms “body” and “technology”.

In terms of corporeality, the scars of the cuts are difficult to get rid of physically, something that is expressed in threads which deal with other people asking questions about the scars on the arms of a person. One thread called “Scars for life” deals with this problematic relationship with other people. One post writes extensively about this, how children will often ask questions about the scars, and how this is constant reminder of how the scars will never completely disappear:

For some days now I have been alternately angry, sad and frustrated that I am sitting here, 23 years old with scarred arms that I will never be rid of. As a lost 13-year old I was after more and more scars all the time, and didn’t really care that they would exist for the rest of my life. I am not ashamed of my scars, I have gotten through something really rough and I’m glad for that. But it is the thing in itself, to have them there as a constant reminder of where I have been. I probably wouldn’t make this journey undone, but sometimes I wish that I could wear tops like everybody else without being stared at and sometimes even questioned. I didn’t really have any purpose with this post, I just wanted to get some frustration out of me.

Considering that last sentence, it can be said to be telling of the functions of the agencement that bodies are entered into and which produces certain forms of statements. It often comes up in posts that explicitly states that there is no “real reason” for writing this particular post, but rather “just to write something”, to express something, no matter what it “means”. The quote above expresses that the scars themselves will never go away and that some other kind of transformation is needed to come out of the depressive state of self harm. The scars remain as reminders of past times where a certain age is called upon in the post; a past time that is always corporeal.

To have reached the age of 23, an aging of bodies, a corporeal intermingling, also comes with it an incorporeal transformation that is the coming to terms with the corporeal actions and passions ten years ago. The act of writing such a statement is always an instantaneous incorporeal event that transforms the body of the subject. As Deleuze and Guattari (2004:95-6) insist on statements not being representations of bodies but rather attributed to them, it is a question of this statement quoted above to intervene in the body that is the corporeality of the subjectivity of self harm; it is rather a question of an act of “coming to terms with past self harm” rather than the quality of self harm or the quality of the scars, which would remain perfectly corporeal on their own terms.

What is important to note here is that Deleuze and Guattari move away from a parallelism between the two forms. There is instead a reciprocal presupposition between the forms, but this, they say, is not a parallelism where what happens in one form also happens in the other. This would go against Deleuze’s Spinozist understanding of mind and body; but perhaps on the other hand it also doesn’t go strictly against it since this does not apply to an experience or a human condition, but rather to a social field:

The independence of the form of expressions and the form of content is not the basis for a parallelism between them or a representation of one by the other, but on the contrary a parcelling of the two, a manner in which expressions are inserted into contents, in which we ceaselessly jump
from one register to another, in which signs are at work in things themselves just as things extent into or are deployed through signs. An assemblage of enunciation does not speak “of” things; it speaks on the same level as states of things and states of content (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:96).

It seems to me as if though Deleuze and Guattari are not talking about verbs or statements made by individuals about themselves, as in the case of the material generated here, but rather of a practice of assigning attributes to individuals by some other, higher authority. An incorporeal transformation, they tell us, is recognised by its instantaneousness, it happens at the moment one enunciates it; but surely this instantaneousness must be reliant on an authority.

Could we turn this philosophical argument to be equally relevant when a subject writes about itself in a similar manner; “I did not hurt myself,” “I am no longer worried,” “I’ve come to terms with,” etc.? From this I would propose that what should be studied empirically is the expressed of the statement, as it is the expression which is the incorporeal transformation, and not necessarily the contents of the statement itself. When a post states, for example, that “I wanted to, but I didn’t” we have to look at what such a statement expresses, and into which bodies it is inserted and attributed. We should also consider what Deleuze and Guattari (2004:89) called “category” in regards to bodies that grow old. This would seem familiar to a social constructionist approach. In such a way, we would only be inclined as to consider the category an individual would belong to; “identity” as it were. In my investigation it would certainly be the category of “self harm” (as to the biological bodies sitting behind the computer screens writing the posts on the forum, I have no empirical access to their age category). But there is no art in simply identifying such a category; it is already given. What is interesting for us however, in keeping with a Deleuzian approach, is to consider the transformation for itself and how any given category is attributed to bodies that then in turn can be set in motion. I find legitimacy for my insistence on the word “transformation” in this regard, and also when Deleuze and Guattari (2004:91) specifically state that this can be a form of “transformational research”.

The ethical importance I would argue in the use of the concept of the agencement is that it forms a connection between language and the outside, instead of confiding to a set of rules, morals, or constants to be applied to each situation (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:90). An agencement is instead a situational account of enunciation, where each statement (for example, “I love you”) is differently expressed in different situations, and varies according to each situation. “I cut myself” is both an immediate incorporeal transformation of turning the subject into a subject of self harm as well as an intervening in the composition of bodies in that a physical cut is made on the body of the subject, or perhaps it is apprehended (ibid:95-6); in any given corporeal outcome there is an incorporeal transformation taking place. When, for example, threads on the message board forum express a certain resistance against the urge to cut one’s body, incorporeal transformations can be seen to take place. But this time, unlike the example Deleuze and Guattari take, the transformation is not coming from an outside source (a judge, or a doctor), but rather from the individuals themselves. This begs the question: when is the incorporeal transformation taking place, and can we observe it? In a thread started before the timeframe for the gathering of material for this thesis, responses are posted within the timeframe which describe how one resisted harming oneself. The posts don’t have the characteristics of direct “answers” to someone else’s question, but rather speak of their own problems;
I had it really rough last Friday. I had been to the psychologist and when I left I was struck by anxiety. I thought “is life going to be like this, I can’t take it, just as good that I give up, I’m just disturbed anyway” and so on. But instead of hurting myself I decided to start writing.

Or in another response appearing ten days later:

I’ve been feeling like shit lately and really wanting to hurt myself, but instead I’ve watched “Friends”, listened to music, hung out with friends and before I was out for a walk and had a lot of anxiety but then I tried to find as many signs of spring as possible. After a while the anxiety let go, and it felt so heavenly.

I believe that we have to attribute the act of writing posts like these the status of incorporeal transformations. The question is then, how do they function? The “resistance” to harm oneself has already taking place, so what purpose do posts like these fulfil? It would be wrong to attribute such purpose to a subject or individual person however, and should instead be attributed to the broader agencement. The quote above seems to function in terms of distractions, of turning away from oneself, of “doing things”. But then, the subject seems to be coming back to itself to write this post. What the post above seems to be expressing is “I’ve done this, I’ve done that, instead of hurting myself”.

The concept of incorporeal transformations also seems to suggest a certain power of the incorporeal over the corporeal. It inserts itself and intervenes in bodies. What is more, this concept can also be related to that of force, from Deleuze’s (1983) discussion of what defines a body following Nietzsche, in that it intervenes in bodies in such a radical way that it is this incorporeal transformations that sets up the composition of bodies in an agencement: “It is always by means of something incorporeal that a body separates and distinguishes itself from another.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:119). We have then, first the capacities of bodies to be affected and the unequal relation between forces which define any given body; both the “immaterial” body of self harm, as well as the corporeal body of the subject which would find itself cutting its own flesh. If the body of a subject is entered into the agencement that is the message board forum of self harm support, then this body is re-defined by terms of the incorporeal transformations that intervene in the body.

An incorporeal transformation can be related to the double articulation of the statement. That is, an incorporeal transformation sets both content and expression in motion, it makes them move in certain ways. The subject come to be defined by a certain attribute, for example “a self harmer”, is an incorporeal transformation, and orders both the mind of depression and the body of the cuts in certain ways and directions; and when considering the specific message board forum on support for self harm, there are incorporeal transformations taking place in that specific agencement which transforms the subjectivity of self harm and sets it on a path to salvation.

However, this is only a theoretical discussion and I do not intent to make any assumptions about the individual persons who physically write the posts appearing on the forum. But we cannot forget the positive power of incorporeal transformations. What happens when we start moving the limit of life? Then we can no longer be said to be defined as subjects of this or that attribute, but rather as a multiplicity of lines between relations in an agencement, and “we” are produced both by these corporeal relations as well as by the statements we enunciate within this agencement. These statements
and incorporeal transformations will make us shift the limit of life around and turn ourselves toward new directions. This is the positive power of incorporeal transformations:

An incorporeal transformation is still attributed to bodies, but it is now a passage to the limit: that is the only way, not to eliminate death, but to reduce it or make it a variation itself. This movement pushes language to its own limits, while bodies are simultaneously caught up in a movement of metamorphosis of their contents or a process of exhaustion causing them to reach or overstep the limit of their figures (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:120).

Where do we find ourselves in terms of “reality”? How are we to understand the body, the internet and the specific types of enunciations that the agencement makes possible? How is subjectivity transformed and produced in all this, how can the body be transformed by practices that are seemingly missing the body? The purpose was to produce a theory on bodily transformation despite the fact that interaction and practices on the internet are seemingly incorporeal; I do not experience the body of the other I communicate with; I do not experience its corporeal immediacy. Should we instead find it in the idea of body of the other, or the ideas of affection, as Deleuze (2004:146) has proposed? Don’t such ideas then remain just ideas never to be actualised or materialised into a corporeal transformation?

To understand what Deleuze and Guattari call an incorporeal transformation that intervenes in bodies, I believe it is fruitful to return to Deleuze’s discussion on the body in Nietzsche and Spinoza; in other words, as affect and force; as movement (Massumi, 2002). But it is also fruitful to remind ourselves of the synthesis (not representation or correspondence) between words and things, and Deleuze and Guattari’s formidable account of Foucault’s studies in this field. The question is not whether the statements or words on the message board forum correspond to an actual physical act or not, what is important is what these enunciating practices express and produce all of their own; it is this that will reveal the incorporeal transformations that can intervene in bodies in an agencement. But this begs the question of how to locate the body of the individual who finds itself in a practice of self harm. We have to bring it “out” of its materiality to see what sets it in motion, of what movements it is capable of, and to what extent it is capable of being affected by other bodies, as well as its capacity to affect other bodies. In order to understand this theoretically, I believe we have to turn to the power of expression, how it functions, and how on what ontological grounds it is produced.

To transform III – Expressing other-worlds and the ethics of actual-virtual syntheses

This section will map out Deleuze’s ontology of the actual and the virtual as well as the ethical aspect of the concept of expression, as laid out in Difference and Repetition. This will be done in relation to the forgoing discussion on the separation of content and expression, of corporeal causes and incorporeal effects (and transformations). As has become apparent in my discussion thus far, a certain emphasis has been placed on expression in relation to content. Expression was then linked to the concept of incorporeal transformations, and its power to “intervene” and “insert” itself in bodies. However, in this section I will attempt to show how expression, or the incorporeal, will always be dependent on its content, and also strengthen the reciprocal presupposition between the corporeal and the incorporeal. We have seen how this distinction is carried over to the concept of the agencement
laid out in *A Thousand Plateaus* in terms of the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation. I will here attempt to map out the concepts of the actual and the virtual in relation to this previous distinction, where it would seem as though the actual would be mapped to corporeal causes and the virtual to incorporeal effects. The answer to this question will be left open however, since I aim to investigate the *problem* of actual-virtual syntheses\(^42\), which would complicate both corporeal and incorporeal aspects of reality, instead of being necessarily placed on either side of that distinction.

To begin with, we should follow Deleuze’s (1994:206-9) account of the virtual as opposed to the actual and not opposed to the real; the virtual is as real as the actual, they are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, Deleuze says (ibid:209), every object is double in that it contains both an actual side, what it “is”, as well as a virtual side which expresses something more or other than what the actual thing appears to be. To begin to understand this divide, we must deal with the concept and importance of “difference” within this ontology, and the two processes of differenciation and differenciation of which reality is made (ibid:207):

> We call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differenciation; we call the actualisation of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differenciation. It is always in relation to a differenciated problem or to the differenciated conditions of a problem that a differenciation of species and parts is carried out, as though it corresponded to the cases of solution to the problem. It is always a problematic field which conditions a differenciation within the milieu in which it is incarnated.

In this quote we have “the Idea” which has a “virtual content”. It would therefore be difficult to simply map out the virtual to be the equivalent of “expression” since the virtual certainly has its own content in an idea, even though we will see that the virtual has powers of expression that will extend over that of content. The virtual then, contrary to discourses on cyberutopia (Brians, 2011; Marks, 2006) is not an undifferentiated or undetermined field of infinite possibilities. It is rather quite the opposite. Deleuze is extremely specific on this point: “far from being undetermined, the virtual is completely determined” (ibid:209). The process of actualisation, or differenciation, which depends on the differenciated and determined virtual content\(^43\), is therefore built on a very strict and powerful structure: “The reality of the virtual is structure” (ibid). Every object is double in its image as both the actual material “thing” (a rock, for example) and the virtual content of the idea (e.g. “hardness”, or the expression of everything that is hard) that has become actualised into the thing itself, i.e. the hardness of the rock we observe empirically. James Williams (2003:7) has presented this kind of understanding of Deleuze’s process of “individuation”, and does tend, however, to link the virtual to the problem of expression: “though actual things may fall into categories such species, Deleuze claims that, as individuals, they must also be thought of as expressions of virtual intensities and ideas” (ibid:9). In my understanding however, I would want to distinguish expression from the virtual, but only insofar as

\(^42\) Again, I am here inspired by a Deleuzian terminology in this instance, whereas Deleuze never called the relation between the actual and the virtual a “synthesis” per say. Instead, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze talks about syntheses of time in relation to the concept of repetition and the unconscious faculties of mind, which appear again in *The Logic of Sense* as well as in *Anti-Oedipus*, albeit in modified forms.

\(^43\) As in any idea you can imagine; the virtual is therefore conscious. Deleuze and Guattari take the idea of the Oedipus complex. For our purposes here, the idea would be related to self harm and practices on the internet.
the two terms remain in a reciprocal relation to one another; we have to distinguish between *that which expresses and becomes the expression*, and *the virtual world that is the expressed*.

We can now begin to understand not only the general ontology for a Deleuzian approach to reality and his philosophy of becoming (although I have opted for transformation), but also its profoundly ethical implications. If the virtual is fully determined in expression, this would seem to be equivalent to Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) concept of incorporeal transformations. The ethical implications of the fully determined nature of the virtual also finds itself the most obvious example in *Anti-Oedipus*, where Deleuze and Guattari (1983:129) specifically state that “it is the Oedipus complex that is the virtual”. The unconscious, which Deleuze and Guattari view as completely undifferentiated, absolutely positive and as producing the actual reality that the subject finds itself in (ibid:129). The conscious, therefore, must be the virtual, and it is here the Oedipus complex is located; as in the *virtual content* of an Idea. If, then, Deleuze’s ontology goes from the virtual to the actual, it is the Oedipus complex (taken as an empirical example) that *actualises* itself in the unconscious through the agencements of Freudian psychoanalysis (ibid); it is therefore very real. We have then, two reciprocal dimensions:

1. The (unconscious) machinic agencement produces statements (actual).
2. The statements insert themselves back in the machinic agencements insofar as they are attributed to them and given the status of incorporeal transformations by the relations of the actual production (virtual).

The actual only produces that which the virtual allows it to produce, and the virtual is determined by the actual productions or circumstances. It is, in my reading, rather the actual field that is the undifferentiated and absolutely positive in that it can be transformed into anything, to make utter any statement. It is the virtual that is the differentiated that inserts itself into the process of actualisation, which again produces a new differentiated actual thing. It would seem as though the virtual is a form of incorporeal transformation, and would be attributed to the forces of the body, following Massumi (2002), at work in defining, in this case, the body of self harm. This body can be understood as having a double-image: one actual (with scars on the individual’s biological, physical body) and the other virtual (expressing all the other bodies of self harm; the identity of self harm as it relates to an external social field).

The question then becomes what kind of body is expressed in a material field (the message board forum on the internet) that is not inhabited by the direct experience of other bodies but instead of bodies of text? In order to investigate this, we have to look at the specific function of the agencement that is the message board forum for self harm support. There seems to be an entirely different and new body created on the message board forum; something that is not the biological body itself nor the physical cuts on the arms of individuals. Instead, these cuts are sidestepped by uplifting comments and support for each other. This very fact, that it is not the biological body of the subject which inhabits this material field, creates a torsion between these two types of bodies. For example, in one thread created a few days before the gathering of material for this thesis, a response appears nearly 20 days after, within the empirical timeframe, containing only an heart emoticon; another response also appears two days later asking “How are you now?” also with a heart emoticon. The original poster replies “Well, not so good... I’m fighting... I think...” The body created on the message board forum must be affected by the other bodies as well as the idea of the body of the others on the forum for it to be transformed, incorporeally. The agencement of the message board forum cannot tell us anything
about this actual relationship between what the subject who writes on the internet and what the subject does outside of these practices. What it can tell us, on the other hand, is precisely what kind of practices of written text that are created in that particular agencement; and this agencement has to, at least theoretically and hypothetically, concern a relationship between biological bodies and enunciation.

I am trying to avoid a discourse in which the virtual would be attributed directly to the digital field. What I am attempting is instead an understanding of new forms and conditions for both the actual and the virtual by the advent of information technology. The statement on the message board forum then, is at once the actual and the virtual; but the virtual now has different conditions than in previous agencements. Practices that are carried out on the internet are the actualisation of something virtual; but this also produces new forms of virtuality that now is inserted into the physical bodies “behind” the screen, as well as the other bodies caught up in the agencement. Against previous discourses on cyberutopia as Brians (2011) has shown, the virtual is fundamentally not something free and nomadic, or a promise of endless possibilities in a new space; it is on the contrary something extremely fixated and localisable.

This would however go against Brians’ own emphasis on the forces and affects of the body as persistent against the liberating promise of online practices. Instead I would argue for a persistence and fixation of the incorporeal and virtual realm that now finds new expressions in practices on the internet, which in turn inserts itself in bodies and transform them accordingly. This cannot, however, be accomplished without the “persistence of the flesh”, or the virtual dependence on the actual body. Specifically with concern to practice the internet, we are only affected to that degree of which we allow ourselves to be, of which we would allow ourselves to open up to the multiplicities already within us. Everything is produced and determined within an agencement. In our case, the message board forum on the internet for self harm support wouldn’t have its incorporeal transformations without the corporeal affects and forces of the bodies entering into that particular agencement. Therefore we need an ethical understanding of these processes within information technologies, and here I believe Deleuze’s philosophy, as a critique of identity and representation, serves as a good model.

Deleuze’s conception of the Other – Enveloping worlds of expression

That the Other should not, properly speaking, be anyone, neither you nor I, signifies that it is a structure which is implemented only by variable terms in different perceptual worlds – me for you in yours, you for me in mine. It is not even enough to see in the Other a specific or particular structure of the perceptual world in general: in fact, it is a structure which grounds and ensures the overall functioning of this world as a whole [...] In short, it is the Other-structure that ensures individuation within the perceptual world. It is not the I, nor the self: on the contrary, these need this structure in order to be perceived as individualities (Deleuze, 1994:281).

In this brief concluding section I will attempt to show how our problematic relation between the corporeal and incorporeal in terms of practices on the internet can be related to an ethical discussion built on Deleuze’s peculiar conception of the Other. We have already seen the ethical implications of the virtual in the previous section, but I believe it would be fruitful to ground Deleuze’s ethics

44 As in an historical perspective on societies.
concerning the productions of virtual ideas. The question then becomes, how can we build this ethical discussion on our empirical material of texts on a message board forum for self harm support?

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze grounds the Other in a structure which cannot be anything identifiable. This goes against any notion of an image of the Other, as the face or the meeting between subjects that become objects to each other and themselves. Instead, I would argue that Deleuze’s philosophy is of a much more radical claim in that it does away with the interpolation between a subject and an object (1994:259-61) in favour of a process of “enveloping worlds” of which we all enter into, are entered into. This is also that which constitutes our very “psychic systems” in which we experience ourselves as an I or a self. We would therefore, in Deleuzian terms, be nothing more than the structure that is the Other. It would not be considered as a meeting between subjects, but instead *the very constitution of subjects in psychic systems* (Deleuze, 1994:257-61). James Williams (2008:49)
takes a quote from Deleuze to illustrate the importance of the concept of expression in this regard and how it functions to envelop ourselves in worlds which produce our sense of self. I will here quote Deleuze as used by Williams,

> Consider a terrified face (under conditions such that I do not see and do not experience the causes of this terror).\(^{45}\) This face expresses a possible world: the terrifying world. By “expression” we mean, as always, that relation which involves a torsion between an expressor and an expressed such that the expressed does not exist apart from the expressor, even though the expressor relates to it as though to something completely different. By “possible”, therefore, we do not mean any resemblance but that state of the implicated or enveloped in its very heterogeneity with what envelops it: the terrified face does not resemble what terrifies it, it envelops a state of the terrifying world (Deleuze, 1994:260).

Deleuze here puts the word “possible” within quotation marks to indicate that that which we call “possible” does not resemble the cause of this possible world, but something entirely new and different world outside of any conceivable actual option in any given situation. The “possible” in this quote actually means the “virtual”.

However, if we consider our empirical field of the message board forum, we do not even have the privilege of experiencing a terrified face, or any part of a biological body for that matter. We seemingly have no immediate corporeal expression of the other to be enveloped in. Instead what we have are bodies of text on the message board forum. Not only does the body in this case not resemble that which causes it to be a certain way, but within practices on the internet the body of the text does not even resemble that of which it speaks nor the expressions it gives off. The Other world is always expressing something more than the meagre simplifications that are our conscious understandings of the other’s body. In other words: more than the simple cause and effect relationships we can establish in actual things; the virtuality in the actual, what the actual expresses, cannot be found in other actual things since they are, we recall, radically separated from the virtual (Williams, 2003:7-9). These expressions, in Deleuze’s words, are what make up the psychic systems in which we may find a conscious subject, an I or self: “In every psychic system, the Other thus functions as a centre of enwinding, envelopment or implication” (Deleuze, 1994:261). If something expresses, an anatomical

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\(^{45}\) One cannot help but assume that Deleuze is referring to *The Scream* by Edvard Munch. The reference is made particularly interesting because of the painting being wildly regarded as launching the expressionist movement in art. It should also be noted that the example of the face is just an example, and not the primary condition or image of the Other as such. Deleuze maintained a problematic relation to the face throughout his career.
piece of a human body for example, that expressions also leads us out of an illusion of our fixed selves. Even more fundamental than that: the Other is our world within us, and the very constitution of ourselves. The terrified world produced by the expression of the face is only one part, and the material constructs of our reality only one side of the problem of expression and the other. The statement that is the body of written text on the message board forum as coupled to an ethical discussion of the other as expression itself now becomes strange kind of “actuality”. This does not take away from the fact that bodies are being pulled and also transformed by incorporeal practices and virtualities that can be considered as quite contemporary aspects in human history. It is my contention that these new expressions are only made possible by the specific agencements created with the advent of new information technologies.

What world can the posts on the message board forum be said to envelop the subject in? This is the question that must accompany the previous theoretical discussions on the importance of the body and its forces, of the separation of content and expression as related to the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation respectively, as well as the incorporeal transformations that can be identified within this agencement.

I would argue that, insofar as the agencement is the unconscious, or “the machinic assemblage of desire” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:40), and at the same time constituted by multiplicities, these multiplicities are in their turn fundamentally Deleuze’s, and Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of “the Other” insofar as the other is expression itself. Again, what is essential to information technologies of communication is that we don’t even see the terrified face. Instead, new types of bodies are produced within new agencements made possible by information technologies and the social field in general. We do not have empirical access to the causes of these expressions, and we do not even have a spatial/visual expression to get enveloped in. The two most important arguments Deleuze (1994:260) presents to us in an ethical discussion seems lost in the context of information technologies. How do we account for this anew? We have to consider, in my view, the expression of the other as in the bodies of written text that appears to us in the collective agencements of enunciation.

The functions of collective agencements of self harm support

It would of course be problematic to conclude from this entire discussion the existence of clearly distinct agencements, of a “virtual reality” of the internet and the computer, and a reality of “real life” in the material flesh; such would be an anathema to both Deleuze’s whole philosophy and posthumanism’s project to view the human biological body as opened up to the world instead of a grounding of experience. The question then is, how do the supposed agencements, which include functions that extend the “real”/”virtual”-divide, converge and diverge from each other in the new relationship of information technology and the body? It would seem that the internet offers new “possibilities” for these convergences. What, then, are the functions of the collective agencement of self harm enunciation, coupled to its machinic agencement of production and bodies? We understand by this theoretical framework that bodies, and only bodies, can be productive; in other words, priority is given to the actual production of things as statement-producing agencements. On the other hand, these statements in turn have an ability to insert themselves in bodies, transforming them incorporeally. This would seem to be how the subject of self harm is both produced and incorporeally transformed in the relation between the body and practices of written text, these texts now becoming bodies themselves yet distinct from the human biological one. It is undeniably so that the agencement
itself of the message board forum, when it has this supporting quality, is setting the subjects who find
themselves enmeshed within it, in motion. It is not only an agencement of self harm, it is an
agencement of support, an agencement of the other as the subject itself; it is an agencement that
functions toward the limit, of balancing on the edge between a state of self harm and a process of
coming out of such state.

The particular statements and enunciations produced in the bodies of text on the message board speak
of this: emoticons in the form of hearts accompany posts, “hugs” are dealt out, the notion of sharing
thoughts with no particular intention. The acts of self harm, detailed descriptions of cutting or not
cutting oneself for example, is largely absent from the material generated. Instead, when such practices
are evoked it is rather in a supportive sense, an account of how one resisted carrying out the act. This
forms the agencement between all the terms that are entered into relations with one another; and
priority, I would argue, is on the incorporeal act of the statements that are now, theoretically, of
primary concern for this particular agencement. This relates back to Deleuze’s rigorous distinction
between intermingling of bodies as causes, such as knife cutting flesh, and incorporeal statements as
effects, as in the statement “the knife is cutting the flesh” (1990:95). It would seem as though the body
is now, more than ever before, necessitated by its coupling to its incorporeal dimension; and that
dimension is inhabited by statements, enunciations, and expressions. This is also an ethical
pedagogical dimension as it envelops the subject in it and thereby transforming it.

These relations, or relations of force, as well as the dialectics between bodies and statement, which
simultaneously define the body of self harm support and transform the biological, fleshy body of the
subject, are considered pedagogical relations. That is, they function in a pedagogical manner to which
an incorporeal transformation of a body is produced. By considering the extremely delicate situation
that is self harm and depression, I have tried to show that when the body is linked up with this
agencement that would be constituted between it and the expressions and arrangements of the message
board forum, the internet does bring about some new form of relations that allow for an opening up of
the body. This is done by the expressing other-worlds that we get enveloped in incorporeally by the
expressions of the statements made in posts on the message board. A pedagogical issue is here at
stake: the question of transformation is related to the forces of bodies we cannot have adequate
knowledge of; that is, we know that we cannot know, but knowing this puts us simultaneously outside
our conscious selves as well as in active relation of change, of transformation. Pedagogy here, would
be considered, in the strictest sense of the word, posthuman.

Discussion: a new virtual reality?

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the productions and transformations of subjectivity
between corporeal bodies and incorporeal enunciations of written text in an online message board
forum about self harm. The specific research questions to answer this broader focus were:

1. How can the subjectivity of self harm be transformed in practices of written text in an online
   message board forum?
2. How is subjectivity produced in an online message board forum, and how can it be identified?
3. How can we understand the relationship between the assemblages of bodies and assemblages of enunciation in an online environment?

4. How can we understand the concept of the body in relation to practices of written text in an online environment?

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to argue that the internet is not a virtual reality but an actual reality that produces new forms of virtual contents that bodies, in turn, are actualised by. On one hand, the relations of bodies (the biological body of the subject, the materiality of the computer and website) produce enunciations that transform these bodies. On the other hand, these enunciations are themselves transformed into bodies of texts on the message board forum capable of producing new forms of enunciations; thus transforming the body of the subject in new ways. My point of argument is this: the relation between body and technology produces particular forms of enunciation that are materialised in an online message board forum as bodies of texts. These materialised enunciations (themselves not bodies but rather become materialised into bodies of texts and representations) are then forming new relations between bodies capable of producing new forms of enunciations, transforming all these bodies in turn. This would seem to explain how new forms of social practices emerge with the advent of information technologies that also takes into account the state of the world at large; in other words, it manages to persist the flesh, as Brians (2011) has put it, while at the same time turning the flesh into something new. As I hope my research focus and theoretical investigation into the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and posthumanism has shown, we find a dynamic play between physical and metaphysical forces, of corporeal causes and incorporeal effects. I propose this dynamic interplay between corporeality and incorporeality as two forms that are theoretically distinct yet inseparable from each other (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:99;120).

This theoretical distinction of the inseparable forms of corporeality and incorporeality, and how that distinction can help us learn about subjectivity in empirical investigation, has not been of focus in previous studies into the problems of subjectivity, body and information technology. Particularly within posthumanism where the body and technology has been of great interest for the productions of subjectivity (Braidotti, 2006b; Brians, 2011; Brophy 2010; Haraway, 1991), the philosophy of Deleuze has been used to argue for an entanglement of materiality and social discourse instead of considering the distinction made in Deleuze’s philosophy between corporeality and incorporeality. This thesis has been an attempt to acknowledge this distinction while remaining within the ethical project of posthumanism in the view of Braidotti and feminist studies specifically into the relation of body and technology (see Brians, 2011; Brophy, 2010; Currier, 2003). I take it to be the project of a posthumanism to open up the human biological body to both materiality and social practices such as language and discourse. The image of the cyborg presented by Haraway (1991) opens up the human biological body to that of technology, while Braidotti (2006a; 2006b) carries this image forward in a more contemporary fashion leaning against a posthuman reading of Deleuze and his use of Spinoza and Nietzsche to open up the body to not just technology, but to all forms of organic and inorganic life. To complement these posthumanist directions, I have proposed to employ a reading of Deleuze that regards the interplay or the “necessary dualism” as Deleuze and Guattari (2004:22-3) call it, between corporeal bodies (i.e. materiality) and incorporeal enunciations (i.e. statements, or language practices, in the form of written text). In order to summarise and discuss my research questions with my empirical investigation, I believe it is useful to reconnect with the discussion of the body as a concept and problem in Deleuze’s philosophy. The research questions worked out from the broader
focus were ordered in a hierarchical manner such that the latter question would serve the former. I will therefore begin this discussion by regarding the fourth question:

4. How can we understand the concept of the body in relation to practices of written text in an online message board forum about self harm?

A common trait of posthumanism in the vein of Haraway (1991) and Braidotti (2006b), evident in studies specifically concerning body and technology (see Brians, 2011; Brophy, 2010; Currier, 2003), has been influenced by Deleuze’s philosophy. Among these authors, Deleuze is generally conceived of as both breaking up the limits of the body while simultaneously committing to a form of materialism; the body is more than its own flesh and blood as it is connected to materials that are become integrated into the very biological functions of the body. Haraway’s (1991) concept of the cyborg was among the first to deal with such issues from a feminist perspective, and Braidotti (2006b) complemented this conception with a posthumanist reading of Deleuze. The cyborg has also been criticised from a Deleuzian perspective as a limited and dualist view of materiality in general and the body in particular (Brophy, 2010; Currier, 2003).

The question I have proposed in this thesis was instead how Deleuze himself discussed the concept of the body and its functions in his philosophy, rather than relying on already preconceived studies. To answer this I turned to Deleuze’s studies of Nietzsche and Spinoza. Beginning with Nietzsche, it is evident that something other than the body itself is superior to it, and that is the concept of force. Forces define any type of body; social, material, biological, psychological, and so on, even souls are bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:89). Forces define a body by entering into an unequal relationship with each other; one active force that acts on the reactive force. Following Nietzsche, Deleuze (1983:38-42) argues that we can only have conscious access to reactive forces, which is to say that we cannot have proper access to that which truly defines a body, namely the active forces. We see here how the body is immanently connected to the unconscious; the body and the unconscious are acting, and we only experience the reaction in our conscious subject and as our conscious subject (Deleuze, 1983:39). But these reactions do not define our subject, it is rather the active forces of the body that constitutes and defines the subject (ibid:42). However, by a hermeneutical process we can regard the reactive forces in their relation to something active, and this methodological process I have here called a functional-assemblage hermeneutics. It is by studying what the reactive forces do, their function, that we can theoretically consider the active forces behind them (ibid:42-3). What, then, are the reactions on the message board forum for self harm support? I have suggested that the theme of fear emerged in the empirical material from forces established between texts on the forum; that is, relations between texts and within texts are the active forces defining the body of text where fear is contained. Fear is thus the reactive force and the conscious experienced force where the subject would find itself. I was hesitant before to call fear itself a force, but it would be evident now to consider fear as the reactive force, but not the active force defining the subject. However, this is only insofar as “fear” is explicitly evoked in the statements and expressions on the message board forum; again, we cannot draw any conclusions of whether “fear” is part of the actual experience of an individual subject writing on this

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Although I cannot have empirical access to the real experiences of the person’s writing these texts, and since my concern is not a phenomenology of self harm, I can only speak of a theoretical experience of fear on the subject of self harm as it appears in text on the message board forum. I am here practicing the double methodological approach to this study outlined earlier, one concerning empirical material and the other a theoretical discussion around this material.
forum, all we can say is that fear is expressed by the bodies of text on the forum. Fear is a reaction to the active forces of relation between bodies of text in this particular instance.

This line of reasoning of the concept of the body is furthered in Deleuze’s study of Spinoza, where the concept of affect is related to that of force. When Deleuze (1990:146), taking cue from Spinoza, says that “we perceive external bodies only insofar as they affect us, we perceive our own body only insofar as it is affected, we perceive our soul through the idea of an idea of an affection” we can methodologically follow this by hermeneutically indicate in each empirical instance the affections that give rise to our sense of self through the external bodies of affection. If the body of the other is channelled through the body of text on the message board forum for self harm support, it is the body of the text which affects the body behind the screen and makes it possible for external bodies to affect this corporeal material body. That is, it is not the body of another subject behind another screen which affects the body of the subject, but rather the bodies of text containing ideas of another body. One common character of the posts on the message board was an expression of inadequacy of not having anything of importance to say; instead, it is often expressed that the post is “just thoughts” or that “I don’t have any real insights, just thought I should share my experience.” These sharing of experiences in the form of written text, no matter the meaning of the words or sentences, function to produce ideas of external bodies; that is, the body of the other is channelled through the idea in the body of text on the message board. It is rather a chain of affections which create ideas of affection that in turn makes it possible to perceive one’s soul, and thus experience the reactive force of the active force defining the subject. In accordance with Brian’s (2011:134) posthumanist account of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the body, it is possible to extend the body beyond the limits of the flesh, but only insofar as the biological body itself remains grounded in its own materiality capable of being affected by other bodies (which are bodies of text containing ideas of affection of external bodies). It is also worth noting in a posthumanist framework concerning the entanglement of bodies and materiality and discourse and language, how Deleuze himself rarely talks about the body itself; what he is interested in is how a body is defined, the practice of defining a body, not the body itself entering into practice, but the practice defining the body.

However, we arrive at a roadblock if we venture no further than the concept of the body and its affects and forces when addressing the questions presented in this thesis. From a theorisation of the body of the subject related to many different bodies in a particular field alone, it is impossible to determine how particular transformations of bodies function in a particular instance; this would also lead to a false cause and effect relationship which Deleuze (1994; 2004) sought to overcome. We have only worked out the concept of the body and how it is possible to consider many different bodies at work in an empirical instance. Thus far I would propose that texts are in this sense bodies, or bodies of texts, but that language, or enunciation, isn’t. When Braidotti, Brian and Brophy, inspired by a posthumanist reading of Deleuze, argue that the body is “entangled” with materiality and social codings (discourse, language, etc.) this would mean that the body is indeed implicated in our enunciations and statements. But this only stops at the body: it does not tell us how bodies of text function only that they do function to some extent (ideas of affection, etc.).

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47 I emphasise hermeneutics because indicating the affections in the agencement concerned with here consists of studying relations between bodies of text.
If, however, any body is defined by forces and affects, are forces and affects themselves bodies? To contrast the posthumanist framework of entanglement in Braidotti, Brians and Brophy, I instead turned to Brian Massumi (2002) and an essay by Claire Colebrook (2000) who deal with the concept of the incorporeal. I did this because I saw it lacking in posthumanist studies attempting Deleuzian theorisations of the body and technology; I saw it lacking largely because it plays a very large part of Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* and is carried over to the work with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The concept of the incorporeal became for me a gateway into thinking the body in relation to information technology and the productions and transformations of subjectivity. According to Massumi (2002:5), forces and affects are *of* the body, but not the body itself. Forces move the body, the body does not move itself; rather, this can be understood as the power of incorporeal forces moving the body. Following Massumi in this regard in relation to Deleuze’s cue from Spinoza’s parallelism of body and mind, to resist harming one’s own body becomes *as much an incorporeal move* as carrying out the harmful act; being affected by the forces around the bodies of text on the message board forum is movement. This is not to say that there is a parallelism between bodies and enunciation; in a Spinozist sense, Deleuze takes up the parallelism between body and mind, but the question then becomes how this parallelism, in turn, is put in motion.

The answer to this I believe lies in the distinction Deleuze (2004:7-9; 29-31) vigorously invokes between corporeal causes and incorporeal effects. In fact, in these very pages, Deleuze specifically calls it a duality, and not a parallelism, which is reserved for the discussions regarding body and mind (mind is not therefore to be equated with enunciation). In short, to answer the parallelism of body and mind we invoke the duality or distinction between corporeality and incorporeality. Concerning our empirical analysis in this thesis, there seem to be new bodies, bodies of texts, created by the incorporeal forces around them on the message board forum and the incorporeal statements of self harm support. I believe we have to view this in terms of the concept of the agencement, particularly considering the relationship between the machinic agencement of bodies, worked out here, and the collective agencement of enunciation. This is formulated in the third research question and will be addressed next.

3. How can we understand the relationship between the agencements of bodies and collective agencements of enunciation in an online environment?

In my discussion of the body I have ceaselessly invoked the concept of the incorporeal; my main argument is that we cannot rely solely on the corporeality of the body in order to understand the productions and transformations of subjectivity. This I believe can be further theorised by viewing the relationship between the agencements of bodies and the collective agencements of enunciation on the online message board forum for self harm support. The concept of the agencement actually follows from Deleuze’s Spinozist understanding of the body as defined by what affections it is capable of; the agencement defines affections of a body, and thus the functions of a body and what it can do, which is to say that the agencement is superior to the body itself.

Could it be that the agencements of the self harm support is producing by itself (Guattari, 1995:6-9), an agency capable of turning the metaphysical (the idea of the body of the other) into a physical act, i.e. transforming the self harming body into a healing body? These transformations surely are a matter of force and affect, but they are nonetheless mediated forces and affects made possible by the words that are produced on the message board. By the machinic agencement, new forms of enunciations are produced and inserted into the bodies (in the broad sense) of self harm. In other words, *incorporeal*
transformations (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:89), in the form of words and statements, are produced within the agencement of self harm support on the message board forum. Methodologically, all we have access to in this empirical analysis are enunciations and statements, and not the biological bodies of the subjects behind the screen. We can however hypothetically deduce that a biological body of a subject is interacting with a computer, and for various reasons (finding oneself in the existence of practicing self harm or experiencing depression, or taking an interest of the subject matter as a researcher); but these aspects are not available for analysis and only necessary assumptions we have to make (in as much as I assume another person to have thoughts just as myself, even though I can never have access to such knowledge, I make the deduction that such is necessarily the case for the world to function). All we can view empirically is what is produced as enunciations on an online message board forum, which are then materialised as bodies of text on this forum. Turning one’s attention towards such concerns, Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004:89) concept of incorporeal transformations fits the methodological and epistemological approach. Again, we can see how the body itself is inferior to these incorporeal transformations: “It is always by means of something incorporeal that a body separates and distinguish itself from another” (ibid:119, emphasis added).

What “body”, then, am I concerned with here? The body of self harm support seems like the obvious designation, but is too wide in scope and needs to be considered to the material field of investigation. In this case, it is the specific online message board forum dedicated to support among its users to cope with a state of depression that can lead to practices of self harm. The posts on this message board are dispersed and express many different things, but one common aspect emerged through my functional-assemblig hermeneutics of the message board. Posts expressing the wish to share thoughts and experiences, of going through a rough time, of being afraid, for example, are met with brief responses expressing gratitude for having read the post, emoticons of hearts and “hugs” are dealt out toward the original poster; a common wish of strength to make it through. This making it through, as I will call the practice of these expressions, is an incorporeal transformation of the body of self harm into the body of self harm support. Support, then, in turn expresses this practice of making it through. The only way to hermeneutically study the relationship between the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation would be by this analysis of the expressions and incorporeal transformations in the bodies of text on the message board.

Regarding previous studies of the biological body of the subject in relation to technology through a Deleuzian philosophy, this sort of focus on incorporeal transformation has largely been overlooked. Braidotti’s (2006b) larger philosophical project which deals with these issues seem only to concern the material relation between biological bodies and technology, and not specific incorporeal transformations within agencement that Deleuze and Guattari (2004:119) specifically state defines and separates bodies from each other. I instead have taken cue from Colebrook’s (2000:42) insightful ethical question concerning the infusion of information technologies into practices of everyday life: “What is the force of this particular incorporeal event – this image, this sense, this gaze and this representation?”

2. How is subjectivity produced in an online message board forum, and how can it be identified? This question is interwoven in the answers above as the empirical examples I have given from the hermeneutic analysis earlier. The theme of fear, the supportive expressions of acknowledgements and emoticons, expressions of not being alone, etc., are all part of what can be identified as the productions of the subjectivity of self harm support. These are also transformations of subjectivity however, since
they are the incorporeal effects of the corporeal bodies producing the identifiable terms I have called self harm support. Since empirical examples have been discussed extensively thus far, and can be seen as empirical answers to this second research question, I will here mainly discuss theoretical implications that can be discerned from this earlier empirical discussion. What are the conditions for these productions and transformations?

Considering the distinction between the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation made by Deleuze and Guattari (2004) I have proposed to place the term production on the former and the term transformation on the latter, following Deleuze and Guattari’s assessment that the machinic agencement is productive and produces statements (ibid:40). Deleuze and Guattari also attribute the term transformation to both “incorporeal” and the collective agencement of enunciation (ibid:89). The question thus becomes: What incorporeal transformations are being produced by the agencement of bodies in the message board forum dedicated to self harm support? But this question also has to answer what the productive bodies are. In our empirical investigation concerned with here, it can only be bodies of text as I have alluded to earlier. We can then theoretically assume that a subject finds itself in its biological body writing these bodies of texts, but we cannot have empirical access to the exact practices of this biological body, only to what this body-subject produces. However, by considering the two sides of the agencement, that of corporeal bodies and incorporeal enunciations and transformations, as well as the apparent superiority of the incorporeal and the virtual, it cannot be said that it is the body of the subject that is producing or writing these texts. First, it is rather the machinic agencement in which the subject is produced which is said to be the agent of production; second, this agencement of bodies is continuously transformed by the incorporeal enunciations and statements on the message board, and it is here that the subject is incorporeally transformed insofar as the body of subjectivity is transformed. What we are seeing as productions and transformations of subjectivity is therefore in reciprocal presupposition with each other, and, as Buchanan (2000:121-2) has said, they are relative distinctions that are always changing places. That is: the products of production become transformations that become new forms of production producing new products, etc. This discussion is always leading us toward the first question proposed as the primary investigation, which was:

1. How can the subjectivity of self harm be transformed in practices of written text in an online message board forum?

Taking this discussion of production and transformation as a building block, I have theorised my empirical investigation accordingly. Bodies and materiality such as the computer, the biological body of the subject, the social body and materiality around it, etc, are producing certain statements by the collective agencement of enunciation. These statements appear, in this case, on a message board forum on the internet for self harm support. I have then theorised that these statements in the form of texts, become bodies of text containing both forms of content and forms of expression. The materiality and bodies of online environments also include bodies of texts that in their turn include incorporeal transformations which define and separate bodies from each other; the body of text, the biological body of the subject, the social body, etc, in short, the subjectivity of self harm support. Next, it is not the first material instance which is producing new statements, but rather the agencement of bodies including the bodies of text on the internet. There seems to be new bodies created by the incorporeal transformations produced by the different bodies, among them bodies of text in the machinic agencement of self harm support.
Would I go so far as to acknowledge the existence of a new virtual reality in new agencements of productions and transformations of the subjectivity of self harm? In a way, yes, that is what I would propose is happening considering the agencements and the conditions for transformation both our body and our language are entered into. But this virtual reality cannot be located on either side of the computer screen; both sides are actual, but the ideas and incorporeal effects of statements produced in this new actual field must be considered virtual, and also virtually different from the virtual contents effected in the material, physical world. When considering the agencement as having two separate dimensions, one corporeal the other incorporeal, I would suggest to place the former on our bodies sitting by the computer screen and acting in the physical material world, and place the latter on the specific practices carried out in the digital environments on the internet. When Brians (2011:133) acutely argues that practices online concern bodily arrangements and social contexts, it also so happens that the incorporeal space is producing new transformations that the body is now in turn also reproducing. I do not mean by this a sort of feedback-loop that would converge the corporeal and incorporeal in on each other, but rather that the conditions for interaction and enunciation in practices on the internet create new enunciations and relations for bodies to enter into. That is to say, when we consider the message board forum on the internet for individuals with depression practicing self harm, this space in itself forms new conditions for ideas and virtualities to emerge that then effectively intervene (i.e. not intertwine or entangle) in the bodies present in said interaction. By this production of new virtualities, it can be said that this is the conditions for the productions and transformations of subjectivity in an online environment.

Deleuze and Guattari (1983:129) are very clear regarding the nature of the virtual when they specifically point it out, name it by name (the Oedipus complex), and attribute it to a certain practice (psychoanalysis). It is therefore important that scholar’s such as Brians (2011) and Marks (2006) points out the problems often facing theorists who employ Deleuze’s concept of the virtual, and attribute it to many of his other concept without regarding the incompatibilities between them. The common misunderstanding that both Brians and Marks remark is that the virtual is seen as something undifferentiated, in almost a utopian sense, where the body can now transcend to and be dissolved. Quite to the contrary however, I have tried to show how the virtual instead is extremely fixed and localisable; that is, fully determined by the contents of ideas (Deleuze, 1994:252).

Concerning the message board forum for self harm support studied in this thesis, the virtual may be understood as the determined ideas that emerge through the forces between bodies of text. These can be called support, sharing thoughts and experiences of a common practice. It seems as though the virtual is also connected to the concept of expression within these bodies of texts. In answer to the previous question of the relationship between the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation, the expressions of the bodies of texts are related to the incorporeal transformations of the machinic agencement of bodies, separating the bodies and defining them. Here, expressions and incorporeal transformations feed into each other.

Is there a hierarchy then in Deleuze’s philosophy after all, as suggested by Reynolds (2007)? Indeed, my emphasis in this thesis certainly pertains to such a notion of a priority given to that which is not corporeal. But such notions misses the conditions for the virtual and the process of actualisation where the virtual is equally dependent upon the actual (e.g. the biological bodies of the individuals behind the screens, the bodies of texts on internet message boards) as the actual is for the virtual when it comes to both corporeal mixtures and incorporeal transformations. There are however, many questions
generated by a close reading of Deleuze’s ontology and process of time pertaining to an ethical theory: if Deleuze employs a problematic transcendental philosophy, how might we take it up in his wake? Reynolds (ibid:162) aptly criticises Deleuze for presenting a difficult theory of how to live an ethical life, the difficulty of pointing out a practice which would pertain to an ethical mode of living by the concept of the virtual. Such critique nevertheless misses the necessary coupling of the virtual to the actual state of affairs, as well as the fact that the virtual is “fully determined” (Deleuze, 1994:252) and not, as Reynolds says, “not fixed but fluid”. And it is this relation that we have to place as the utter most important ethical aspect of life, instead of debating whether priority is given to this or that.

How can we read the empirical material of the message board forum for self harm support in ethical terms from the philosophy of Deleuze? To read the empirical material generated in this study would be to consider the determined ideas contained in bodies of text, and view these as *enveloping worlds*. In order to determine the content of an idea as contained in a body of text as a researcher, I have relied on the method proposed earlier, a functional-assemblage hermeneutics. To determine a virtual idea within this method is to view how it functions as a body of text related to other bodies with a specific agencement. How a body of text functions on the message board thus determines its enveloping world. A text may contain a content that appears to be supportive, but when viewed in relation to other bodies this content in the text turns out to be anything but supportive. For example, explicitly stating that a certain text is supportive (“I am trying to give you support”) does not make it expressively so; it may function in ways that express something entirely different, and thus envelops a different world than the supportive. The agencement of the message board forum is largely concerned with expressions of sharing thoughts and not judging one another. The texts may not explicitly contain the words “I support you” but they nonetheless function in a supportive manner considered from the framework of a functional-assemblage hermeneutics.

We have the capacity to be affected as long as we are enveloped in a virtual world of expression, which we can determine through its function to other bodies in an agencement. The subject thus disappears in this regard, and constitutes a proper Deleuzian ethics: to open up yourself for the enveloping worlds you are already implicated in, to dismantle your subject and organism (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:177). By the use of emoticons in the form of hearts, by just saying “thank you” in responses to a longer post where it is expressed that it is just there to “share thoughts”, the relation between such posts expresses something unique and individual: it envelops all the posts in a supportive world. This supportive world is only made possible it seems by the absence of the body of the subject in practices of written text (Johansson, 2010). It sustains the necessity of thinking the body and enunciation; only by this distinction yet inseparable relationship is the body of self harm to be transformed in supportive and positive ways.

This is also related, I would argue, to a necessary understanding of the infusion of information technologies into practices of everyday life, and subsequently in the productions and transformations of subjectivity. The virtual can have no bearing unless there is an actual state producing the virtual. If we consider practices on the internet, bodies of texts and the bodies of others in the form of ideas can only affect me to such a degree that my body is entered into composition with these practices; the internet is not a virtual reality per say, on the contrary it is an actuality that produces new forms of virtual contents that our bodies are, in turn, actualised by. Concerning the empirical material of the message board forum for self harm support, there is an intimate relationship between the actual state of affairs for many individual biological bodies, and the virtual ideas and expressions in the bodies of
text on the online forum. As such, it may be said that the subjectivity of self harm is transformed by the virtual practices and determined ideas in statements on the message board forum that themselves constitute bodies corporeally affecting the body of self harm. These are the virtualities of support, of sharing ideas, by expressing fear and coming to terms with the conditions of depression. Thus, a new production of subjectivity arises: the healing production.

The contributions of this thesis in terms of new theoretical understandings of the productions of subjectivity between the corporeal and incorporeal can be summed in three points:

i. A new virtual reality is proposed in terms of information technologies and the body, in that the body finds itself in new actual fields on the internet by the production of new incorporeal practices of enunciation and virtual contents that insert themselves in bodies that are not themselves given in this new actual field.

ii. Methodologically, a functional-assemblage hermeneutics is proposed to analyse written text on internet message boards by a dialectical relationship between content and expression (which includes bodies of all types and the affects and forces between them).

iii. An ethical reading of the empirical material grounded in Deleuze’s concepts of expression and enveloping worlds that takes the form of a supportive world by the relations between bodies of text in an online message board forum.

The methodological agencement and virtual futures

One of the central contributions of this thesis is its insistence on a methodological approach to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and more specifically to the concept of the agencement. It has argued that it is possible to carry out social research by the concept of the agencement and relate this to an underlying ontology of the actual and the virtual. With the focus on enunciation, statements and expression, and inspired by Jameson (1983) and Buchanan (2000), a methodological approach to the concept of the agencement has been proposed as a functional-assemblage hermeneutics. This is been done by studying the relationship between forms of content and forms of expression within the agencement of an internet message board forum for self harm support, as well as the relationship between corporeality and incorporeality in terms of bodies as causes and enunciation as effects. The functional approach comes by analysing how the agencement produces certain statements. It is a hermeneutical approach in that it proposes a different way of interpreting texts; that is, how the contents and expressions of a text function in a wider agencement. Future research should extend this methodology in theoretical terms, and place it in specific historical relation to hermeneutics as a whole, and also compare and transform it against the literary criticism of Buchanan and Jameson. It would consists of doing empirical research by “applying” this methodology to a specific case; for example, the case presented here of self harm and forum for support on the internet. Here however, this thesis has been primary a theoretical analysis and therefore the traditional disposition of purpose-method-theory-results-discussion did not suite the aims presented. If, on the other hand, research would attempt to theorise on a particular case or phenomena, such as anxiety and depression in western contemporary capitalist society dependent on information technologies, then the traditional dispositional model of research applying this Deleuzo-Guattarian theory-method would be suited.
This thesis has, unfortunately, left out an important axis of the concept of the agencement which would account for more politically focused studies. Important concepts that build an agencement have been left out, such as the body without organs, territorialisation and de-territorialisation, etc. I have kept away from this axis however in keeping with the research focus which has been to simply lay out the conditions for the productions of subjectivity in regards to the information technologies and the body of the subject. However, future research should also include this axis and relate it to a wider socio-political field.

The question of the method of interviews also has to accompany these future researches. To map out the agencements that extends the material field of message board forums on the internet can account for wider aspects of how bodies come to be affected by incorporeal practices and enunciations that take place on the internet; and also to understand the entire machinic agencement which produces the statements on the message board. Such method would also have to be related to a “clinical” practice Deleuze and Guattari termed schizoanalysis, as has been the focus of the studies carried out by Jessica Ringrose (2011). Ringrose has also shown how this philosophy has pedagogical implications and practical uses in educational settings, something that needs to be furthered by studies using a functional-assemblage hermeneutics considering the interplay of bodies and enunciation.

For the limited resources of this thesis and regarding the research focus, such a method was not carried out, although it would shed light on new ways for coping with depression and self harm in a time where it seems as it is an ever rising concern. In this sense, one should not be occupied by the writings of Freud or Lacan; rather, the question should be raised on the state of psychoanalytic discourse today, find its intersection and breaks in contemporary culture where subjectivity is made of central concern. 

One should question contemporary discourses into the psychological sciences and philosophies, with one example being cognitive behavioural therapy. This contemporary discourse would also inevitably be concerned with technology, and as I have argued, also with the body. That is to say, in what way is the body compromised, transformed and produced in a field where technology is placed side by side with it yet without the terms collapsing in on each other? A rigorous philosophical account of the relationship between words and things would also have to be carried out in future studies. This would concern a history of philosophy by engaging with structuralism and linguistics through Louise Althusser, Ferdinand de Saussure, Alexius Meinong and Louis Hjelmslev. Other philosophers Deleuze was influenced by in his *The Logic of Sense* would also be considered, such as Husserl, Heidegger, Kant and Wittgenstein. This would follow through to the critique of representation evident in Deleuze and Foucault’s writings.

It would also seem as though the project and thesis presented here is dependent on the assumption that there is a strong bond between body and text, or body and enunciation, when it comes to practices carried out in an online environment such as a message board forum. This would be effected by the agencement. However, the subject matter of self harm easily lends itself to suggest such a strong bond: the individual subject can theoretically be said to intensively and personally invest in writing posts on the message board with a particular wish (of sharing thoughts and experiences, and, one would

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48 Theoretically, future research concerning interviews as method should take a schizoanalytical approach. Concerning the body and enunciating practices within a critique of representation against psychoanalysis, future studies needs to account for the fascinating connection between Deleuze and Foucault in regards to contemporary psychological and political movements (as in the case of late capitalism and cognitive behavioural therapy).
assume, in the end come out of a state of depression). This choice of field for research on my part does not take into account the discrepancies between what happens to the body and what happens on the message board forum on the internet, and can thus not be generalised outside of the particular agencement studied.

Take, for example, the notion of “comments” ever so present on websites of major newspapers, or, predominantly, Twitter, Youtube and other so called social media. The anonymous character of the interaction, the fact that the body is not given, would make it seem as though what takes place on the internet is just “empty chatter” (as Deleuze would say). This entails the entirely necessary coupling between the virtual and the actual, the machinic agencement of bodies and the collective agencement of enunciation; the former produces the latter, and it would therefore the inadequate the conclude that a website on the internet in and of itself produces certain enunciations since this could contain many different machinic agencements one does not have access to in empirical studies. I have chosen to study a case where I found a strong bond between the corporeal experiences of a subject in a state of depression, and practices that take place online in the form of written text, because I think it is here we need to start, and also here that the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari shines the brightest; his philosophy is positively “the opposite of childhood memory” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:182). It is only when we have constructed our toolbox out of a positive analysis and built our foundation that we can begin to dismantle this foundation, to aptly direct our critique and dismantle from within whatever we take as our field of investigation. Just as Deleuze and Guattari took on psychoanalysis from within so too must we confront the challenges of today. What, for example, would be the psychosocial implications of making public personal problems; do they remain personal, or do they express something entirely different than a person; how does the relation between words and things constituted in information society function with regard to sharing thoughts and experiences of mental illness in public space? How would this constitute a critique of the separation of public and private space?

The challenge of this thesis has been a conceptualisation of the relation between the body of the subject and information technologies, and subsequently the new areas of incorporeal transformations and agencements of enunciation that take place on a specific online message board forum. It will be concluded from this investigation that texts indeed produce bodies, but bodies of a different kind than the specific biological one of the human subject. These bodies can only be thought in relation to the new virtual fields they produce, and these new virtualities can only be dependent on the actual character of the specific form of interaction by written text on the internet. It is by this specificity, of the dependence of the actual biological body of the self to the virtual ideas of the body of others on the message board that can actualise new virtual ideas of transformation and healing; new souls of bodies by sharing thoughts about a common actual state of affairs. In the end, may they insert themselves in bodies, to transform them from within, or will they remain “just thoughts”? Perhaps that is the strength of just having thoughts; perhaps thoughts are the way to open up your body to the multiplicities already running through you; to dismantle your destructive organism or self harming state of affair, by paradoxically doing away with yourself. This is the path of opening up your body, of transforming it.


Ringrose, Jessica (2011). Beyond Discourse? Using Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis to explore affective assemblages, heterosexually striated space, and lines of flight online and at school. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 43(6), 598-618.


