

## Reference Materials for Pills Cluster: CAPACITIES

### ***ACTUAL: A type of reality with full concrete existence.***

Actual (always referred to in Deleuze's philosophy in connection to the virtual) is the moment when something is instantiated, and acquires tangible reality. Actual is the manifest contraction of a potentiality. This is the reason why actual and virtual are inseparable and they always must be thought together. They have no meaning apart from each other. The dynamic between them is the process of becoming and change. "The moment you think change, you have actually appealed to the virtual. Think the actual without the virtual and you have fixity" (Massumi 2008:18). This means that the actual is nothing but the taking effect of the virtual, the actual is what holds the reality of the virtual. Between them, an ongoing process. It is important not to think at the actual and the virtual as opposites, but in terms of them coming together. Think for instance of how ice and water relate to each other. We don't see them as opposite to each other, but as different phase transitions whereby water becomes ice and ice becomes water as a processual extension of each other, where each 'contains' the other as potential. We could say that design idea generation and concept creation are the 'liquid' phase that transmutes into a 'solid' phase of prototyping, building and manufacturing. One contains the other, nor could exist without the other. It is useful to think at a spectrum, from the speculative to the actual.

#### READINGS

- Massumi, B. in conversation with J. Nguyen and M. Davis in *Manifold. Issue 2. Forms of time*. Manifold publishing pp. 17-30
- De Landa, M. (2000). Deleuze, Diagrams, and the Genesis of Form. *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 45(1), 33-41. [www.jstor.org/stable/41157534](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41157534)

### ***POSSIBLE/PROBABLE/PLAUSIBLE/PREFERABLE: Types of reality that: might happen/is likely to happen/could happen/you wish to happen.***

Possible: it may happen. Probable: it is likely to happen. Plausible: It could happen. Preferable: I want it to happen.

To unpack what in the futures studies/scenario building literature is often referred to as the 4 Ps, we will zoom in here on the notion of the possible and flip it entirely on its head. The possible is usually considered to be both less than the real and preceding it. Bergson instead argues that this is a retrospective illusion that we humans fall into. For him the possible is "simply the real with, in addition, a mental act that casts its image into the past once it has been produced. It's just that our intellectual habits prevent us from seeing this". The possible is nothing but the "mirage of the present in the past". We falsely assume that tomorrow is already contained in today, and we call it possible. We postulate a 'retroactivity' (or future anteriority, or front-to-back remodelling) carried out by the present in the past. Something will have been possible once it has occurred. For Bergson it is exactly the other way around: "Let us return possibility to its proper place, and evolution will become something other than the execution of a program; the doors of the future open wide; freedom is given a limitless field". Why? Because "it is reality that makes itself possible, and not possibility that becomes real". This illusion impacts greatly on how novelty is perceived. If an event was possible before it happened, then nothing genuinely new, no "continual creation of unforeseeable newness" would happen. Everything would be predetermined, expected, familiar.

Deleuze too, in his work on Bergson, describes the possible is a mode of anticipatory resemblance and doubling up of the real, a sort of pre-planned, pre-formed version of what exists already. As such, the possible does not involve anything unexpected, and therefore coincides with the predictable. In other words, when we think in terms of what is possible, we are already limiting what can happen and there is no space for novelty to manifest itself.

#### READINGS

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- Deleuze, G. (1991). *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books
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### ***POTENTIAL/VIRTUAL: A type of reality on the verge of happening, but not material yet.***

A mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials, producing actual experience.

(Deleuze, 1991). It is the repository of all the potential that can be actualized but is not there yet. However, it is as real as the tangible reality that we can touch. Think of the virtual as a force: when the virtual (=what is not there yet but only exists as potential) becomes actualized, that is when change is produced, and when something new occurs. Deleuze distinguishes between the process by which the possible becomes real (realization) and the process by which the virtual becomes actual (actualization). The possible is a mode of anticipatory resemblance and doubling up of the real, a sort of pre-planned, pre-formed version of what exists already. Precisely because it

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does not involve anything unexpected, the process of realization is always predictable. On the other hand, the transition from the virtual to the actual (actualization) is a process rooted in, and generating, genuine innovation.

In the first case only a limited number of possibilities are reproduced and there is no space for novelty to manifest itself - an apt description of the hylomorphic model. In the second case, we have a model where the unfolding of matter and the unpredictable interaction of forces at play allows the emergence of new forms, of the not-yet - that is, morphogenesis.

If the real is what already exists here and now, and the possible is what can exist, it follows that the possible is determined by, and ultimately dependent upon, the real. In other words, it is by knowing what is real that we can predict the probability that it might turn, one day, into the possible. Thus, we can predict which possibilities will be realised in the future starting from the reality we know already. However, until we stay in the realm of the possible, we only have access to a sort of mechanical evolution that adds existence to what is already known, and already exists. Consequently, there is not much space for the unknown and the radically new to manifest themselves. This is why, for Deleuze, the possible is a "false notion, the source of false problems" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 98). In what sounds like a veritable warning against overplanning and retrofitting by design, he continues:

We give ourselves a real that is ready-made, preformed, pre-existent to itself, and that will pass into existence according to an order of successive limitations. Everything is already completely given: all of the real in the image, in the pseudo-actuality of the possible. Then the sleight of hand (emphasis added) becomes obvious: if the real is said to resemble the possible, is this not in fact because the real was expected to come about by its own means, to "project backward" (emphasis added), a fictitious image of it, and to claim that it was possible at any time, before it happened? In fact, it is not the real that resembles the possible, it is the possible that resembles the real, because it has been abstracted from the real once made, arbitrarily extracted from the real like a sterile double. Hence, we no longer understand anything either of the mechanism of differentiation or of the mechanism of creation (Deleuze, 1991, p. 98).

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- Deleuze, G. (1991). *Bergsonism*. New York Zone Books
- Grosz, E. (2001) *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. MIT Press
- Massumi, B. (1998) Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible. Hypersurface Architecture. S. Perrella (ed.), *Architectural Design* (Profile no. 133), 68, 5/6. pp. 16-24 <https://www.brianmassumi.com/textes/Sensing%20the%20Virtual.pdf>

### **UNEXPECTED: A type of reality that catches you by surprise.**

Heraclitus reminds us that "If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it; for it is hard to be sought out and difficult." The unexpected can be encountered only if a certain inclination to it is already present, as a propensity to the openness of the future. In this sense the unexpected, whether positive or negative, is related to anticipation and not only as its negation (or even failure). If we define the unexpected as the arrival of what we did not see coming, something we were utterly oblivious to, we can also say that, less obviously, the unexpected is also a by-product of an intense regime of prediction and anticipation. The more a system is methodical, accurate and expert in its predictions, the more what swerves from this system would be taken as 'unexpected'. For instance, if we rely daily on sophisticated weather forecasting, then an unexpected storm acquires a different significance if compared to a world where all storms were in principle unforeseeable. In this sense, paradoxically, the specific mode of the unexpected within modernity is the product (rather than the negation) of sophisticated expectations. Put differently, the more we are fine-tuned to adhere to anticipatory conceptual models, the more the unexpected can and will surprise us.

The way in which we allow (or not) for the unexpected is telling about our paradigm of futurity. Deleuze's thought, for instance, is characterized by an immanent ethics which is first and foremost an attitude to possibility, openness and belief in the world, an affirmation of the possible where the unexpected, the unforeseen, the genuinely new are the ever present dimensions that must be encountered in how we experience the unfolding of the world. The absolute encounter with what happens - the event - is what can produce radical novelty.

### READINGS

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