[A Q and A with Ami Clarke. Ami Clarke is a writer and an artist whose practice is informed by, investigates, and is produced through, the increasingly performative conditions of code and language in hyper-networked culture. She is also founder of Banner Repeater; a reading room and project space in London.]

MBJ: Your practice and research are informed by financial markets and beyond. With your group initiative DLeb you suggest exploration of digital citizenship via blockchain technologies.

AC:
I'm interested in emergent behaviours developing through the co-evolution of humans and technology that necessarily include consideration of the socio-political and economic circumstances underpinning these. I'm interested in the deeply inter-dependent relationship between language, code, and the economy, with all the underlying anxieties of what amounts to freedom, that Katherine Hayles notes, emerge through market relations, during the Enlightenment, with human rights afforded to only certain people, and not others.

I've deployed a High Frequency Trading algorithm 'dealing' in world news, drawing on John Maynard Keynes phrase: *Low Animal Spirits*, coined during the Great Depression, to describe the paradox found at the core of international finance of a herd-like mentality, coupled with the need for individuals to act autonomously: a model of mass behavioural procedures. As social productions, including news, became increasingly enmeshed within algorithmic procedures, through their production, distribution, and reception, it seemed an apt moment in 2013 to apply HFT – an operation of *pure process*: trading for the sake of trading, and perhaps the most neoliberal mode, par excellence - to global news production. *Breaking News – Flash Crash* drew on the Associated Press twitter hack of 2013 that brought about a 1% drop in the market in a minute, and generated further investigation into high-speed algorithmic procedures. Sentiment analysis via data-mining software such as Gnip, DataSift, Topsy and Dataminr, scan twitter feeds for the financial sector, attempt to assess emotion, importance and social meaning in order to "predict the present", in full recognition of how social media signals drive economic information and value[1]. I'm currently working with voice recog units and dialog agents that are acquiring language skills through negotiation.

The work with Elie Ayache the Lebanese financier, in which I wrote his *Chapter 4, Writing and the Market,* word for word, published in the book: *Ami Clarke: Author of the Blank Swan,* drew on Borges story of *Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote,* introducing contingency, and what it might be to 'act' within a field of probability. This then struck a chord during the blockchain workshops that were held last year at Banner Repeater (see www.x-fx.org) which I wrote about in the book: Artists Re-thinking the Blockchain, earlier this year (download *Text and the Market* here: http://www.amiclarke.com/amiclarke.pdf). I wondered if the equivalence that Ayache had found in 'writing' to 'pricing' in the derivatives markets, that produced what he described as a *capacity* to trade – shared another equivalence with the capacity opened up by the writing of smart contracts time-stamped via the blockchain. Ayache's writing, perhaps, accounts for all that can be said of what it is to *act* within a field of probability, in a philosophical sense. This echoes for me throughout the many narratives surrounding the blockchain, thus far, which take little heed of the complex infrastructural, socio-economic, and political conditions of a particularly exploitative mode of platform capitalism, within which blockchain operates. As such, the rather more urgent and compelling aspect of the equation, for me, is the question of *who* gets to write the future via smart contracts, to re-determine the currency of data and what other values that currency could convey, in this new calculus.

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[1] Clarke, Ami. Low Animal Spirits. Journal of Visual Art Practice Volume 15, 2016 - Issue 2-3: Headstone to Hard Drive http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14702029.2016.1228759

MBJ: I am interested in the link between personal data and innovative business solutions. I am curious what do you hold of the observation of self-surveillance as a model for self-regulation? If we approach our data's brokerage with new marketing skills, what useful toolkit strategies could be adopted from holacratic/ DAO models towards autonomy?

AC:
An array of data may be collected at multiple points of contact via sometimes several interfaces at once, few of which are clearly defined, through complex apparatus' of capture. Reminiscent of Deleuze's conceptualisation of the 'dividual' as a bank of data, what seems indisputable is that personal data has value in a variety of markets. Mike Pepi describes these *"dramatic regimes of measurement that posit an unknowably complex field of inputs"* as facilitating what he calls the sublime administration of platform capitalism. He writes: *'by facilitating this natural omniscience - it makes it seem like governance has melted away[2]"* – a becoming ontological of power.

I'm interested in thinking through the kinds of gradients, or degrees of measure, that are being developed in conjunction with the exploitative practices of data analysis, along spectrums of the affectual register drawn from social media, but also from soft and wearable wetware, and hence my intrigue in your practice, as well as speculatively; bio-engineering, and what new forms of measure develop that inelluctably pertain to how that data is repurposed.

The non linear, or decentralized organisations that have developed in tandem with these practices, that specifically derive profit from ideas of self-organisation, share only an 'engineer's fantasy[3]' that has become 'management's best friend[4]'. Elvia Wilk's writing in Jenna Sutela's recent book Orgs, quotes Mike Pepi saying "from the perspective of the individual worker, asynchrony doesn't remove authority as much as

displace it.[5]" We can see, very readily, how exploitative forms of data extraction instantly merge with the new potential of blockchain, written about in a recent paper that considers turning sensors into data-hawkers via blockchain, in a paper titled: *When Your Sensor Earns Money: Exchanging Data for Cash with Bitcoin.*

> "There is no way for third parties to leverage today's sensor deployments considerably. [...] Attaching a bitcoin address to a sensor could empower the sensor immediately to take part in a worldwide data market." [6]

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[2] p 72 Pepi, Mike. Sublime administration: between platform and organism. Orgs: from slime mold to silicon valley and beyond, Jenna Sutela (ed.), 2017. Garret Publications.

[3] p34 Wilk, Eva, Orgs (ed) Jenna Sutela. Quoting: Pepi, Mike, "Asynchronous! On the Sublime Administration of the Everyday," e-flux Journal 74 (June 2016), http://www.e-flux. com/journal/74/59798/asynchronous-on-the-sublime- administration-of-the-everyday/.

[4] ibid

[5] ibid

[6] Wörner, Dominic, von Bomhard, Thomas, When Your Sensor Earns Money: Exchanging Data for Cash with Bitcoin. 2014. http://cocoa.ethz.ch/downloads/2014/08/1834_sample.pdf

Two projects have emerged from this, the collective project DLeb, and Living Currency, developed from my personal experience of analysis as a child patient at Great Ormond street, both of which are invested in thinking through these new gradients of measure.

DLeb develops within the matrix of a collectively authored speculative science fiction as an experimental writing project, through multi-actor/actant input. It introduces the capacity for an individual to broker their own data, through smart contracts time-stamped via the blockchain, and asks what new values might be attributed as a result. The project takes it's name from the situation that a de-Leb (a dead celebrity) - typically enjoys more data choice from beyond the grave - i.e. they have more agency over the deployment of their data: name, image, the very idea of them, and the products that they may be associated with - than those still living. The project aims to bring into discussion the currency of data, and question existing value systems with regards data as currency. It aims to examine the kinds of measure that currently exist, and propose new gradients of measure, asking further what might be considered non-negotiable, what price anonymity, amid other pressing questions. In light of these ideas, we will be scrutinizing how new gradients of measure develop, emerging from the more affectual register, thus far outside of any given metrics.

With the work Living Currency, I'm looking to treat data in a more speculative sense - within the context of DLeb – that draws upon my own experience as a child patient at the Tall Girls Clinic at the Department of Growth and Development, at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. I'm interested here in thinking through the ramifications of predictive formulas and probable outcomes, in association with the information held in the biocode, so thinking again of how this is repurposed - it all gets a bit Gattaca here - amid a very long history of genetic modelling.

We are keen to take account of the systemic problems in our speculations, that mean that data analytics in no way operate as impartial, working within existing biases, segregations, and discriminations, that Ramon Amaro's writing addresses, for example, often actively reproducing these through machine learning and the exploitative practices of capital production. I think this is not beyond our reach, and the artist Caroline Sinders work also addresses concerns of this sort, with her feminist database that seeks to rectify inherent bias' by compiling alternative databases to draw from, than the current ones available.

MBJ: Sentiment analysis is practically an attempt to quantify and predict something that is unquantifiable.
AC:

If I might converge the tail end of the previous question with question 3: I don't hold much hope for the promises made of DAO within the current economic paradigm. What might be useful, though, is confronting a still oddly prevalent taboo that emerges in an unwillingness to think through the financialisation of life that we find ourselves in - whether we like it or not.

It's interesting to think about this in relation to the wages for housework movement, when Judy Ramirez of the Canadian campaign remarked sagely, that you can't simply escape it by saying *"oh we're not part of it – we don't want wages for our labour, we're pure, we're not inside of the system, which puts all this monetary value on everything including all our human relations"*[7]. She said it didn't make sense, because we can see that even without wages we're drawn into that whole system. Simply put, there's nothing unquantifiable about sentiment analysis, through the software of Gnip, DataSift, Topsy and Dataminr, when it drives economic decisions.

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[7] transcript: 1975 episode TV programme 'Confrontation,' produced by CBC. Featuring Canadian spokesperson for the Wages for Housework Committee Judith Ramirez who was interrogated by a live panel including writer Richard Lubbock, actress Barbara Hamilton and Eileen Morris from HOMEMAKER Magazine, whilst advocating for payment to housewives. Feminist Duration Reading Group, run by Helena Reckitt, Wages for Housework session hosted by Stockholm-based artist Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn.