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PhD dissertation

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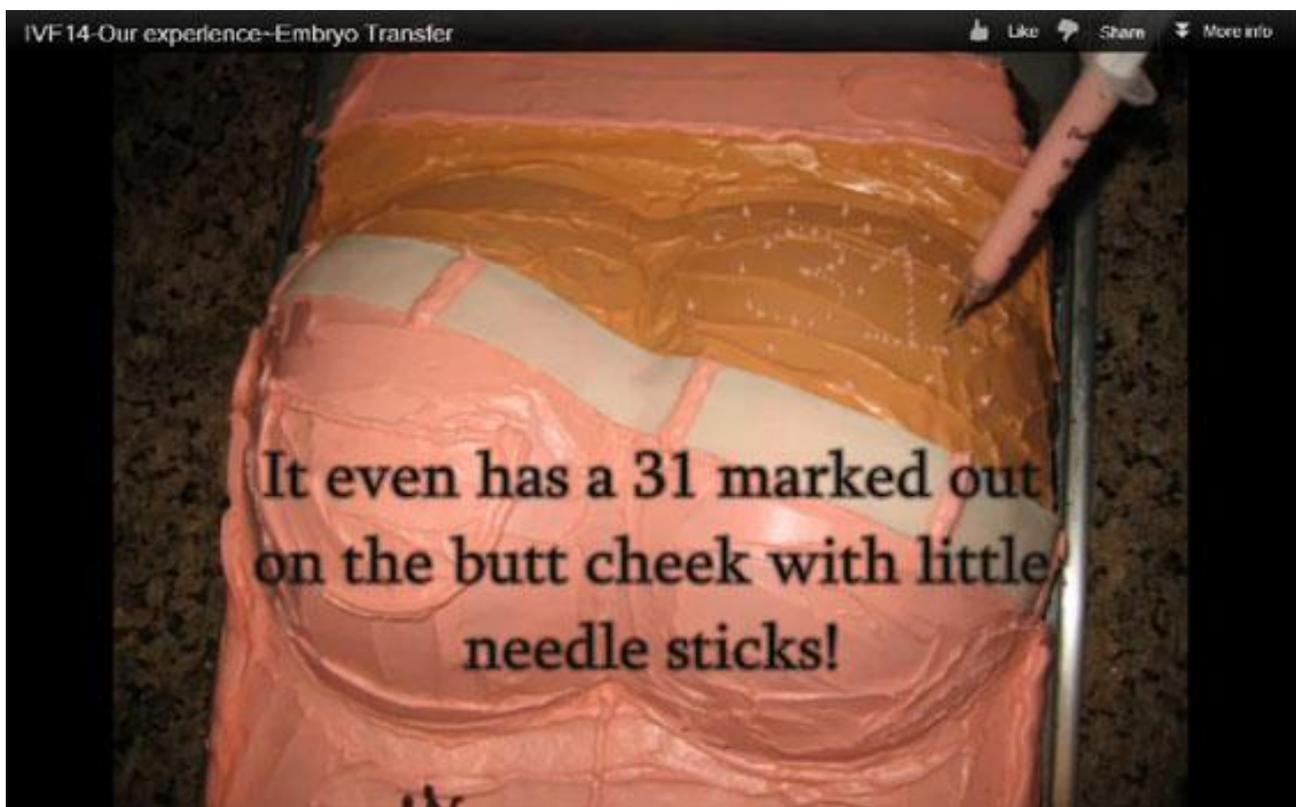
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# Relational (Trans)formations

On the aesthetics of mediated experiences with infertility and  
assisted reproduction in

Video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art



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## Introduction



The picture above is a video still from a video blog (vlog) that, along with other objects, people, and environments, has been central for this dissertation. It shows a meatloaf, which is what, the context of the vlog reveals, someone's buttocks looks like after countless injections related to the fertility treatment of in vitro fertilization (IVF). It is a telling illustration of the creative and usually unseen aspects of what comes to matter in kinship practices involving assisted reproductive technologies (ART) presented in an array of media. This dissertation explores the significance of these aspects in mediations of experiences with infertility and ART in vlogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art. The mediations investigated by this study all to a degree take issue with biotechnology and biomedicine—more specifically ART—and a main argument of the dissertation is that a retheorization of aesthetics is needed in order to address media and art's ability to make what usually goes unacknowledged visible, audible, and felt. The articles, albeit differently, discuss the relevance of this perspective in relation to media studies, kinship studies, and cultural studies. The dissertation is part of the Danish collective research project “Transformations of Kinship. Travelling in Search for Relatedness” (KinTra), which, for a three-year period (2011–2014), set out to investigate the social meaning and imagining of kinship as they travel through, among others, new media. The research of KinTra centers partly on the staging of the making of kinship and the importance of new media and social network sites for communicating between different stakeholders as well as creating new sites for expressing and negotiating relatedness. This PhD thesis, “Relational Transformations. On the Aesthetics of Mediated Experiences with Infertility and Assisted Reproduction in Digital Media Practices and Installation Art,” reflects this interest in the relationship between bio and media

technology, body, and kinship. More specifically, the topic of this thesis, as the subtitle reads, is mediated experiences with infertility and ART.

I have chosen to approach this topic by focusing on four material collections that included contemporary film and TV documentaries, video blogs on YouTube, and installation art. American Andrei Kirilenko's *Technostorks* from 2006 features three couples undergoing a cycle of IVF, while the Danish TV documentary series *The Baby Clinic*, which aired in 2012, follows six couples undergoing fertility treatments. The American video blog *Lucid IVF* by Silvia and Peter contains user-generated, -populated, and -distributed videos (2009–ongoing) featuring their own experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction. Japanese Tomoko Mukaiyama's *wasted* from 2009 is an art installation and hence not a digital media production. It features, however, the Dutch documentary film *Water Children* (2011) by Aliona van der Horst and in this sense is a cogent example of how experiences with (in)fertility and ART travel into media and what this expression is imagined to give appearance to, make experiential, and (trans)form.

## Aims and crossroads

The questions that have structured the project are: How do mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in vlogs, film documentaries, and art installations express individuals as critically engaged in the understanding of the body as an experienced object undergoing fertility treatments? What role does the aesthetic-affective orchestration of clinical and everyday life objects, people, and surroundings in the mediations have for the viewer's involvement in the mediated fertility projects? Can the mediations be conceptualized as productions of atmospheres, and how does this affect their (trans)formation of public registers of kinship?

These questions effectuate a study that is situated at the crossroads of several fields of research and areas of knowledge production, which provides the opportunity to engage with the material from different yet potent angles. Focusing specifically on mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction, it relates to (critical) kinship studies centering on the technification of reproduction and the (media) sites where kinship is practiced and expressed (Franklin 2013; Carsten 2004; Bouquet 2001; Edwards and Salazar 2009; Rose 2007; Thacker 2005). As a study of mediations, it is also situated in relation to a media-cultural approach emphasizing the specific potential for the aesthetic experience offered by digital media technology and the aesthetic qualities of these experiences (Broadhurst, Thomsen 2012; Shaviro 2010; McCormack 2013). Since aesthetics is a crucial concept for this study, the study relates to recent expansions of the classical concept, enabling a twofold aesthetic

approach to the material through a focus on the production side and the reception side of aesthetic productions (Böhme 1995; McCormack 2013; Massumi 2010).

Additionally, as a study of the cultural significance of productions of experiences and their affectivity in relation to (trans)formations of cultural perceptions of kinship, it also relates to the research discipline of cultural studies. This positioning is important to illuminate as it is the interdisciplinary approach characterizing cultural studies that has enabled a bringing together of diverse yet, in my opinion, complementary scientific positions: a phenomenologically based critical aesthetic theory anchored in the Frankfurt School and Foucauldian inspired cartographies of governmental strategies of biomedicine to wield power and to shape the way we relate to ourselves, our bodies, and others. The challenge for cultural researchers undertaking such a study is an awareness of the strategy chosen to map and explore the relation between individuals and context. It is an awareness of how empirical research is not given beforehand but shaped through the context chosen as analytical focus and defined by the project.

In light of the above, methodically, the project is greatly inspired by the German project *Kulturen des Performativen*, specifically the work of Fischer-Lichte (2004), as well as the Dutch project *Performing Culture* and Mieke Bal's perspectives on *traveling concepts* (Bal 2002), which take issue with the performative dimension of human practices, including artistic and digital media practices. The dissertation aligns with the trajectories of these projects, which point to the function of cultural productions not as a circular semiotic structure that merely refers (back) to a social context. Cultural production, according to the Dutch and German projects, is characterized by dynamic (semiotic) processes that constitute and potentially transform the social context it is embedded in. This dissertation aligns with these perspectives and discusses the production of atmosphere by the empirical material as a cultural mode, an active force in constituting cultural norms, ideals, and values.

Using the concept of atmosphere as focal point of investigation attends to crossroads and movements in and between works, spectator, and context. It is an approach that, I hold, adds critical nuances to the discussion of what characterizes the contemporary understanding of body, technology, and kinship. This perspective takes into consideration the challenge of cultural studies, media studies, kinship studies, and performance studies that is presented by concepts of power and groups and movements that inflect on sociocultural norms ideas not easily identifiable. These objects of investigations are themselves intrinsically interrelated (Sørensen et al. 2008, 8). The intention of the project is not to present an exhaustive analysis of the dynamics between individuals' relation to themselves, others, and the world and mediations of the body, technology, and kinship and their social implications. Rather, I point to the role of the transaesthetic characteristics of the mediations in this

dissertation—their atmosphere and the social effect of these. I have thus followed Bal's (2002) and Böhme's (1995, 1993) perspectives on how art, literature, and digital aesthetic productions are characterized by a spatial epistemology that is related to “the art of the stage set” (Böhme 2008).

The analysis in the articles demonstrates my use of atmosphere as a concept and enables an opening of the respective material examples and an investigation of atmospheres as closely linked to the contemporary understanding of the body and kinship. The study of the aesthetic dimension of mediated experiences with infertility and ART requires a theoretical and methodical approach that cannot be confined to a single discipline or its sources of study or traditions. It rather entails a methodology that allows for a combination of related disciplines to investigate the dynamics of movement within the work and culturally with regard to the transformative potential of digital and art practices. Because a core aspect of this investigation is the orchestration of the aesthetic-affective attunement of the mediations, the articles of this dissertation each discuss how the composition of experiences in the subject matter; vlogs, TV and film documentaries and installation art make an array of dynamics and complexities of body, technology, and kinship entanglements experiential. Such an investigation also requires considerations of the respective characteristics of the media in question.

## The relevance of aesthetics

I came to the project because it posed the opportunity to study intersections of digital media and art practices with biotechnology and biomedicine. An initial question that guided the project in its early stages was how to approach the creative constellations of mediations of experiences with infertility and ART. One of the early decisions was to discuss these constellations in relation to media studies perspectives on the aestheticization of everyday life through the concept of re-encoding (Jansson 2002). This concept directed attention to the critical function of the mediations as creative re-encodings of experiences and furthered a focus on re-encoding as a critical practice of questioning beliefs and norms regarding the understanding of the body within the realm of ART.

The polyvalent ways in which the realm of biotechnology and biomedicine is recombined with the space, time, objects, and people of everyday life experiences in mediations that continually enter into the public registers of ways to relate thus have been central for this study. By no means are media representations of kinship relations involving ART a new phenomenon, nor are the discussions of their sociocultural implications. Media representations of kinship practices have, for instance, in a Danish context, been discussed as a launch pad for the establishment, processing, and adjustment of conceptualizations of kinship to the global reality of kinship practices (Frello 2011, 128). In these discussions, the adjustment is imagined to destabilize a biocentric and biogenetic normativity driving

the understanding of kinship (Frello 2011, 128). While the role of media in the above perspective is acknowledged for its potential to subvert conventions of body, technology, and kinship, representations of kinship in popular media are also criticized for corseting participants in documentary series into a predefined and normative kinship model (Frello 2011, 142). Such a critical approach echoes discussions within kinship studies of media accounts of infertility and ART (Franklin 1997, 2013; Carsten 2004; Bouquet 2001; Edwards and Salazar 2009).

An interesting common denominator of these perspectives is that media representations are regarded as more-than-neutral vessels. Media accounts are considered crucial for the distribution of the public face of assisted reproduction (as miraculous and quick), as well as, more broadly, the biotechnological and biomedical perception of the body as an object and subject as somatic (Thacker 2005; Franklin 2013). The increasing intertextuality characterizing the recombination of biotechnology with media is, in the abovementioned perspectives, regarded as critical in terms of its implications for how the body, technology, and kinship are understood. As my initial project description reflects, I set out to contribute to this body of material by approaching mediations as critical engagements in the regulation management of biotechnology and a cultural system that is driven toward opportunities and discovery of economic benefit from the objectification of the body. This led to an early decision to focus on mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in advanced liberal societies in which the understanding of family and of kinship practices are affected by, among other things, advances in biotechnology and biomedicine (Edwards and Salazar 2009; Franklin 1997, 2013; Strathern 1992a; Dolgin 1995). The delimitation of the research object to mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in a North American, Western European, and Japanese context reflects the aim of the study to investigate how the objectification produced by biotechnology (e.g., assisted reproduction) affects the way people understand kinship practices, body, and technology and what is effectuated when these disseminate into media.

As the work progressed, the combination of the material (clinical space, staff, and objects as well as “the trickiness of everyday relationships,” spaces, and objects) directed my attention to how the material could not be reduced to symptoms of a contemporary way of perceiving the body as an object and individuals as somatic. Nor could it be discussed as sites that conceptualize and make sense of experiences anterior to encounters with biomedical and technological phenomena. These perspectives, as well as the need for a nuancing of the critique within kinship studies of media accounts of infertility, kinship practices, and ART, directed attention to the significance of the particular combination of people, objects, and surroundings and how the affectivity of such constellations in the material could be discussed. This effectuated a different theoretical direction than initially planned, and

I was attracted by the possibility to discuss the aesthetic dimension of the mediations and its role in transforming understandings of the body, technology, and kinship. I found that this dimension had yet gone unacknowledged in discussions within media studies focusing on the significance of re-encodings. It was also a dimension not elaborated on within kinship studies focusing on infertility, ART, and kinship in media.

Aesthetics thus was not an a priori decision from which I set out to investigate vlogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art featuring experiences with infertility and ART. What triggered the aesthetic focus was the sentient encounter with the subjects, objects, and surroundings in the material. This furthered a dissatisfaction with understandings of media and biotechnological intersections as reflections of the manifold ways biotechnology networks itself into the way we think of the body “socially, economically, and politically” via its recombination in media (Thacker 2005, 345). A question this perspective is unable to address, the question the dissertation is interested in, is the significance of affective attunements by mediations—in other words, their capacity to structure feelings.

Another dissatisfaction that influenced the scope of the dissertation related to an understanding of media and biotechnological intersections as merely mobilizations of a greater demand for medication and biomedical and biotechnological services—in other words, consumption (Clark et al. 2003, 161–194). Although “show and tells” with medication, injections, and clinics are introduced in the mediations, the combination of these in the works with a picture of a meatloaf, a birthday cake resembling a buttocks with needle marks on it, buns, buttons, ear-flap hats, music, dresses, blood, and so on blurs the boundaries between the real and aesthetic reality of the mediations. The “essence” of such re-encodings is far from “empty” (Baudrillard 1988, 187). Instead, these combinations are characterized by a creativity enabled by digital media practices and art work that call for a “redefinition of ‘meaning’” (Broadhurst 2007, 15), stressing the relevance of an aesthetic approach.

The aim of this dissertation is to destabilize and to bring more nuances to fields of research emphasizing cultural transformation due to biotechnological intersections with media by turning attention to the aesthetic-affective dimension of such intersections. These perspectives led me to consider the significance of the production of sentience in mediated experiences of infertility and ART, and effectuated not only a complementing of my initial sociological theoretical foundation with the theory of an aesthetics of atmosphere. Central for the dissertation became the suggestions by cultural theorist Raymond Williams in an essay from 1978 of structures of feeling as fundamental to any understanding of cultural complexity. The consideration of feeling, intensity, affect, and immanent experience is not exemplary for this dissertation alone but has increasingly gained importance across a

range of disciplinary areas (see Sharma and Dahl, 2014). Aesthetics, in Williams's perspective, plays a crucial role in structuring feelings as he illuminates how "we need to acknowledge (and welcome) the specificity of these elements—specific feelings, specific rhythms—and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality...social content in the fullest sense, that of a generative immediacy" (Williams 1978, 133). What William calls for are studies of cultural structures of feeling in aesthetic formats and genres. This call effectuated a turn in the study to the notion of atmosphere increasingly becoming the focal point of interest in art, design, architecture, and media studies (Zumthor 2006; Böhme 1995, 1993, 2003; McCormack 2013; Hansen 2012).

The German philosopher Gernot Böhme's concept of a "new" aesthetics of atmosphere (1993, 1995) became a main theoretical inspiration. Following Böhme, the works are discussed in this dissertation as productions of atmospheric spaces. The main argument that greatly influenced the study is how digital media and art practices produce new experiences or make aspects of infertility and ART newly visible, audible, and felt rather than representing a specific understanding of the body, biotechnology, or kinship. This did not effectuate an understanding of the works as dislocated from their sociocultural context. On the contrary, the dissertation stresses how aesthetics is embedded in the messy scimmages of everyday life experiences of the body, technology, and kinship and points to dimensions of the works that have till now been omitted as constitutive aspects of norms, ideals, and values related to infertility, ART, kinship, and the body. The shift in attention to aesthetics also implicated methodological considerations of how to approach art and media practices performing and embodying knowledge that is not a preconceived given.

Rather than addressing the aesthetic experience as a mere mirror of social identity, the shift focuses on the significance of imaginative, emotional, and experiential qualities of mediated experiences in terms of their power to transform how we relate to ourselves and others. The power to create new registers of perception and feeling and to make us see the world differently emphasizes considerations of the role of aesthetics in meaning-making practices. The performative turn in cultural studies has effectuated a shift from reason, knowledge, and political organization to an emphasis on the performative anchored in the expressive and registers of feeling and the sensuous. It is a shift that enables new perspectives on experiences, participation, and cultural citizenship (Sørensen et al. 2008, 66). In light of these perspectives, the dissertation takes form as a cultural study of mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction and emphasizes how the aesthetic-affective dimension of these experiences enable new perspectives on cultural understandings of body, technology, and kinship.

## Structure

Four articles together with this dissertation summary<sup>1</sup> form the PhD thesis at hand. As the articles appear in different journals or anthologies as chapters, an inevitable result is that they seem disparate in their discussion of mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction. This summary provides perspectives on the overall concerns and context of the project as a whole – theoretically and methodologically – only briefly touched on in the articles. Minimal redundancy thus must be expected in a summary that centers on relating the discussions of the individual studies to a broader context with the aim of pointing to findings and perspectives of this dissertation.

The summary is structured in three chapters ((Digital) atmospheres – migratory aesthetics, Biotechnology, and Aesthetics), which offer a more thorough discussion of the theoretical and methodological considerations more or less ephemerally traceable through each article. These chapters are characterized by a detailed yet wider insight into the overall arguments of the project: how it has evolved from the project description initially forming the base for the study to the final venture and its results. The articles reflect the developments of the project, but their function in this summary as analytical contributions enables me to foreground the theoretical and methodological stance of the project and to discuss the implications of such applications for the project. Accordingly, the articles are placed at the end of the dissertation and only briefly referred to in the proceeding summary when relevant, not least to avoid repetition.

In chapter I, “(Digital) atmospheres – migratory aesthetics,” I will elaborate on the empirical material used in this project: video blogs on YouTube, TV and film documentaries, and art installations. The chapter elicits the methodological considerations, criteria of selection and characteristics of the media and art installations examined. The chapter also offers considerations of my incorporation of the Danish, American, and Japanese examples featured in this study as suitable for the aim of the study.

Chapter II opens with the preface “Biotechnology and Aesthetics,” in which I clarify my aim with bringing together two apparently opposed yet, as I have stated, complementary theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> According to the “General rules for the PhD program at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Southern Denmark” November 2008, §14.4: The anthology should consist of a minimum of 3 articles whereof the student must be the sole author of at least one and the first author of at least one. The anthology should include a statement which, in relation to the articles, describes the overall issue addressed by the project, the theory and methods that have been applied (including an explanation of choice and method validation) and the results that have been achieved. It should also give a critical assessment of the aforementioned in relation to existing knowledge and future implications. As a guideline, the concluding statement should be between 30 and 80 pages. The total number of pages of a dissertation constructed as an anthology, i.e. articles and conclusive statements, should not exceed the stipulated length of the monograph, i.e. approx. 250 pages.

approaches. The preface presents the affordance of complementing Foucauldian-inspired social theory of what characterizes the biomedical understanding of body, technology, and kinship (Franklin 1997; 2013; Rose 2007; Thacker 2005) with the new phenomenologically based critical aesthetic theory of Gernot Böhme (1995). The preface is followed by chapter II, “Biotechnology,” where I present one of the two theoretical threads of the dissertation and which more or less features all articles, here, though, elaborated more in depth. I introduce the key arguments of Nicolas Rose (2007), Eugene Thacker (2005), and Sarah Franklin (2013) in a movement from a narrow concept of biopolitical power to a broader one in the work of Thacker and Franklin in terms of their discussion of biopolitical experiences related to new media. The chapter includes a summary discussing the necessity of incorporating aesthetics in the perspectives of biopolitics.

Chapter III, “Aesthetics,” opens, perhaps a bit peculiarly, with a presentation of Gernot Böhme’s philosophy of technology (2012). His perspectives on technology and his consideration of aesthetics, however, must be considered together. Greatly inspired by Martin Heidegger’s paradoxical formulation of how art as a “realm that is, on one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it,” his new aesthetics critically examines how this can be resolved by viewing the artistic orientation to the world as the alternative dimension of “enframing.” The chapter introduces Böhme’s key arguments and considerations that have guided this thesis’s approach to the material as productions of atmospheres affectively inflecting understandings of body, technology, and kinship. The chapter also addresses the understanding of affect used in the study and how the different theoretical perspectives on this concept complement each other. This chapter, like the former, contains a summary, which considers one of the recurring sites in the course of this investigation: bioart.

Chapter III is followed by a conclusion that sums up the study and its key perspectives, followed by the respective articles, as well as abstracts of the dissertation in Danish and in English. The three parts of this dissertation together with the articles articulate what I consider crucial for further investigations of the role of mediated experiences of infertility and ART: the knowledge that creative intersections between biotechnology and media or art are premised on as well as contribute to. (Trans)formation is a key aspect pointing to how the making of what hitherto could not be aesthetically perceived experiential is an important aspect in discussions of what makes processes of (trans)formations possible.

## The articles

The project has resulted in four studies, three submitted to peer-reviewed journals and anthologies and one published in conference proceedings. Each article offers possible answers to the main questions of this study. At the submission of the dissertation, the current status of the articles is as follows: article 1 has been accepted for publication (Nov. 2014), article 2 has been published, and article 3 has been submitted and article 4 published in conference proceedings:

Article 1, “Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs: On the Aesthetic-Affective Dimension of Individual Fertility Projects on YouTube” (forthcoming, in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*. Eds. Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup. Concepts for the Study of Culture, Bd. 5. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, Jan. 2015). The first article is an analysis of American user-generated video blogs about infertility and assisted reproduction and discusses how involvement is orchestrated through aesthetic-affective attunements in order to engage the viewer. The article discusses how the video blogs not only allow the process of IVF to be experienced by the viewers but offer insight into reflections of individuals and their encounter with the regulatory power of biomedical techniques.

Article 2, “Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility” (published, *Body, Space and Technology* 12, no. 1). The second article is an analysis of a video blog (vlog). Article 2 is a study of user-generated video blogs on YouTube by an American couple undergoing treatment for infertility. The study discusses the relevance of aesthetics and the concept of atmosphere in relation to mediated experiences in new media. The article turns its attention to the atmospheric body, technology, and time, space, and modalities of everyday life and their constellation as significant dynamics for the viewer’s involvement in the mediated fertility project.

Article 3, “Relational (Trans)formations. The Matter of Kinship in *Technostorks* (2006) and *The Baby Clinic* (2012).” (submitted, *Critical Kinship Studies: Kinship (Trans)Formed*. Edited by Charlotte Kroløkke et al.) The third article centers on critiques within kinship studies of media representations of assisted reproduction and kinship as spectacles, and (family) photography as reinstallations, of “kinship as we know it.” The article points to the actuality of these considerations but also sets out to qualify the discussion of mediations in relation to digital media culture. Empirically, two documentary formats are included. The article illustrates how the documentaries make kinship matters experiential through a range of affective intensifications capacitating (trans)formations of public understandings of kinship practices involving IVF. The article argues that haptic experiential qualities, the presence of the small

and mundane, and ambivalence make the complexities and dynamics of the kinship practices visible, audible, and felt.

Article 4, “Atmospheres of Belonging. The Aesthetic Qualities of the Japanese Installation *wasted* on (In)fertility and American Videoblogs (vlogs) about IVF on YouTube” (published, in *Official Conference Proceedings 2013*, The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2013, pp. 213–224). The fourth article centers on the convergences between American experiences with IVF in a video blog and Japanese experiences with infertility. With a departure in what characterizes the biotech century, the article discusses the video blog and installation as powerful atmospheric lenses through which the formation and development of individuals is seen as actively involved in contemporary understandings of the body. Whereas *wasted* is characterized by an abstract cathedral-like space, the vlogs offer close encounters of spaces, body, and life usually unnoticed. The article discusses how these atmospheres spur belonging, which is less about biology than how a bodily participation in sociocultural conditions is produced through movement physically and affectively.

The four articles appear in very different journals and anthologies yet to some extent build on each other as they all more or less reflect on media and biotechnology, kinship, and body. The anthology form suits this investigation of the travelling of kinship practices into digital media and art. It has enabled a study of how these practices come to matter, inflecting understandings of body, technology, and kinship, pointing to the significance of the findings for an array of research areas. I acknowledge, however, that this format also has limited the rich empirical material, which could have been more detailed. The material could also have benefited from a longitudinal analysis of how mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in digital media relate historically to similar intersections of medicine with art, TV, and movies. The study, however, has been driven by my belief that my material and the articles offer important nuances of approaches to digital media and art practices addressing infertility and ART.

Whereas I point, in article 1, to how the objectification produced by assisted reproduction affects the way people understand kinship relations, I also point to how this objectification in return is affected by the orchestration of the trickiness of everyday relationships between people, objects, and environments. Article 2 expands the aesthetic-affective theoretical arguments of article 1 and offers, in particular, a more detailed analytical discussion of video blogs as “atmospheric” media. Article 3 relates these aesthetic and affective approaches to discussions of media representations within kinship studies. Article 4 returns to questions that arose in article 1, which

I was unable to expand on owing to space constraints, and addresses the question of entanglements of biological rationalities and affect briefly touched on in article 2 and 3 also.

## Chapter I

### (Digital) atmospheres – migratory aesthetics

The thesis is interested in the transformative potential of mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction for understandings of the body, kinship, and technology. The collection of material represents a tendency to incorporate biotechnology and biomedicine in its mediation, which carries with it challenging aesthetic-affective attunements for already existing understandings of body, kinship, and technology. I believe, similar to Susan Broadhurst (2007), that these digital media and art practices share some defining features: the centrality of the digital, an emphasis on the corporeal, the implication of new aesthetics, and the requirement of a transaesthetic mode of analysis and interpretation. This first chapter of the thesis, about the methodological considerations, is directed at giving the reader a sense of some of the choices of the empirical material and the theoretical approach to and method related to the study of it. As this is a transaesthetic study, the collection of material directs attention to how the aesthetics of experiences with infertility and ART migrates into an array of media and art work.

The approach of this thesis follows recent considerations of the transformative potential of such aesthetic travelling / migration (Durrant and Lord 2007; Bal 2007; 2002; Bal and Hernandez-Navarro 2011) of, in this case, understandings of kinship, body, and technology. Understanding the material as migratory aesthetics refers not only to how video blogs, TV and film documentaries and art installations travel (trans)culturally and how atmospheres travel transmedia but also to a third issue of mobility, that of emotions and places within the works themselves. The collection of material thus calls for the appropriation of a method that allows for a transaesthetic and, to a degree, transcultural investigation while remaining mindful of the media specificity of the respective works. The transaesthetic approach of the dissertation relates to both the German-centered “Kulturen des Performativen” led by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2004) and the Dutch “Performing Culture” formulated by Mieke Bal (1991; 2002). Before elaborating on how these traditions have informed my way of studying the material, though, I firstly outline some of main criteria that have provided me with the material featured in this study. Furthermore, I will address what characterizes these media and their relevance to this thesis.

In the following, I will account for my selection of material, which comprises more than that presented in the articles of this thesis, which I in turn have considered exemplary for the respective collections that I have been working with. Thus, my material collection is not exhausted. Nor should it

be regarded as a representative selection of contemporary art installations, film and TV documentaries or video blogs (vlogs), even though the vlog of Silvia and Peter, the art installation *wasted* by Tomoko Mukaiyama, the film documentary *Technostorks* by Andrei Kirilenko and the TV documentary *The Baby Clinic* as expressions, are related to existing and previous vloggers, artists, and documentaries on the matter. They are collections of sites where biotechnology intersects with the body, space, time, and modality of everyday life in digital media and art installations.

## Vlogs

The video blogs included in this dissertation are related to an emerging area of health vlogs (Liu et al. 2013). Video blogging as performed on YouTube, as well as on sites such as Vimeo, is affordable and easily accessed, featuring not only amateur videos but also professional video productions from fertility clinics, agencies, and biomedical companies. Vlogs thus have been used for an array of purposes spanning from “e-learning, citizen journalism, product marketing, daily interaction with family and friends” (Liu 2013, 49) to sharing experiences of health-related conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Health video blogs are characterized by a certain stylistic format: the talking head, which refers to how most video blogs feature only the author and his/her head. According to Liu et al., this format follows the idea that virtual social proxemics and the size of the image affect the experiential quality (Liu et al. 2013, 54). Liu et al. centers on three generative aspects of vlogs: *nonverbal cues*, *other actors*, and *context filming* (Liu et al. 2013, 53). I have discussed these as the art of setting the stage, relating these aspects to Böhme’s (1995,1993) discussions of atmosphere produced by the constellation of people, objects, and spaces. *Nonverbal cues* such as “pausing, crying, or giving facial expressions,” according to Liu et al., are included in order to establish connections with the audience through a range of emotions (Liu et al. 2013, 50–51). *Other actors*, referring to how the vlogs entail not only the vloggers themselves but their romantic partners, friends, clinical staff, pets, etc., is another component that Liu et al. and I have argued provides the viewer with further context of the vlogger. The *context filming* aspect of vlogs refers to “in-the-moment capturing” using real-time recordings of mobile phones and/or transportable video cameras (Liu et al. 2013, 50–51). The vlogs take the viewer beyond the

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<sup>2</sup> In a Danish context, Tobias Raun has investigated the intersection between transidentity and technology as it manifests in American trans video blogs on YouTube (Raun 2014; 2012). The connection between vlogger and viewers, Raun argues, as social support or connections with others works as self-therapy/DIY therapy (Raun 2012). Studies of the use of vlogs in the health domain have been used for an array of purposes, which also can be extended to the more textual variant, blogging. In these studies, user-generated vlogs and blogs are regarded as a tool to gain access to physical and emotional experiences of patients for the purpose of learning and assessment of treatments (Molyneaux and O’Donnell 2009; Kiliarnta, Roeser, and Nihlén Fahlquist 2011). Few of these studies examine the connection between the vlogger, alone their aesthetic dimension, and the audience (Liu 2013, 50).

talking heads, their homes, and the fertility clinics into cars, to events, and on vacations with videos that are augmented and intensified using light, sound effects, animation, and music.

While Liu et al. argue that small “show-and-tells” (Liu et al. 2013, 55) of, for instance, how to inject hormone-stimulating medication are viewed as effectively involving the viewer in the specifics of the couple’s context, I have suggested that these show-and-tells effectuate involvement as they offer insight into matters (objects, materiality, substance) of the fertility project. The high degree of customization enables the vloggers to gain control over their presentation and content. Viewed as a generator, customization plays a substantial role in relation to understandings of body, technology, and kinship. Liu et al., as well as this study,<sup>3</sup> relate to recent discussions within media studies of how to evaluate digital media and their user orientation (Sørensen 2009, 66).

I have explored my empirical material inspired by Nick Couldry (2004; 2008; 2009), who takes what Sørensen describes as a techno-optimistic” approach to new media (Sørensen 2009, 66). Relating the material to Couldry’s discussion of mediation has to do particularly with his media-oriented practice perspective. This perspective has allowed an approach to the vlogs as a social activity, calling for an emphasis on how the vlogs produce relations to others and ourselves (Couldry 2004, 115–132). The social potential of media practices, according to Couldry, can be approached through the concepts of mediation and mediatization (Couldry 2008). Whereas the latter addresses aspects of media textuality, suggesting that a unitary media-based logic is at work,<sup>4</sup> the former provides more flexibility for thinking about open-ended and dialectical social transformations.<sup>5</sup> For Couldry, the valences of mediation and its attentiveness to the nonlinear make it a potent concept. What the concept enables are discussions of digital media practices not least related to the “community”<sup>6</sup> dimension of these practices (Couldry 2008, 375). He adjusts Silverstone’s definition of mediation as dialectic: a nonlinear process that “requires us to understand how processes of communication change the social and cultural environments that support them, as well as the relationships that individuals and institutions have to that environment and to each other” (Couldry 2008, 380). This seamless dialectic, however, does not sit well with Couldry, who comments that this movement “disarms us from noticing

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<sup>3</sup> Whereas Liu et al. relates to this dissertation’s approach to the material as aesthetic-affective productions, their interest lies in developing a future design that can further audience involvement premised on making the experiences with health-related conditions experiential. This project in turn has discussed the cultural dimension of health vlogs as they currently take form and discussed their relevance in relation to understandings of kinship practices involving IVF.

<sup>4</sup> As formulated by Stig Hjarvard (2004) and Winfried Schulz (2004).

<sup>5</sup> As formulated by Roger Silverstone (1999).

<sup>6</sup> He refers to Etienne Wenger’s (1998) concept of “communities of practice.” For Wenger, “communities of practice are the prime context in which we can work out common sense through mutual engagement” (Wenger 1998, 47, cited in Couldry 2008, 385).

certain asymmetric interrelations between actors in the media process, and even the impossibility of certain actors or outputs influencing other actors or outputs” (Couldry 2008, 380).

Mediation, according to Couldry, rather should be understood as “flows of production, circulation, interpretation or reception, and recirculation, as interpretations flow back into production or outwards into general social and cultural life” (Couldry 2008, 380). As a consequence, such an understanding of mediation emphasizes both how “the space of media’ is structured in important ways, durably and partly beyond the intervention of particular agents,” but also how this structuring is “closed off, isolating some pockets of mediation from the wider flow” (Couldry 2008, 384). Digital storytelling (including YouTube videos), Couldry maintains, has the potential to correct isolations or closing-offs as it provides the means to distribute the capacity to tell important stories about oneself – to represent oneself as a social, and therefore potentially political, agent – in a way that is registered in the public domain. The transformative potential related to video blogs, following Couldry, is related to these mediations operating “outside the boundaries of mainstream media institutions” (Couldry 2008, 385).

The flow Couldry discusses is also present in Andre Jansson’s considerations of how image production is characterized by re-encoding, an expansion of the classical communication model of encoding / decoding (Jansson 2002, 18–19; Hall 1980). Jansson discusses re-encoding or flow from the vantage point of mediatization as logic. Couldry does not dismiss this dimension but nevertheless argues that it leaves out the multidirectionality of how media may be transforming society. Mediation in turn includes multidirectional perspectives, enabling the possibility to discuss how aesthetics and narrative as part of media practices play a role in transforming society. Whereas Couldry proposes that mediations are connected to “important stories” (2008), which are spectacular, interesting, and special occasions (2009), I have followed another trail suggesting that what characterizes YouTube videos are also “the minutiae and small-life moments” (Lange 2009, 74). It is a trail that requires another approach than that of “traditional cinema art-house aesthetics” (Lange 2009, 74). Co-belonging, following Couldry, supersedes what is implied by re-encoding: a saturated media environment of still more self-revolving individualized experiences. Personal expression of all sorts finds its way into video clips that are shared with a community of users or strangers, who may further circulate, comment on, and edit them.

YouTube, in the perspective of Burgess and Green (2009), cannot be reduced to a singular phenomenon, because it operates as a mainstream media outlet and at the same time as a critique and countercultural model subverting those political and aesthetic models. Similar to Couldry, they stress how a multidirectional perspective is relevant because new media such as YouTube is

characterized by a complicated structure. Burgess and Green particularly stress that regarding YouTube, “it is important not to fall into the trap of simply assuming that vernacular video is organized primarily around a desire to broadcast the self” (Burgess and Green 2009, 4). Holloway-Attaway similarly believes that while YouTube, “on the surface, [seems] hyper-invested in creating overt visual displays or public performances, mediatized externalization as a means of communicating private, personal experience” (Holloway-Attaway 2012, sec. 3), its real power is its communicative power. It is a power that relates to the connectivity of exchange and production of “private internal expression and not the externalized aesthetics of the videos (which are often low budget and low quality)” (Holloway-Attaway 2012, sec. 3).

What Holloway-Attaway and Burgess and Green argue has to be acknowledged as part of the multidimensional perspective is the affectivity of the mediations that extends to emotions and sensory connections felt in the body, that are expressed through it as well as with it. It is this aesthetic-affective dimension as a defining feature of social media’s mode of experience-based production,<sup>7</sup> in relation to YouTube, that I have taken interest in and have discussed in relation to social transformations of understandings of infertility and kinship involving IVF. As amateur cultural producers, vloggers’ production of atmospheric video blogs “outside the cultural value systems of either high culture or commercial creative practice” entails a small power to make viewers participate in the mediated experiences. Burgess and Green state that what is stressed by these media practices are “desires to be *felt* (that is, as opposed to being *seen*) in order to instantiate a form of communal ontology and sharing . . . one that is both mine and yours” (Burgess and Green 2009, 25). The social

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Lange (2009) and Lissa Holloway-Attaway (2012) argue, specifically in relation to YouTube, that affect and phenomenality of the body are crucial for social transformation. Holloway-Attaway, for instance, discusses how the talking head, a common feature of vlogs, can be seen as a straw man set up for *my* experience, a generic device posing as subjective function. Its connection to the subject and site of production, the “me,” is, however, one that depends on a configuration of the material body where organic (vs. technical) material is a primary element of creation. Her perspectives are highly influenced by media theorist and philosopher Mark B. N. Hansen (2004; 2006). Similar to this dissertation, Hansen in his earlier works is interested in how images in digital art go beyond the merely visual (2004; 2006). The body is regarded by Hansen as a privileged position by which he counter prevails notions of technological transcendence. Hansen’s theoretical trajectory has moved in new directions, from a phenomenological focus drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty to his current framing of media through A. N. Whitehead. Through this framing, Hansen argues for the relevance of cognitive neuroscience in relation to new media culture, which is characterized by computational processes occurring at scales far beneath what our senses can experience and is in need of a reconceptualization. Concepts such as the *superject* and *prehensions*, Hansen (2012) argues, more accurately capture what is at issue with new media culture. They indicate a shift in the understanding of aesthetics, which also is at play, albeit differently, in writer and performance actor Susan Broadhurst’s call for a re-theorization of aesthetics and perception with regard to cognitive neuroscience that offers “an understanding of the biological basis of aesthetic experience” (see Broadhurst 2007; Zeki 1999). Aesthetics thus (still) is relevant in the discussion of media cultural practices, but as the abovementioned perspectives reflect, the classic concept of aesthetic in the tradition of Kant onwards to Lyotard requires an expansion/re-theorization in order to address the aesthetically relevant dimensions of digital media culture.

transformation of mediation, according to Burgess and Green, is linked to the challenge by a new media cultural politics that foregrounds expressive bodies (Burgess and Green 2009, 25–26). “The production aesthetics of tactile motility and *amateur* organics networking” (Burgess and Green 2009, 25–26) destabilizes the subject’s dimension, whereby the possibility is enabled creatively and critically to address “the texts and bodies supported by current emergent digital media forms” (Holloway-Attaway 2012, sec. 4) – or more specifically, as I have argued in this dissertation, the public face of IVF and infertility. The body and its relation to technical mediation as outlined in the above perspectives point to the relevance of such a relation as a core site for investigation of video blogs on infertility and IVF.

### Criteria of selection

The first collection of material; vlogs, was selected based on thematic content (infertility, undergoing IVF) and vloggers who posted series of entries about their experiences, offering chronologically ordered insight into their fertility project over time in order to achieve a broad insight into what it means to live with infertility and undergo IVF. Since YouTube does not feature specific health categories, my search was initiated by entering the keyword “>infertility< blog.” Reaching 13,500 hits, I narrowed down the vlogs of infertility using the following criteria: (1) vlogs directly related to IVF (IVF diaries, IVF channels), (2) vlogs featuring couples undergoing IVF, and (3) self-produced vlogs, because the initial search result included professionally produced videos uploaded by fertility clinics, organizations, and corporations. This last criterion was based on an interest in mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction as DIY (do-it-yourself) videos, produced and uploaded by the couples themselves.

The collection consists of twelve video blogs by American, British, and Australian couples, which was the saturation point of the search. This point emerged when a reoccurring pattern in the material was identified as an identical structure featuring thoughts on being reproductively challenged, preliminary thoughts on hormone injections (drugs, injections and emotional distress), examinations and scans in fertility clinics, egg retrieval procedures, embryo transfers, the two-week wait, and the results of their treatments. Each video blog consists of eight to sixty-three video entries with durations between fifteen seconds and twenty-four minutes and was continuously followed during the past three years of research. Each vlog is cleared for copyright issues because some vloggers specifically stress that their videos are not to be used without permission. Although the vlogs I have collected are accessible to the public, I have chosen to anonymize the identity of the authors in the respective articles in light of the highly private content.

The dynamics of the video blogs on YouTube have posed a serious challenge related to assuring continual accessibility to the material. I hence had to decide early in the project how to secure and manage data that consists of highly private content yet is available on a public accessible distribution channel that allows for the material to be discussed. The dynamics of the material, which both could be added to continually through uploads and could be removed by the authors of the video blogs at any time, also encompassed considerations of an ethical character. The latter quality in particular – that video blogs can be removed – poses a serious problem for a dissertation that, due to the anthological format, has centered on a few examples of a wider collection. My choice not to store the material was based on the AOIR ethical guidelines for Internet research<sup>8</sup> acknowledging the author's right to manage personally produced and distributed material. However, in order to manage the material, I have used the subscription feature provided by YouTube, enabling me to follow the video blogs closely.

As Sørensen notes in relation to research of the online phenomenon of blogs (a textual variant of (health) vlogs), the challenge is the characteristic mash-up of volatility and redundancy: blogs can be created or abolished or can passively exist without contingent entries / posts (Sørensen 2008, 10). Subscribing to the vloggers channels and diaries provided new material (videos) linked to the collection through uploads and made me aware of when material was removed. It also provided me with a diverse collection of material not at all related to the project, because subscription was not restricted to the respective channels, the diaries of the users, but linked to their entire profile. It required a constant assessment of how these entries outside the respective thematic channels on IVF somehow could be incorporated in the study to influence our understanding of the role of the process of IVF in people's lives. I had to limit the scope, however, to the respective theme – the significance of the vloggers' mediated experiences with IVF – as the project otherwise would have grown in data, which would have required a more structured method of coding. As a result, I chose not to include video uploads of a country festival, cats dressed as a sheriff, etc., which could have made the research method even more time consuming (but admittedly sometimes quite fun).

Because the vlogs could be removed any time, it was critical to verify the findings related to material no longer accessible. This obvious disadvantage did not affect the aims or approach of the study. It did, however, provoke a continual search for video blogs that, along with the collection as a whole, were representative of the findings. It also effectuated attention to aspects of everyday life linked to experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction that were explored further but not followed in

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<sup>8</sup> <http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>, accessed 11-06-2014

this dissertation, such as religion and religious beliefs, which reoccur in several vlogs (and are addressed in *Techmostorks*). An overview of the complete collection of material has been included in the reference list so the reader may engage with the video blogs included in this study in addition to my written accounts in the articles along with frame grabs, which are limited, not least by the journals in which the material is discussed.

The vlogs selected are related to the aim and scope of the research and thus were selected based on the criteria that they more or less explicitly expressed experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction. The vlogs were also chosen based on their mash-up orchestration of real-time recordings in homes, cars, and clinical surroundings filmed with a transportable camera, webcam, or mobile phone before, during, and after the IVF treatments, along with sound effects and off- and online materials (texts, cartoon clips, photographs of meatloaf, etc.). The aim with the collection was to illustrate how mediated experiences with infertility and the process of IVF express the complexity of kinship practices involving IVF. I believe that the mediations, however, should not be regarded as mere retrospective vessels for or reactions to experiences with an understanding of the body premised on objectification. The mediations rather implicate transformations through their production of aesthetic-affective experiential qualities. The video blogs on infertility allow an array of matters of kinship practices to be experienced through the aesthetics of usually unseen aspects of fertility projects: physical pain, emotional distress, financial costs, and everyday life.

Silvia and Peter's vlog is representative of this collection of video blogs I have been working with and is featured in the article "Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility" as well as the article "Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs: On the Aesthetic-Affective Dimension of Individual Fertility Projects on YouTube" and "Atmospheres of Belonging. The Aesthetic Qualities of the Japanese Installation "wasted" on (in) Fertility and American Videoblogs (vlogs) about IVF on YouTube."

## TV and film documentaries

Whereas health vlogging, as a subgenre of weblogging,<sup>9</sup> is a relatively new digital practice, health-related TV and film documentaries have been around since the early twentieth century and, along with formats such as instructional films, newsreels, cartoons, and health-related videos and DVDs, have (trans)formed American's understanding of health and disease (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 1).

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<sup>9</sup> Kathrine Harrison notes in relation to weblogs on infertility, a textual subgenre of blogs, that the term "weblog" was coined in 1997 (see Harrison, Katrine. *Discursive skin: Entanglements of gender, discourse and technology*. Linköping University, 2010, 21).

According to Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler, health-related films and TV shows are not merely an American phenomenon.

Makers of films and television documentaries have used their craft to change public attitudes toward specific diseases and medicines, leaving a rich and diverse body of material that is still in the beginning stages of a more systematic exploration of the connections and conflicts, and the ongoing coincidence of interests, between medicine and mass media (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 3). What unites health, body, and medicine in electronic media is, according to Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler, that they can be characterized as a genre, medicine's moving pictures, by its topics (health, body, and medicine) and its relationship with medical profession and science (2009, 3). What unites the wide variety of formats included in this characterization is the power of *moving* pictures. This is the power not only to make bodies move across screen, to compose this moving to seem real, but to *move* in the sense that movies can be shown and seen everywhere – in cinemas, homes, classrooms, hospitals – a distribution involving different screens and audiences. Moving pictures also move across media in terms of interplay between media formats, and the stories these images present move between people. Whereas the depiction of emotions on screen has the ability to move the audience, the educational aim is to move the audience to adopt new health-related practices (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 4).

Leslie Reagan, for instance, in her analysis of an American Cancer Society film, points to how the modeling of a procedure is much more complicated, arguing that the film models for the viewer an ideal patient *and* the ideal movie viewer (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 4–5). Health and medical media are invested in moving their audience to adopt a perspective or take action in relation to a health controversy, a lobbying that is increasingly being challenged by independent productions. Thus, medicine's moving pictures move in a variety of ways: through their physical distribution to different viewing sites, their constant movement across different media, and their capacity to move audiences emotionally, and as catalysts that motivate audiences to take actions regarding new health-related practices or health controversies.

As genres, TV and film documentaries are popular formats, exemplified by the increase in international festivals (CPH:DOX, IDFA – the largest documentary film festival in the world, and Amsterdam-NYCIFF, to name a few) and a proliferation of television programming of the format. The Annual Independent Television and Film Festival hints at the impact of TV and film documentaries; it points out that owing to “the majority of today's visual content being created outside of the major

networks and studios, independent artists have become a central force.”<sup>10</sup> Just as producers of health-related TV and film are invested in representing the subjects of the medical industry with “accuracy,” so are the independent productions invested in accuracy / the “true” story, which they believe can be achieved through independence from major production companies and through independent funding. Treichler suggests that the troublesome allure of medicine’s moving pictures has led to a sharpening of distinctions between educational film and entertainment / theatrical films. Approaching this distinction as a clear-cut, however, limits the ability to grasp the significance of these media (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 7).

What characterizes the production of a realistic drama is the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, where verisimilitude since the 1950s has been achieved by deploying cinematic strategies and tactics developed over decades. What was strived for was a way to present science and medicine dynamically and realistically or to achieve the appearance of realistic representations (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 7–8). This intention effectuated a commitment to accuracy in medical films, which forced the intermingling of “fictional, acted material, and documentary, ‘live’ material” (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 8). *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic*, which are examined in this dissertation, thus are not exact depictions / representations of experiences with IVF, but the aim to endow the audience with a more accurate perspective on infertility and undergoing IVF still remains a key feature. Similar to medical image productions in general, the “more true story” of infertility and undergoing IVF are achieved through selection, cinematic techniques, and augmentation “that emphasizes some truths over others” (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 10).<sup>11</sup>

Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler point to another interesting aspect of medicine’s moving images related to this dissertation, namely that these images provide strong support for a more complex understanding of how audiences respond to media productions (2009, 8). TV and film productions thus have moved attention from accuracy in terms of depicting experts in action to accuracy connected to depicting the existential and emotional aspects of engagements with medicine. Medical images thus operate with a reception model, which is more complicated than the once-dominating one-directional reception model and the static understanding of the audience (Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler 2009, 9). Media codes, mediation, conventions, and context that create meaning (production side) together with

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.itvfest.com/the-festival/what-is-itvfest>

<sup>11</sup> Accuracy in terms of authenticity has been recently discussed in relation to, for instance, mediation of travel and tourism practices; see B. T. Knudsen and A. M. Waade, *Re-investing Authenticity: Tourism, Place and Emotions* (Leeds: Channel View Publications, 2010). Although their focus is on tourism and travel, their discussion of constructed (staged) authenticity and phenomenological experiences of this staging relates to the discussions of accuracy in medicine’s moving pictures as well as this dissertation’s discussion of atmospheres.

what the audience brings to the media experience (reception side) are aspects that have to be considered in a discussion of how the audience responds to the calibrated health-related TV and film productions.<sup>12</sup> Medical moving pictures have to be considered not only in relation to their visuals, and also sound and silence as crucial components of film and TV in relation to medical moving images for deaf audiences, but also in relation to the production of accuracy.

Some of the effects of medical moving images imply that “medical experts do not always have it their way,” an implication that, according to Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler, relates to how the moving images, among other things, have revealed a medical field itself filled with tensions (2009, 11). They have also distorted some of the outcomes of medical products, romanticizing them by promising a happier result than is clinically possible to predict. In addition to collaborations with experts, activist movements and health-related agencies have redefined the category of “experts” and challenged the medical definition of accuracy. Medicine’s moving pictures constitute a rich cultural and historical archive that has been and still is a part of national discussions and debates. The characteristics discussed by Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler point to the relevance of including TV and film documentaries in this study.

## Criteria of selection

The second collection of material consists of film and TV documentaries revolving around experiences of couples undergoing the process of IVF intertwined with explanations of the process by doctors and clinical staff. The collection consists of four American film documentaries. The materials were selected based on their production as independent documentaries in order to avoid documentaries produced, distributed, and financed by corporations, fertility clinics, agencies, and organizations. This criterion does not mean that these documentaries are less political or do not follow a particular agenda. My choice to include these relates to this genre as a central force of artistic production. Furthermore, the choice of independent productions relates to Reagan, Tomes, and Treichler’s intriguing notion that independent production destabilizes the biomedical definition of accuracy, truth, and reality further and premises it on other definitions. *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic*, for instance, aim to offer an open and honest insight into what it means to be reproductively challenged, how life is organized around fertility

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<sup>12</sup> Guattari, for instance, has pointed to how reception of TV is characterized by a being in the intersection: “When I watch television, I exist at the intersection: 1. of a perceptual fascination provoked by the screen’s luminous animation which borders on the hypnotic, 2. of a captive relation with the narrative content of the program, associated with a lateral awareness of surrounding events (water boiling on the stove, a child’s cry, the telephone, . . . 3. of a world of phantasms occupying my daydreams” (Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* [Indiana University Press, 1995], 16).

treatments, the personal emotional distress, and reactions of friends and family.<sup>13</sup> For Kirilenko, the truth about the process of IVF is related to the public face of IVF as an always-successful procedure. *Technostorks* aims, Kirilenko notes, to be true to the statistics on achieved pregnancy through IVF.<sup>14</sup> The collection aims to explore how the couples in these documentaries are subjected to the biotechnological perception of the body as an object as their IVF process and how genetic substances are commented on and assessed by clinical experts. The documentaries provide insight into how assisted reproduction is not only a technique, service, or industry but a way of perceiving the body as an object. They offer insight into how the couples' bodies are regulated and controlled at their fertility clinic and how the optimization of the body as an object functions as experiential orientation for the viewer. Documentary filmmaker Andrei Kirilenko's *Technostorks* is a fifty-one-minute long documentary, including a title sequence and end credits. The film was screened at the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival 2006, where it subsequently was named Best Independent Health Documentary. The film was initiated by Kirilenko and his wife Shelly's own experiences with six years of infertility and multiple fertility treatments and their need at that time for material centering on the many aspects of in vitro fertilization, physical and emotional, as well as scientific. *Technostorks* follows three couples from Washington whose medical histories vary as does the number of cycles they have undergone before the one followed.

The documentary enables a focus on how the couples orient themselves in relation to their body and cultural bodily ideals. The film documentary presents three couples' fertility projects but as a documenting act is also engaged in the social dimension of these projects. The documentary is discussed as critical in the sense as it reveals matters of kinship involving ART, effectuating an experience of kinship as a complex process. This collection turned out to be a small sample, I extended the scope of the material to include TV documentaries, including the Danish *The Baby Clinic* (*Babyklinikken* 2012). *The Baby Clinic*, produced by Koncern TV and Film, first aired on December 3, 2012, and ended with the eighth episode on February 4, 2013; reruns were broadcast during June and July 2013. The duration of each episode, eight in total, is forty-two minutes. The TV documentary had seventy-five thousand viewers and placed in the top twenty most-watched programs on TV4 four times during the period it was aired. It is a multiplatform-oriented series accessible via the TV channel's webpage and an app offering access to a gallery with pictures of the couples and a news section covering additional information on infertility, fertility treatments, sexual transmitted diseases, factors

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nutv.dk/video?video=4178> accessed 23/10/2014

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Beckman, "Waiting Woom," *Washington City Paper*, February 24, 2006.

<http://opensourceproductions.com/Images/WashCityPaperArticle.PDF> accessed 23/10/2014

influencing fertility such as age, etc., as well as direct links to streaming services (nu.tv) where full episodes can be watched. I have not examined this multiplatform analytically but rather focused on the documentary material as aired on TV4.

Analytically, the film documentary *Technostorks* (2006) and *The Baby Clinic* represent a collection of material invested in the significance of mediated experiences for cultural perceptions of pursuits of biological kinship involving assisted reproduction, which I have addressed in article 3, “Relational Trans(formation)s. The Matter of Kinship Substances in *Technostorks* (2006) and *The Baby Clinic* (2012).”

## Installation art

The last collection differs substantially from the two other media examined yet is similarly invested in the production of properties from which “something” can proceed. Installation art is a relatively new art form but nevertheless has become, according to Anne Ring Petersen (2009), the dominant art form on the international art scene. It is a diverse art form in appearance, materiality, and subject matter that furthermore draws on a variety of disciplines, whereby it constantly renews itself transaesthetically and transdisciplinarily (Ring Petersen 2009).

In this section, I will elaborate on the specificity of installation art and why it is interesting for a study of the transformative potential of mediated experiences with infertility and IVF. One of the main reasons for the relevance of art installations for this dissertation is their production of experiential quality, which, following Ring Petersen, is established by (I) activating space and contexts, (II) extending the work in time, whereby it takes form as situation and process, and (III) a phenomenological focus on the visitor’s bodily and subjective experiences (Ring Petersen 2009, 38–39). Installation art, Ring argues, is characterized by its spatiality; it takes form as a spatial scenography rather than an isolated object in space. In combination with diverse media, it has networked into video installations or mixed-media installations, making crossovers a defining feature of its relational or migrating aesthetic qualities (Ring Petersen 2009, 45–46).

However diverse these crossovers might be, Julie Reiss argues, “the essence of Installation art is spectator participation, but the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another and even from one work to another by the same artist . . . the viewer is required to complete the piece; the meaning evolves from the interaction between the two” (Reiss, 1999, xiii). Installation art thus has a built-in spectator or participant activated through bodily involvement spurred by the installation. These bodily actions, Ring Petersen argues, can take form as motile movements through which the spectator interacts with and reacts to the installation as he/she moves around it in order to

connect (with) its diverse compositional elements (Ring Petersen 2009, 48). These motile actions, Ring notes, are partially choreographed as a part of the artist's incorporation of possible routes for the motility of the spectator. Actions in relation to installation art, according to Ring Petersen, also encompasses imaginative actions, the stimulation of the spectator on the level of reflection premised on her/his bodily movements and reactions: "This phenomenological premised reflection must by the spectator be complemented with the semiotic reflection on the signs which the installation produces. . . . The spectators must include their own actions in the interpretation of the work" (Ring Petersen 2009, 53, my translation). Furthermore, following Ring, action in relation to installations is related to actions structured by the artist, offering a limited number of possibilities for engagement on the premise of the spectator (Ring Petersen 2009, 52–53).

These modes of actions are structured by the installation in a twofold manner between what Ring Petersen refers to as image and stage. The former refers to the organization of the physical space as stage, the way that the theatricality of installation art transforms the physical space into an imaginative space (aesthetic reality). The latter refers to its internal scenography, the organization of the material composition that structures the reception of the beholder performative. These two gestures – the inward *mise en scène* and the outward structuring of the experience of the beholder – have facilitated a change in the role of the beholder from the ideal of the disinterested and distanced viewer to the phenomenological ideal of the engaged viewer-performer (Ring Petersen 2009, 215–216, 228). Accordingly, what is effectuated is an event, a now-here experiential quality by which the focus shifts from the work to the experience of the spectator. The spatial and scenic qualities thus also contain a temporal dimension emphasizing the involvement of the spectator as a process rather than fixed in time and space. Installation art turns attention to the bodily, processual, and situational aspects of being, an attention that, in relation to the subject matter of the installation, also effectuates a contextual engagement in external cultural issues: ideals, norms, and values.

### Criteria of selection – installation art

The third collection of material consists of contemporary art installations related to experiences with (in)fertility, bodies, and kinship. The collection engages in the contemporary debates on experiences with (in)fertility by questioning not only how different experiences relate to each other but also how they relate to cultural understandings of the matter. Analytically, the art installation *wasted* by the Japanese-Dutch pianist and visual artist Tomoko Mukaiyama represents a collection of works focusing on the significance that mediations of experiences with infertility, optimization of the body, and

assisted reproduction and biotechnology have for understanding individual experiences of infertility, pursuits of kinship, and loss of infertility as a result of menopause. Similar to the two other material collections, which make the couples culturally locatable, the Japanese installation specifically expresses Japanese experiences with infertility and thus also addresses cultural understandings of the body. In contrast to the video blogs and TV and film documentaries, where involvement is enabled through intimate close-ups, the abstract cathedral-like space of white dresses in *wasted* presents experiences of infertility in an abstract form. Including this material enabled me to discuss how the orchestration of proximity and distance is produced to influence the capacity of the artwork to energize change in how the beholder understands infertility. It also allowed me to discuss how engagement by the artwork is premised on bodily participation / interaction with the work physically present and whether this physicality differs from the physical participation presupposed and orchestrated by the other included materials. This amounted to a tentative comparative analysis in the article “Atmospheric Belonging” of Silvia and Peter’s vlog and *wasted*.

As art installations travel globally,<sup>15</sup> access to this object is limited.<sup>16</sup> In order to address the significance of the material, I have chosen to include the Dutch-Japanese film documentary *Water Children* (2011) about Mukaiyama’s work. The documentary shows the mounting of the installation in a Japanese village, the experiences of visitors, and how these are intertwined in the installation as variations of rather disparate experiences. This is not to say that the documentary is not significant in itself; rather I have taken the documentary as an elusive example of what my transaesthetic and transcultural approach can do: make the movement between domains surface and in turn underline the specificity of the particular mediations, the documentary, and the art installation. The relation between the documentary and the art installation epitomizes Bal’s point that what van der Horst’s *Water Children* offers is not direct access to Mukaiyama’s installation or experiences of the visitors. As the installation migrates into this documentary film, it becomes part of the aesthetic reality of this work, effectuating an attunement of its own. Yet van der Horst’s creation of an experiential quality particularly aims to make the installation present-experiential, a quality that I have argued is possible to investigate through the concept of atmosphere and the new aesthetics as formulated by Böhme together with close reading as formulated by Bal.

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<sup>15</sup> As do digitally distributed TV and film documentaries, and video blogs.

<sup>16</sup> Accessibility is also an issue related to TV and film documentaries in terms of language and streaming accessibility online. Initially, I wanted to include a Swedish documentary series on infertility, but it was not accessible for online streaming or otherwise. *Technostorks* also proved to be surprisingly complicated to access because, for instance, only US residents could rent it online through Amazon.com, leading me to buy the documentary. Like *Technostorks*, *Water Children* has travelled transculturally, screened at an array of film festivals. To my knowledge, they yet have not been broadcasted on TV.

I also included art installations on infertility and kinship relations because a relatively new art form, bioart, recurred in several of the examined theoretical perspectives on biotechnology, ART, and kinship. Mukaiyama's art installation *wasted* is not defined as bioart (by herself or me), nor are the other installations in this collection of material, albeit their incorporation of, for instance, sperm in the installation. I have not discussed what distinguishes bioart from mediated experiences of infertility and assisted reproduction in the articles but offer some considerations of similarities in the recapitulation of chapter III. The installation *wasted* features in the article "Atmospheric Belonging."

The overall collection of material consists of video blogs, film documentaries, and art installations, a selection that I believe offers the possibility to investigate how body, technology, and kinship are understood and mediated, as well as how mediations of their entanglement transform existing understandings of them. My way into the material has been structured by aesthetic theorization of the presence of things, people, and surroundings and how these constellations generate affect that enables the viewer to experience and participate in the dynamics and complexities of infertility and IVF. I will address the significance of aesthetics in relation to biotechnology in chapter III, "Aesthetics." My material and theoretical anchoring, however, also required a method that could enable such a study while remaining open to other perspectives.

## Performative aesthetics

The collection of material thus justified the appropriation of a method that allows for a transaesthetic and, to a degree, transcultural investigation while remaining mindful of the media specificity of the respective works. Fischer-Lichte's interests are centered particularly on theatrical performance; in *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004), she proposes a theatrically founded concept of performance, pointing to how narrowly confined aesthetics can be used to illuminate the transformative and theatrical aspect of art. The project offers a different approach, where culture is defined not by artworks but by the practices, processes, and negotiations that produce and add value to cultural objects. From the perspectives of the German project of *Kulturen des Performativen*, it is the relations between spectator and artist that the performative cultural study takes interest in. The spectator plays a crucial constitutive role in cultural production. The body is, at the same time, the place and medium for cultural practices. According to Fisher-Lichte, contemporary performance art is an ideal place to investigate the processes of artistic works premised on bodily relations that include the interaction / participation of the spectator. The concept of performativity in the tradition of *Kulturen des Performativen* thus became a theoretical point of departure for analysis of what increasingly took form and was investigated as an even more theatricalized culture. Accordingly, culture was defined not only as dynamic processes

representing a social reality but rather as constitutive aspects of its formation and transformation. Fisher-Lichte's perspective is interesting; she points to how performative spaces produce atmospheres that affect the perception of the audience. The concept of atmosphere used is adopted from Gernot Böhme, who situates his aesthetics in opposition to aesthetics as semiotics. In doing so, he foregrounds the role of the body:

“While the semiotic-oriented aesthetics is premised on the understanding of art as communication and focuses on the processes of the generation of meaning, the aesthetics of atmospheres in turn directs attention to bodily experiences” (Fisher-Lichte 2004, 208, my translation<sup>17</sup>). Fisher-Lichte takes interest particularly in how atmospheres work and are produced by smell, volume, noise, and music and their effect on audiences through embodiment (Fisher-Lichte 2004, 207). Embodiment in relation to cultural analysis is crucial as it “provides the field with a new method that regards the phenomenon of bodily being in the world as a condition for any possible production of culture” (Fisher-Lichte 2004, 139, my translation<sup>18</sup>). Contemporary aesthetic discussions, according to Fischer-Lichte, reflect three forms of the assessment of presence: firstly, it is discussed as related to a specific aesthetic quality of human bodily being; secondly, it is discussed as related to objects of everyday life; and thirdly, presence is discussed as an effect, as a product of technological and electronic media (Fisher-Lichte 2004, 151). Her concept of presence relates to bodily being, which she stresses is a performative quality, as opposed to the semiotic body, which is discussed only in terms of its expressive quality. In turn, she argues that electronics and technology can produce only presence (Fisher-Lichte 2004, 151).

Although Fischer-Lichte's perspectives clearly reflect Böhme's point that bodily existence is constitutive for the potential of aesthetic production, I have dissociated myself from her narrow discussion of aesthetics confined to cultural analysis of performance art, where it has its own justification, particularly owing to her disregard of two of the three dimensions that all are regarded by Böhme as playing a role in the production of atmospheres. A disregard of these and a sole focus on the significance of the nonverbal in the creation of aesthetic-affective attunement would, in relation to this dissertation, have limited the material substantially. I instead turned to the Dutch cultural analyst Mieke Bal (1991a; 1991b; 2002; 2007; 2011), whose transaesthetic and transcultural theory of cultural analysis and postsemiotic method have enabled me to discuss these dimensions of mediated experiences with

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<sup>17</sup> Original: “Während die semiotische Ästhetik von der Voraussetzung ausgeht, dass Kunst als Sprache zu verstehen sei, weswegen Prozesse der Bedeutungsgenerierung fokussiert, lenkt die Ästhetik der Atmosphäre die Aufmerksamkeit auf die leibliche Erfahrung.”

<sup>18</sup> Original: “eröffnet ein neues methodengriff des Feldes, in dem die phänomenelle Körper das leibliche In-der-Welt-Sein des Menschen als bedingung der Möglichkeit jeglicher kulturellen Production figuriert.”

infertility and assisted reproduction. Furthermore, Bal's method also required respecting the specificity of the materials: video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations.

## Mise en scène and atmospheres – the art of the stage set

In the following, I will present Bal's perspectives on the concept of the mise en scène rather than her considerations of the image or narratology, which also are discussed in *Travelling Concepts*. This choice is based on the fact that mise en scène relates to Böhme's argument that atmospheres have to be approached from two sides – from the production side as well as the reception side – which is also addressed in Bal's perspectives on mise en scène. Furthermore, this particular concept can, as Bal notes, be used to investigate aesthetic productions more broadly, including (media) images. In the works of Böhme, as well as those of Bal, art and literature are discussed as characterized by a spatial epistemology, which is related to what Böhme terms “the art of the stage set” (2008). In other words, the character of atmospheres, like the effect of mise en scène, is linked to the scenography, the orchestration of what is presented. Mise en scène as a concept originates from theatre yet, as exemplified by Bal and Böhme, can be appropriated in relation to the scenography of the contemporary production of culture. The making of atmosphere or mise en scène creates and communicates affect to the participating subjects (viewers). According to Bal, the concept of mise en scène is useful because it enables a nuanced and in-depth investigation of artistic practices that reaches beyond its discipline-specific appropriation:

“I am maintaining, therefore, that mise-en-scène, usually conceived of as a theatrical issue of dramaturgy and performance production, can be taken as a theoretical concept, as a tool for the semiotic analysis of cultural practices outside of theatre and opera. (Bal 2002, 109)

Böhme approaches atmospheres in a similar way: as a relevant analytical tool to investigate aesthetics produced within not only art but cultural productions more broadly. This approach has enabled me to compare experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in diverse works despite their media specificity while at the same time respecting the selfsame. Furthermore, mise en scène, like atmosphere, involves attention on the constellation of people, objects, and places and how this organization in video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations functions as a constitutive aspect of our understanding of the world, or more specifically, kinship practices involving IVF.

Bal's aim with *mise en scène*, the art of staging, is similar to Böhme's focus on productions of atmosphere: to investigate the theatrical nature of artistic work based on the premise that most contemporary art and media practices, to some degree, produce a fictive setting (an aesthetic reality) that is opened for a public / social reception. Bal's investigation of *mise en scène* thus must be seen as part of a wider project of hers, which is related to the performative turn within cultural studies spurring Bal's interest in transcultural and transaesthetic analysis. Taking *mise en scène* as an example, Bal not only expands on objects of investigation but revitalizes space and place in aesthetic analysis. In a Danish context, Mette Mechlenburg's *A Walk around the Weber Grill* (2012) has taken issue with space / place in Danish literature and art. Mechlenburg discusses how suburbs in Danish art and literature offer aesthetic spatial experiences that nuance contemporary interpretations of suburbia in art and literature.

*Travelling Concepts*, where Bal's perspectives on *mise en scène* are featured, is not her first attempt to reconfigure a postsemiotic reading of aesthetic cultural productions. In "Semiotics and Art History" (1991a), Bal and Norman Bryson formulate a method reflecting the move in the performative turn from a linguistic-based approach to artworks to a transaesthetic and transcultural approach. It is a move also at issue in her "Beyond the Word Image Opposition" (1991b). *Travelling Concepts* builds on these perspectives, furthering the understanding of affect as related to the presentation rather than representational aspect of a work. *Mise en scène* exemplifies this as well because as a concept, it can be seen as an example of the possible intersections of the performative and spatial turns in cultural studies. In the same manner, the focus on atmospheres / aesthetic reception and affect has been increased as a consequence of their revitalization in relation to not only the spatial turn but the performative ontological turn (Sørensen et al. 2008). Central for the intersection of the turns by Bal is her (postsemiotic) method, which supports the transaesthetic and transcultural investigations that theoretically, as well as analytically, enable a focus on the comparative aspect of cultural objects.

Just as a paradigmatic gravity keeps traditional disciplines vital, so too do concepts form the scientific consensus within cultural studies. Concepts within this discipline are not regarded as fixed or self-enclosed but rather, Bal argues, function as a postsemiotic method that encompasses the dynamics of concepts with objects as well as analysis. "No concept is meaningful for cultural analysis unless it helps us to understand the object better on *Its* – the object's – *own terms*" (Bal 2002, 8), Bal believes; thus, close reading as a method reveals itself as a relevant tool yet distinguishes itself from a pure close reading, which does not consider the concept as culturally situated. The triadic method uses the concept as the connection of the object outward, contextualizing it in relation to cultural ideals, norms, and values. The concept-based analysis thus combines close reading with an understanding of the object as context related, culturally situated. The analysis in the articles demonstrates my use of

atmosphere as a concept that has enabled me to open the respective material examples as well as understand atmospheres as closely linked to the contemporary understanding of the body and kinship.

Bal defines concept as “a part of the framework, a systematic set of distinctions, not oppositions, that sometimes can be bracketed or even ignored but that never can be transgressed or contradicted without serious damage to the analysis at hand” (2002, 22–23). “Framework” in this context underlines Bal’s understanding of working with concepts as active.<sup>19</sup> It implies a multitheoretical use where congruent theoretical perspectives are included with the aim of providing thick description. In the dissertation, this is exemplified by my bringing together not opposed but complementary theoretical perspectives on how the body, technology, and kinship are understood. In the same manner, I have complemented Böhme’s new aesthetic theory of atmosphere with theories of media cultural practices in order to investigate the respective material. Using atmosphere as a concept led me to supplement it with complementary theories analytically, illustrating Bal’s point of the productive potential of concepts. *Mise en scène* as used by Bal has been inspirational for my engagement with the material as atmospheric, and in addition, her perspectives on this concept are related to Böhme’s perspectives on atmospheres.

*Mise en scène* originates from theatre and is about the art of the stage set – the constellation of object with the aim, through the production of dramaturgy, of creating an effect. It has been operationalized to function within film studies analytically centering on the effect of emotionality of film through a focus on light, camera angle, acting skills, and composition but has broadened to encompass an array of disciplines and fields (design, architecture, etc.) (Böhme 1995). *Mise en scène* is, through Bal’s analysis of an array of diverse works, transformed. What started as a concept in a narrowly confined discipline, Bal turns into a transaesthetic and transcultural operational concept. It is a conceptual operation that she returns to discussing migratory aesthetics (2007; 2011), taking departure in aesthetics as travelling concept. I have used atmosphere as a relevant concept in order to understand how digital mediations of infertility and ART in video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations work through the effect of the production of the aesthetic reality. Atmospheric cultural practices that in Böhme’s work are exemplified by literary examples (poetry) and garden architecture I have argued, based on Böhme’s own suggestion, can be equated with digital media and art practices.

As a concept, *mise en scène*, like atmospheres, sets the stage and thus aims to create experiential realities that at the same time are performative as well as narrative (Bal 2002, 108–109).

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<sup>19</sup> Bal’s understanding of the work with concepts like “active analytical tool” is inspired by Isabelle Stenger (1991).

According to Bal, *mise en scène* cannot be understood merely as narratives of directors and producers (for instance, documentaries such as *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic*, the couples producing video blogs, or Mukaiyama's production of *wasted*). Bal's use of the concept transcends this confinement and emphasizes the power of the aesthetic reality of the work, which she argues produces a "scene." It is this fictive space created by the constellation of objects, people, and places that contains the real potential of the artwork. Bal and Böhme both point to how cultural production and practices more than ever are engaged in the creation of fictive realms as bearers of the real potential of the transformation of how, in this dissertation, the body, technology, and kinship are understood. Furthermore, Bal, like Böhme, operates with an understanding of cultural objects as intrinsically linked to the cultural context, an understanding that in this dissertation has led me to consider what characterizes the contemporary perception of the body in biotechnology as well as the material, an endeavor that has amounted to four different articles offering different perspectives related to this aim.

Although the concept of *mise en scène* relates to Böhme's atmosphere, the concepts also differ in approach and scope. Whereas Böhme is interested in how constellations of objects, people, and places aesthetically transform the spectator's understanding of culture from a critical aesthetic phenomenological perspective, art is regarded by Böhme as a space where the qualities of people, objects, and places are transformed into the space of art, which is then characterized by its own reality. Böhme understands atmosphere as dynamic and, at the same time, something undefinable with an aesthetics of its own, yet intrinsically linked to objects, people, and places. Atmospheric mediations of experiences with infertility and ART accordingly do not merely mediate sensations, as argued by Fischer-Lichte, but produce them. Bal, in turn, as postlinguistic and postsemiotic informed, is interested in *mise en scène* as a transcultural concept for the purpose of a cultural analysis.

I nevertheless believe that it has been meaningful to bring these perspectives together in this dissertation, because their denominator relates to a mutual interest in the fictive realm Bal ascribes to cultural (art) works, the aesthetic reality of the object. The aesthetic reality / fictive space is the result of a subjectification of the material reflected through the staging, *mise en scène*, as an organization of the reception of the spectator. For Böhme, this requires a particular knowledge of what specific constellations effectuate, because they contain the power of affecting the spectator prepersonally, and hence affectively.<sup>20</sup> For my purpose, these perspectives point to how mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction, despite their self-referentiality and structure of narrative and

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<sup>20</sup> Mike Featherstone has pointed out how such productions outside the realm of art and popular culture disclose an appreciation of aesthetic-affective attunements and point to a general awareness of people of the force of staging (Featherstone, Mike. "Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture," *Body Society*, March 2010, vol. 16 no. 1, 193-221).

feelings, open for a public reception through their aesthetic reality; it is this now-here that contains the transformative power of cultural understandings, pointing to knowledge not as objective but intersubjective. *Mise en scène* is not necessarily restrained to one discipline, as Bal elaborates on concepts:

“They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meanings, reach and operational value, differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during and after each trip” (2002, 24).

Following Bal, in the dissertation I have approached and discussed the new aesthetics of atmosphere as presented by Böhme, a presentation that also has led me to consider this concept’s relation to the classical concept in the tradition of Kant, Descartes, and Lyotard as outlined by Böhme (1995). I have discussed the relevance of this concept and the theory of aesthetics for the material in each articles, and I have complemented the concept with related theoretical perspectives, pointing to possibilities as well as the delimitations of the concept. The constellation of the video blog, for instance, required me to consider the movement within the material between modes of everyday living, places, and time, leading me to complement the concept of aesthetics with Rita Felski’s perspectives on aesthetics of everyday life (2000). These perspectives complicated the discussion of what occurs as a seamless transcendence of the biomedical understanding of the body by way of ART into everyday life, because everyday life itself had to be understood as characterized by mobility and hence not as a fixed, stable realm.

The same endeavor required me to consider movement in the material between emotional states, leading to an incorporation of Sianne Ngai’s perspectives on ugly feelings (2005). Ngai’s perspectives, which I will discuss more extensively in chapter III, allowed for an exploration of how the presence of feelings in the analytical material destabilizes the viewer’s perception of the mediated fertility project. Attention to minor and ugly feelings added a relevant dimension to the investigation of what goes into kinship relations. It also evoked a discussion of (ugly) feelings as generators of bodily and affective responses in the viewer, which in Böhme’s theory are limited to the grander feelings. In relation to my discussion of the transformative potential of aesthetic-affective orchestrations of people, objects, and surroundings, Ngai’s emphasis on ugly feelings led me to consider mediated situations of passivity as nonetheless affectively charged (Ngai 2005a, 9). Digitally and artistically mediated experiences in this dissertation are viewed as a complex network of historical, spatial, and cultural layers of ideals, values, and norms of body, technology, and kinship. In “Relational

Transformation,” the media specificity called for perspectives from media theory inspired by Thomsen’s (2012) characterization of contemporary media culture as signaletic material, as well as Shaviro’s (2010) perspectives on the transformative power of compositions in video and film. They complement Böhme’s concept of atmosphere as they too are invested in the study of how art produces sensation rather than in the production of representations of experiences of infertility and IVF. The dissertation’s engagement with art installations, video blogs, and TV and film documentaries through a close reading has required me to consider the media specificity of each work, recognizing that this would take me different places with regard not only to the different mediation but also to the theoretical and analytical framing required by these mediations. The close reading has effectuated four different studies of a collection of material nevertheless relatable to each other through their creation of an aesthetic reality. This led me to discuss how their constellation of people, objects, and surroundings draws attention to aspects of kinship practices and matters usually omitted by the public face of ART.

## American, Danish, and Japanese perspectives on the transcultural aspect of the material

Art installations as well as digital media practices and culture, politics, and economics are, in this dissertation, regarded not just as intrinsically interwoven but as constituting each other. Remaining mindful of this dialectic, my aim has been to avoid the danger of over-aestheticization by which the experiences with infertility and ART are generalized into a universalized “fertility project aesthetics.” I have, on the other hand, argued for aesthetics as a crucial aspect of transformation of cultural understandings of kinship practices involving ART. My discussion of migratory aesthetics is not a suggestion of a free-flowing aesthetics that transcends cultural specificity, nor did I set out to discuss global / local dynamics in a national context or within diasporas.

Paraphrasing Durrant and Lord (2007), aesthetic practices, like couples undergoing IVF, are culturally, politically, and economically constrained. Yet, Durrant and Lord continue, “aesthetic practices often gain their force precisely through their contestation of constraint and the assertion of a certain freedom of movement” (2007, 13). Freedom is here linked to the power to create, which does not effectuate frictionless cultures but, on the contrary, reveals the small local tensions usually less evocated in the focus on aesthetic productions reflecting on unequal power relations underpinning movements occasioned by globalization (Durrant and Lord, 13). Art and digital media practices and productions create a platform to make the problematizations of a frictionless process of IVF

perceptible and to enable the spectator to experience and participate in the tensions elicited. The dissertation thus is committed to cultural studies' interests in how structures determine what we do but also how they are inhabited and are chosen among:

The privileging of biology (and connected to this the ubiquity of 'blood' and the emergent dominance of 'the gene') is often considered to be a key defining feature of it [Euro-American kinship]. Undoubtedly in specific contexts the transmission and sharing of biogenetic substances are emphasized as the source of kinship, but this is not the only way kinship is contextualized. (Edwards 2009, 6)

Including American, Danish and Japanese empirical material in this dissertation relates to the quote above, which points to the necessity of research that does not presuppose the anteriority of biology, society, or science to other dynamics and matters of kinship that are just as constitutive in the formation of kinship. As Edwards continues, "understanding of kinship as ultimately based on biology is neither sufficient nor complex enough to deal with the ethnographic reality across Europe, let alone Europe and North America" (2009, 6). The dissertation thus has focused on biotechnology as a field characterized by tensions and ambivalences that, together with the trickiness of everyday life, make some of the matter and "connections that go into the imagination of kinship" (Edwards 2009b, 139) possible to experience.

The concern about implications of engagement with enhancement technology in terms of how individuals relate to themselves, their body, and others is not reserved for Americans. As American studies theorist Winifried Fluck (2009) argues, European consumption and appropriation of American culture has been based on a "romance with America" motivated by ideals of freedom and individualism. Americanization is, by cultural studies, mostly conceptualized as "anti-authoritarianism, informality, pragmatism, experimentalism, youthfulness or, more recently, diversity" (Fluck 2009, 89). The American studies theorist Susanne Hamscha (2013) proposes that the romance has been supplanted by disenchantment with American ideals and values, acknowledging the unattainability of the promises of American ideals. In relation to enhancement technology, there is a tendency to critically address the European adoption of American makeover shows as an uncritical adoption of American values and ideals. Hamscha aligns with Fluck in the notion of that this disenchantment functions as a de-romanticized and de-idealized America, which, through culture studies' critiques of American culture for its superficial, self-congratulatory indulgence in its ideals, has paradoxically resulted in an affirmation of the idea of America. For Hamscha, however, the disenchantment allows one to see a

disruptive moment in the performance of America, which exposes American culture as highly ambivalent, paradoxical, and fraught with tension (Hamscha 2013).

By including American video blogs and film documentaries as empirical material, I have not set out to discuss what constitutes the national American imagination in relation to kinship or IVF within or from abroad. I have rather operated with a transcultural perspective in which mediated experiences with infertility and ART in vlogs, TV and film documentary, and installation art are viewed as part of an American context that still contains aspects also at issue in a Japanese or Danish context. I have, however, discussed that a particular biotechnological and biomedical perception of the body characterizes advanced liberal societies (Rose 2007; Thacker 2005). It is an understanding that is embedded in cultural practices and understandings of body, kinship, and technology rather than working from a hawk-eyed distance. Biotechnology and biomedicine's approach to and understanding of the body becomes interesting not primarily because the body is enhanced but because it allows for an investigation of the tensions related to ART and the consequences of such tensions for how people relate to and understand themselves and others. The vlogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations are platforms that, rather than affirming cultural exceptionalism, magnify small-scale fragments that hitherto could not be perceived.

A particular reason to expand the American examples with the Japanese art installation is related to Rose's discussion of the aggressive growth of the Asian biotech sector, as well as a call for proposals that discuss how belonging is understood. Masae Kato and Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner (2011) have discussed some of the consequences of the growth of the biotech sector for the meanings of the embryo in Japan. Analytically, they draw on narratives of IVF experiences and embryo ownership. Through an analysis of experiences with ART, they reveal how the discussions in Japan on embryo ownership are fraught with tensions and are particular linked to perceptions of Japanese exceptionalism, *nihonjinron* (Kato and Sleeboom-Faulkner 2011, 444). Similar to Fluck's and Hamscha's notions of (bad) romances with America, Kato and Sleeboom-Faulkner note that discussions in Japan about the value of embryos repeat ideas of the Japanese people being unique or ideas of reverse Orientalism by contrasting East and West. As a consequence, individualism and contentiousness are characterized as particular Western aspects of bioethical decisions. The Japanese, by contrast, are perceived as being harmonious (Sleeboom-Faulkner 2005). Another influence in the debates in Japan on enhancement technologies, Kato and Sleeboom-Faulkner argue, is Japan's tendency to look to Western societies as a model informing state guidelines. What Kato and Sleeboom-Faulkner suggest is considering the dislocation between ethical framework, influenced by *nihonjinron*, Western-inspired life ethics, and individuals' experience of embryo ownership (Kato and Sleeboom-Faulkner 2011, 445).

Their aim, similar to Hamscha's, is to point to how the cultural implications of assisted reproduction in Japan expose Japanese culture as highly ambivalent and paradoxical and how neglecting to acknowledge the various dislocations form some of the conflicts related to ART.

The juxtaposition between the American examples – the vlog and film documentary – the Japanese art installation, and the Danish TV documentary is that these works, in an exemplary manner, combine media and biotechnology by taking form as mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in a “social medium,” enabling spectators to experience and participate in the “tensions of a (nonconsensual) culture” (Bal and Hernandez-Navarro 2011, 11), be it American, Danish, or Japanese. The examples all revolve around individual fertility projects involving ART yet at the same time offer intersubjective experiences of the implications of the contemporary perception of the body as an object for our understandings of ourselves and others.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have elaborated on how I have approached the material that has formed the analysis featured in the articles but also is closely linked to the theoretical choices.

The researcher has an important role in the method outlined and discussed by Bal as close reading. The concept of atmosphere, as well as Böhme's theory of aesthetics, points to how mediations of infertility and assisted reproduction in video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations cannot and should not be regarded as a reaction to or reflections on a bioscientific phenomenon but rather create their own aesthetic reality with social effects:

“The work of art is recognized as not only reflecting its context but mediating it, reflecting upon it; and the work is understood as not simply passive with regard to the cultural forces that have shaped it, but active – it produces its own range of social effects, it acts upon the surrounding world” (Bal 2001, 2).

The choice of method, close reading as elaborated by Bal, enabled me to investigate how experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction across media as diverse as video blogs on YouTube, TV and film documentaries, and art installations employ aesthetic signals and atmospheres to emphasize the complexity of kinship practices. Understanding the transmediality of the material as migratory aesthetics furthermore gave way for the materials to be investigated in relation to calls from a wide variety of places: discussions of affect as a concept in cultural studies; considerations of the body,

space, and technology in the material in relation to contemporary and digital practices; the transformative potential of aesthetics in relation to understandings of kinship; and discussions of belonging in relation to understandings of the body at issue in an American video blog and a Japanese art installation. Analytically, I have centered on both the production side of the material, which has entailed a focus on bodies / people, objects, and spaces / environments not nearly exhausted, and the reception side, the experience. This twofold perspective has enabled a discussion of how atmospheric media are crucial to consider in relation to their effect on our understanding of body, technology, and kinship. Atmospheres thus are regarded as a “real” social power, and their effect in the respective material is discussed in the articles, together with their cultural effect. Bal’s perspective of the triadic dynamics of concept, object, and analysis forces the researcher to go beyond an approach to the material to merely confirm its experiential quality as something inherent in the work itself. The dynamics point to how experience is created through shifting relations between the work’s aesthetic reality (quality) and the spectator. As a researcher, I have activated its potential and have re-actualized it in relation to the specific perspective of this project, which has informed my investigation and has situated me through my analysis, pointing to my framing as “performed by an agent who is responsible, accountable, for his or her acts” (Bal 2002, 135).

The material in this dissertation is not activated in order to confirm a specific historical context, and so I have discussed how digital practices point to contemporary understandings of the body as complex, also revealing my approach to the material as other than mere support or examples of this point. Rather, I have pointed to potentials of the material, leaving it open for further investigations, because its richness allows for the examination of other constellations than those examined by me. Because the material, however, does engage in contemporary understandings of the body, technology, and kinship, I have centered on the aesthetic-affective attunement as a crucial part of its transformative potential.

Following Bal, I have centered on the mediation of the context rather than its representation, just as this summary and the articles mediate my investigation of it. As I pointed out in the introduction, I did not set out a priori to center on the aesthetic dimension of the material. Yet it became a focalizing dimension of the analysis because it presented the opportunity to critically examine the understanding of kinship relations involving ART as a seamless, miraculous, and spectacular optimization of the body, i.e., the public face of IVF. In turn, what characterizes the contemporary body in biotechnology and biomedicine also became part of my point of departure analytically. I have taken departure in Bal’s consideration on close reading as method. My project thus is invested in and aligns with the notion that digital atmospheres not only can be regarded as performance of a now-here,

or *what is*, but also have a performative dimension. As I have discussed in this dissertation, the now-here is related to the contemporary biotechnological and biomedical understanding of the body. The empirical material of this dissertation all emphasizes the now-here, the atmospheric rather than representational, even though these cannot be separated from each other.

The articles all reflect a performative, aesthetic-atmospheric, methodical use of four diverse media-specific works invested in the transformation of understandings of body, technology, and kinship. Through a close reading of the concept of atmosphere, I have investigated how mediated experiences with infertility and ART transaesthetically orchestrate an aesthetic-affective attunement that makes an array of dynamics and complexities of body, technology, and kinship entanglements experiential. Although, as I have argued, the material does not represent, but must be asserted as, creations of an aesthetic reality, they are not free-floating in space or culturally unspecific. As discussed in relation to Bal and Böhme, all aesthetic productions entail a cultural and intersubjective aspect; they are thus an “an illusion, typical of Enlightenment thought, that the subject can stand outside of what it criticizes, analyses, understands” (Bal 2002, 222).

Methodologically, the choice of an anthological format is appropriate for a study invested in the transaesthetic and transcultural aspect of mediated experiences with infertility and ART. The material had to be considered in relation to calls for contributions to journals and anthologies with diverse thematic scopes. This framing of the material analytically allowed me to consider the material from different perspectives in each article; it also meant, however, that comparative aspects have been addressed only tentatively. While the format disclosed the material as rich, it also meant a foregrounding of some aspects at the expense of others. In “Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility,” for instance, as well as in “Relational Transformations,” I only briefly touched on sound (effects) and music, arguing that these play a central role in the production of atmosphere in all the analytical examples. Mukaiyama’s art installation, for instance, is accompanied by a piano performance of J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. Bal also discusses the migration of sound into mediations as aesthetically relevant. She critically examines how documentaries’ use of sound reduces its potential, as it usually is approached as a support in film and media rather than as a force of its own:

“Sound . . . is a tool, perhaps a weapon, against some of the dominant tendencies in viewing, in a culture saturated by cinema and television and its standard modes of identificatory absorption” (Bal 2007, 31).

She particularly centers on a strategy that escapes and forces the spectator to become an active participant in the production of meaning rather than taking a more passive witnessing position. The sound must be “displaced from the image, pushed rigorously out of sync, thus counters, for example, the voyeuristic tendencies built into a cinema of individual story-telling, including witnessing” (Bal 2007, 31). The recent Cinemax-produced TV series *The Knick* (2014),<sup>21</sup> aired on HBO and directed by Steven Soderbergh, perhaps can be said to exemplify Bal’s point. As (yet another) medical drama, *The Knick* takes some of the events of the nineteenth-century medical history and combines them with a collation of modern electronic music composed by Cliff Martinez.<sup>22</sup> It could have been interesting to discuss the significance of the sound effect of a fired gun, a short trumpet-like sound right at the injection of a hormone-stimulating medicine, and Bach played on site in relation to the logics of the synchronic sound and image tradition. The point, following Bal, is not that the traditional mode usually deployed in film and documentaries is wrong; rather, she argues, it is efficient and adequate. On the other hand, this is exactly the reason why this mode should not have monopoly (Bal 2007, 35). I have not taken this further in the dissertation, because the publication calls I answered directed the dissertation’s analytical focus to other aspects of the material.

The representative material is suitable, I believe, for a study of how mediated experiences travel into media and art. As the study progressed, however, I also reflected on how the design of this study related to critical considerations of investigations of experiences with ART more generally as set forward by, for instance, anthropologists Janet Carsten (2004) and Jeanette Edwards (2009). As a narrow study, my project stops short of pointing to the wider consequences of technology, body, and kinship entanglements for the understanding of the fertility project once treatment is over. I thus have been restricted by the project design leading to investigations within certain settings and conceptualizations of the body, technology, and kinship. I did not set out to conduct a longitudinal study of understandings of infertility and ART expressed in media and art emerging over time, nor did I set out to trace the interrelations of kinship practices involving IVF with related practices such as surrogacy or adoption. The study of the material presented in this chapter draws attention to how infertility and IVF travel into mediations and installation art and how these works affect our understandings of body and technology intersections. In the following chapter, I will present some of the perspectives on the dominating biological rationality that have informed my discussions of the material in terms of their relation to, presentation of, and transformation of these perspectives.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://hbonordic.com/da/series/-/-/the-knick>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://observer.com/2014/08/behind-the-sounds-cliff-martinez-the-knick-original-series-soundtrack/> last accessed 11-09-2014

## Preface

### Biotechnology and Aesthetics

This brief section presents the main arguments for bringing together apparently opposed yet, as regarded in this dissertation, complementary scientific positions: the German philosopher Gernot Böhme's<sup>23</sup> conceptualization of new aesthetics (1993; 1995) building on the Frankfurt School's social critical theories as well as the new phenomenology of Herman Schmitz, and sociologist Nikolas Rose's (2007) and media theorist Eugene Thacker's (2005) Foucauldian-inspired cartographies of governmental strategies of biomedicine to wield power and to shape the way the body and selves are understood. For those unacquainted with the work of Gernot Böhme, which spans philosophy of technology, ethics, and formulation of a new aesthetics as a general theory of perception, it may seem incongruous to speak of Böhme in the same sentence as Rose and Thacker. Reservations toward my bringing together these perspectives are clearly justifiable; after all, Böhme defines the issue of technification<sup>24</sup> of other-than-human nature, as well as bodily existence, as a critical phenomenological question whereas Rose and Thacker dismiss the critical aspect of biotechnology and biomedicine as a phenomenological issue. That being noted, I will point to what has intrigued me to include both their perspectives in a dissertation about mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in art and digital media.

Admittedly, Rose, Thacker, and Böhme have not received equal attention; the articles have drawn on mainly Böhme's new aesthetics and only briefly contextualized the material in terms of Rose's cartography and Thacker's perspective. This (over)emphasis analytically relates particularly to Böhme's argument of the pertinence of attending to not only the "decidedly unemotional stance" of

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<sup>23</sup> Most of Böhme's work is yet to be translated into English. His primary work in German on atmospheres is *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995). A small selection of articles pertaining to different applications of the aesthetics of atmospheres have been translated. See Gernot Böhme, "The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmospheres," <http://www.cresson.archi.fr/PUBLI/pubCOLLOQUE/AMB8-confGBohme-eng.pdf>; "Acoustic Atmospheres"; "The Atmosphere of a City," *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics* 7 (1998); "Aesthetic Knowledge of Nature," *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics* 5 (1997); Gernot Böhme and John Farrell, "An Aesthetic Theory of Nature: An Interim Report," *Thesis Eleven* 32, no. 1 (1992).

<sup>24</sup> Böhme argues that technology functions as a *dispositif* (Böhme 2012- which I will return to in chapter III). Technology accordingly must be seen as a total structure which makes new forms of human action and human relationship possible, while limiting the possibilities of others. He is concerned with tracing the profound impact of technical mediation on every aspect of modern social life including, among many others, production, consumption, perception, communication, medicine, education. The technological "invasion" of all these domains transforms what it means to be human for better and for worse. Technification also refers to the prepersonal structuring of subjectivity. Böhme presents a normative approach to technology not unlike Heidegger, pointing to the pertinence in cultivating a critical approach to technology, a task which he argues is no easy task.

contemporary technological civilizations but also its fostering of “an enormous imaginary domain” (Böhme 2012, 26). The nurturing of an “otherwise truncated emotionality” according to Böhme entails potential for capacitating a counter ideological valorization of bodily lived experiences and their impact on how we understand ourselves, others and the world (Böhme 2012, 26). This double movement between instrumentalization and fostering of an emotional domain has informed my approach to the video blogs, TV and film documentaries as well as installation art from the perspective that they as lenses offer insight into this double movement and its consequences for understandings of ourselves, others and the world.

Nikolas Rose is particularly interested in the political history of medical knowledge and expertise, specifically with respect to the proliferation of experts and their role in postmolecular transformations of biological knowledge. In *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007), he describes the efforts of scientists and patients to manipulate biological life at a molecular level in the name of individual health. This perspective has proven interesting in relation to the investigation of the role of fertility clinics, experts, and biotechnology and biomedicine (ART) for the understanding of the body of the couples as presented in the material. While Rose offers valuable insight into formations of experience on the molecular scale, he nevertheless reduces biopolitics to this scale. Aiming for an investigation that discusses biological rationality and biopolitical formations of embodiment reaching beyond the context of biological science and medicine required a complementing of Rose with Eugene Thacker’s perspectives on the global genome, bioinformatics, and biomaterial labor.<sup>25</sup> Thacker similarly takes issue with Foucault’s notion of biopolitics, which he argues can be manifested in the age of global genomics (Thacker 2005). Contrary to Rose, however, he acknowledges how the object of governing in Foucault’s work on biopolitics is “man as living being” or “man as species,” that is, not a body but the population (Thacker 2005, 23).

Bioinformatics plays a crucial role as it, at the same time, reconfigures biological information as a universalized and an individualized resource (Thacker 2005, 25). Accordingly, biological exchange can, within the context of globalization, “be defined as the circulation and distribution of biological information, be it in a material or immaterial instantiation, which is mediated by one or more value systems” (Thacker 2005, 7). As biological information is encoded, recoded, and decoded, biological exchange is instantiated where the biological can be produced, distributed, and consumed. The discussion of the intersection of biology with information technology does not result in a reduction of biology to information. Biology is conceptually premised on biological matter:

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<sup>25</sup> Thacker discusses and terms the type of labor that occurs in regenerative medicine and tissue engineering “biomaterial labor.” It is a labor performed by cells, enzymes, and genes, or DNA (Thacker 2005, 300).

“biological exchange is not simply the ‘digitization’ of biology, for biology has arguably always been enacted of the ‘stuff’ of biological life” (Thacker 2005, 9). The exchange of information thus is contradictory “both immaterial and material” (Thacker 2005, 21). The centering on contradictions and models characteristic of biotechnological practices, including ART, and their ramifications for understandings of these processes directed attention to frictions and tensions in the material, which I discussed as culturally significant for understandings of kinship practices involving IVF.

Rose and Thacker both contest sociological “antibiologism,” reflecting what Rose notes is a changing relationship between social constructivism and biology; “biology is a matter of artifice, hope and risk management (not biological destiny, discipline or normalization)” (Rose 2012, 2).<sup>26</sup> Thacker, in contrast to Rose, relates the ever-expanding politics of medical practice, somatic orientation, and biotechnological consumption to biopolitics in terms of the experiential economy and nonbiologistic population politics. Thacker interestingly points to popular culture and bioart as relevant fields to which the concept of biopolitics could productively be applied in terms of an economy of experience. His perspectives have stressed the relevance of experiences beyond the politics of scientific expertise as proposed by Rose in considering the intersection between aestheticization and biopolitics.

Gernot Böhme, like Rose and Thacker, is interested in the scale of the cultural contingent nature / culture relations as particularly relevant for human life. Böhme not only has taken a particular interest in theory of aesthetics as in his *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (1993; 1995), but has also worked extensively within philosophy of technology, including biomedicine and ethics related to a rethinking of bodily existence (Böhme 2003; 2008; 2012). Accordingly, Böhme, with reference to Foucault discusses this binary that has structured Western understanding of self and body historically (Böhme 2012, 7). The centering on the subject and its bodily experiences in Böhme’s thinking, however, also differs substantially from Foucauldian thought and theory. Experience in Foucauldian thought, traceable also in Rose and Thacker’s work, is referred to as the transfiguration of subjects and objects, trying to reach the limits of the livable, and as “a project of desubjectivation” (Foucault 2000c, 241–43, in Blencowe 2012, 19). Böhme, in turn, insists on a reconfiguration of experiences that emphasizes our bodily connectedness with nature, including the nature that we ourselves are. It is an attempt to develop a non-anthropocentric yet still subjectivist approach that insists on a nature that lies

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<sup>26</sup> Rose notes that this is a relation that also has become central within the human sciences: “Over the last decade, a number of social theorists and feminist philosophers have come to realise that it is not reactionary to recognise the reality of our fleshly nature, and to examine the possibilities and constraints that flow from it (Grosz, 1994; Braidotti, 2002; Massumi, 2002; Wilson, 2004; Thrift, 2007; Blackman, 2008; Blackman, 2010)” (Rose 2012, 2). He finds that what has become progressive by virtue is no longer the distance from the biological but the reverse: “A rhetoric of materiality is almost obligatory” (Rose 2012, 2).

before us, rather than a return to a preexistent concept of nature. Inspired by the early Frankfurt School, Böhme is interested in how rationality with regard to social-natural relations can be rethought without presupposing what constitutes reasonableness. Böhme's critical phenomenological stance sets him apart from, for instance, phenomenology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work, as he insists on an aesthetics that takes issue with historical and sociocultural conditions rather than merely situating humans socio-historically in the world.

A rethinking of social-natural relations are perilous, according to Böhme, with regard to the impact of industrial societies on other-than-human nature. For this dissertation, it is specifically his thoughts on the increasing technological invasion of our own nature as bodily beings that have been engaged. For Böhme, the latter nevertheless is intrinsically linked to the former. Both of these problems are ethically bound to the question of what kind of nature we want to inhabit collectively and to embody individually. This trajectory is reflected in his "ecological aesthetics of nature" that centers on how recognition of what society has done to earth is premised on increasingly experiencing ourselves in our bodies (Böhme 1989, 6). Whereas Böhme, Rose, and Thacker can be said to align in their discussions of (bio)technology as non-neutral and what characterizes the (bio)technological civilization in terms of objectification and instrumentalization, they differ substantially in what they propose as critical / problematic related to this cultural contingent nature-culture binary.

Both Thacker and Böhme discuss aesthetic works as relevant but propose different approaches and potentials of such works. Thacker argues for (bio)art as confrontational and reactionary (2005) whereas a main point in Böhme's work is that the task of critical theory is not only to bring processes characteristic of the technification of nature and the human body into confrontation. Art should critically address technification in light of contributing *alternative* knowledge. Art and literature, and aesthetic production more broadly engendered by physical encounters with other people, things, and places aesthetics, can catalyze bodily experiences into a transformative social practice. This point has served as inspiration for my work with the material; I have proposed that these are premised on a shared knowledge of bodily existence and strive to transform public understandings by making lived experiences matter aesthetic-affectively.

Böhme's aesthetics is concerned with how the space of literature and artworks themselves constitute a space that, through the constellation between things, people, and environment, inflect the viewer's state of feeling. I have extended this argument to digital practices and installation art about experiences with infertility and ART, pointing to how this state of feeling allows us to gain insight into matters of kinship practices involving IVF. Aesthetics has not been acknowledged as significant related to mediations of IVF. Böhme's questioning of what is epistemological there,

however, points to the potential of a highly ephemeral ontological field. Mediations of experiences with infertility and IVF are not expressions of an imagined isolated future for the individual but rather participate in imaginations of a collective futurity that, according to Böhme, at the same time must function as a historical materialistic critique. Böhme's critical aesthetics opens for a consideration of domains, which for him entails the power to cultivate perceptions of ourselves, as for instance art.

Although I sympathize with his ecological aesthetics of nature, my project has been more modest. I do not in this dissertation point to how TV and film documentaries, installation art, and video blogs function as cultivation of a subject in nature or the nature that we ourselves are but to how they emphasize a bodily connectedness as a cultural reference point that draws into question the more or less habitual state of being, facilitated by objectification and instrumentalization of biomedicine and biotechnology. Furthermore, they draw into question the aestheticization of biomedicine and biotechnology premised on rationality – a profitable means to an end.

Aesthetics as formulated by Böhme is a critical aesthetics that directs attention to how knowledge is constituted intersubjectively, supplementing scientific knowledge based on objectification with knowledge based on recognition of a given relationality in and through our shared physical existence.<sup>27</sup> In the following chapters, I will present more in depth the two main theoretical threads of the dissertation, which have enabled me to address the complexity and dynamics of the empirical material in the articles. Aesthetics and biotechnology in this dissertation are approached as intrinsically intertwined by the intersection of ART in mediations, furthering a consideration of the potential of these intersections culturally.

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<sup>27</sup> For Böhme, the latter includes respecting the autopoiesis of other-than-human nature (Rigby 2011, 141).

## Chapter II

### Biotechnology

In this chapter, I will present sociologist Nikolas Rose's cartography of the contemporary understanding and approach to the body that, in *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (2007), he argues is characteristic for advanced liberal societies. Rose's perspectives have inspired me to investigate how this contemporary perception of the body as an object and subject as somatically disciplined by experts of ART is expressed and examined in digital media and art installations. I have complemented Rose's perspectives with media theorist Eugene Thacker's similar interest in activities of biotechnology. Thacker points to biotechnology as increasingly interwoven with the Internet, which he examines in *The Global Genome: Biopolitics, Politics, and Culture* (2005). Thacker offers insight into how biotechnology itself is characterized by frictions, both offering valuable perspectives on how the body is perceived within the biotech industry as well as analytically drawing forth the consequences of this tension for our understanding of the body. Recent discussions within kinship studies epitomize how this tension, referred to as "technological ambivalence," functions as a constituent component of biological relativism, furthering developments within ART (Franklin 2013, 8). Both Franklin's and Thacker's discussions proved particularly interesting for the dissertation; each takes issue with the cultural ramifications of the increasing intersection of bio and media technology as a proliferation of a specific understanding of the body and kinship. As the aim of the project is to investigate how the technological and medical optimization of the infertile body affects the perception of the body, kinship, and technology, these perspectives have informed my analyses, particularly in "Relational (Trans)formations: The Matter of Kinship Substances in *Technostorks* (2006) and *The Baby Clinic* (2012)."

The perspectives of Thacker and Rose form one-half of the theoretical foundation of the dissertation, and they are examined in the articles, where they, however, only briefly have been outlined due to word limits, brevity, and thematic and conceptual focus required by the journals. This chapter thus seeks to expand my theoretical appropriation and relate the different fields and concepts that have informed the scope and angles of the articles. Neither of these perspectives opposes Böhme's understanding of technology. Furthermore, Thacker's reflections on the need for considerations of biotechnology in relation to popular culture and art are reminiscent of Böhme's discussions of the relevance of these realms, which I will return to in chapter III, "Aesthetics." I have chosen to place Böhme's arguments regarding philosophy of technology in the chapter on aesthetics as it enables us to

understand his argument of technology and aesthetics as two dynamics of contemporary (Western) society.

## Ethopolitics

Sociologist Nikolas Rose is particularly interested in the political history of medical knowledge and expertise, specifically with respect to the proliferation of the “psy” disciplines and their role in modern governmentality (1989). In his recent work, he discusses postmolecular transformations of biological knowledge. The concept of governmentality remains central for this perspective, now related to developments in, among others, biomedicine (Rose 2001; 2007). In *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007), he describes the efforts of scientists and patients to manipulate biological life at the molecular level in the name of individual health. The normativity that is at play in contemporary biology is, Rose argues, a kind of somatic ethical work upon individuals. The norm of biological science is no longer “population life” (Rose 2001, 13). “Biopolitics,” as discussed by Rose, “now addresses human existence at the molecular level: it is waged about molecules, amongst molecules, and where the molecules themselves as at stake” (2001, 17).

By the start of the twenty-first century, hopes, fears, decisions, and life routines shaped in terms of the risks and possibilities in corporeal and biological existence had come to supplant almost all others as organizing principles of a life of prudence, responsibility, and control (Rose 2001, 17). Rose takes issue with the plasticity and contingency of the conception of biological life, which he argues is both expressed and practiced in molecular biology characteristic of the latter half of the twentieth century. Of particular importance for an understanding of biotechnology and biomedicine are the scientific possibilities for, and individual’s interests in, manipulations of biological life at a molecular level in the striving for optimal health and a good life. Rose’s cartography of contemporary biopolitics is inspired greatly by, yet also differs from, Michel Foucault’s notions of biopolitics and discipline. As he notes:

“If ‘discipline’ individualizes and normalizes, and “biopolitics” collectivizes and socializes, “ethopolitics” concern itself with the self-techniques by which human beings should judge and act upon themselves to make themselves better than they are. The biomedical ethopolitics – the politic of how we should conduct ourselves appropriately in relation to ourselves, and in our responsibilities for the future – forms the milieu within which novel forms of authority are taking shape” (Rose 2007, 27).

For Rose, the normativity of biological science is no longer population life but rather a somatic ethical work upon individuals (2001, 13). Thus, biopolitics for Rose refers to the new formations of genetic responsabilization and molecular ethics. In what he defines as advanced liberal societies, people engage in an array of fluent social spaces including but not limited to family, schools, and hospitals, which for Foucault functioned as *milieu d'enfermement*, shaping subjects in particular ways. The proliferation of regimes in a postpopulation biopolitical perspective shifts focus from top-down systems of thought to governmentality through “freedom” (Rose 1999).

The way we relate to ourselves is transformed, promoting a somatic orientation and biopolitics is about “life itself... and how it should be lived” (Rose 2001, 18). Accordingly, Rose argues, there is a tendency to equate somatic with ethics, effectuating an evaluation of one’s own life and the life of others premised on biological and medical criteria and categories. Rose is particularly interested in who we think we are, the kinds of human beings we take ourselves to be. His key argument is that we are “somatic” individuals, meaning that individuality is partly grounded within “our fleshly, corporeal existence and who experience, articulate, judge, and who act upon themselves in part in the language of biomedicine” (Rose 2007, 25–26). It is a somatic orientation that exemplifies a change in scale: “It is now at the molecular level that human life is understood, at the molecular level that its processes can be anatomized, and at the molecular level that life can now be engineered” (Rose 2007, 4), effectuating a shift from normalization to customization, proliferating an array of experts and technologies that govern life. Like Foucault, Rose thus examines the ways in which individuals are subjectified through the conduct of self-cultivation imposed by external authorities, yet follows philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Foucault, suggesting that it is an “in-folding” of a diverse and discontinuous exterior plane of authoritative influences. Similar to Thacker, Rose argues that contemporary biopolitics depends upon the technical enframing of naturally occurring biological processes in laboratories, as well as the encoding of biological material into digital form, as strategies that involve human beings individually and collectively. As the quest for health has become central to the telos of living for so many human beings in advanced liberal democracies, people have come to experience themselves and their lives in fundamentally biomedical terms and, with best intentions on all sides, have become bound to the administrations and adjudications of medical expertise and/or those paramedical alternative and complementary forms of expertise that have partaken of much the same logic. According to Rose, it is here, in the practices of contemporary biopolitics, that novel forms of authority are to be found. He terms the new authorities “pastoral powers” that, grounded on knowledge on predictive and future-oriented genetic or neuronal evidence that indicates risk of future

disease or undesirable behavioral traits, brings desirable, legitimate, and efficacious interventions into view (2007, 29). A central claim thus is that our problems with risk and uncertainty derive from the new ways we reflect upon our future rather than from “existential” changes. The quasi-autonomous regulatory bodies – such as fertility clinics selling products directly to consumers – are characterized by techniques of government, instructing individuals to act upon and understand themselves – self-government in the present with an eye on the future.

## Five mutations

Rose points to five pathways that delineate the changes occurring, or, in Rose’s vocabulary, *mutations*. These are not epochal, he claims, but configurations of an emergent form of life. The first mutation, *molecularization*, is the style of thought<sup>28</sup> in contemporary biomedicine that has supplemented the clinical gaze, where life is approached at the molecular level as “a set of intelligible vital mechanisms . . . that can be identified, isolated, manipulated, mobilized, recombined” (2007, 5–6). Technologies of intervention are not constrained to the normativity of the natural vital order, poles of life-death and health-illness. In addition to the poles, the interventions seek to impact or secure the future by acting in the present. An interesting argument of Rose’s is that people, in the emergence of the molecular style of thought, still imagine their bodies at the molar level – at the scale of limbs, organs, tissues, flows of blood, hormones, etc. It is this level of the body that is represented in media, on TV, and in films and ads. It is the level that is acted upon and that we seek to perfect through diet, exercise, tattooing, and cosmetic surgery.

Biomedicine, however, visualizes life at the level of molecules, a discourse of life helped along through visualization techniques – X-rays, medical films, and CT scans – yet also depends on a range of technologies to decompose, anatomize, manipulate, amplify, and reproduce vitality at the molecular level. Rose points to reproduction technology as exemplary, where elements such as eggs, sperm, and embryos became not only locatable and visual but also separable from the body. Tissues and DNA fragments can be rendered visible, isolated, composed, stabilized, and stored in biobanks, commoditized, transported between laboratories and factories, reengineered by molecular manipulating organisms, suppressed, or removed. Biomedical knowledge and technologies are very different from

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<sup>28</sup> It is a phrase adopted from Ludwik Fleck (1979) that allows Rose to emphasize how molecularization as key style of thought is mediated by a “thought collective” across an array of experts that form the “transformational and mediational role in forming the associations made up of politicians, lay people, patient groups, research councils, and venture capitalists and investors – on which such expertise depends” (Rose 2007, 29–30).

each other yet have one thing in common: Human life is understood at the level of the molecular; it is analyzed as well as controlled and formed on this level.

As a consequence, everything seems demystified, open for targeted interventions serving our means to the ends. Before introducing the second mutation, I want to briefly turn to his casual yet interesting notion regarding the role of media representations. He makes a similar comment in an earlier work, pointing to how not only techniques, practices, problems, locales, truths, and authorities are involved in the contemporary modes of subjectification. Another factor is images of self-conduct and self-formation in a variety of television programs and the marketing of consumer products for self-fashioning personal identity that are closely linked to biomedical and biotechnological research (Rose 1996, 320–322). He does however not take these arguments further.

Technologies of *optimization*, embody disputed visions of what individually and collectively is understood as an optimal state (Rose 2007, 6). New ideas of what human beings are, should do, and can hope for emerge. This second mutation marks an epistemological change, Rose argues, from biology of depth to biology operating in a “flattened” field of open circuits. Genes are not hidden entities that determine us but are used for the exact reverse, “to predict future vital states and to enable intervention into those vital systems to reshape those futures” (2007, 16). The circulation and recombination of any vital element with, in principle, any other also have ontological ramifications. For Rose, the enthusiasm with which biomedicine engages in the reengineering of vitality signifies indifference to the epistemological and ontological changes. The aim is no longer to cure diseases already manifested but to control vital processes of the body. Thacker, however, complicates this perspective by focusing on how ambivalence related to technological interventions actually energizes developments within biomedicine and biotechnology, a perspective that I have taken to be significant for discussions of mediations of kinship practices involving ART, which I will return to.

Before turning to the third mutation, intrinsically linked to the first two, a closer look at what Rose defines as “technology” is needed. Technology is an assemblage of social and human relations and thus not only a mere tool, utility, or technique. Technology “refers to an assembly structured by a practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal” (2007, 16–17). For clarification, he refers to discussions of reproduction technologies that have been argued to “entail much more than the craft skills of doctors using new technologies and techniques” (2007, 17). He turns to anthropologist Sarah Franklin, who has pointed to how technologies engender certain ways of thinking about reproduction, certain routines, and rituals (Franklin 1997; Rapp 1999; Strathern 1992). Biotechnology, he argues, is “best understood as hybrid assemblages oriented towards optimization” (Rose 2007, 17) of health as well as life.

Rose identifies two dimensions of optimization: susceptibility and enhancement. The contemporary idea of susceptibility reworks well-established technologies of risk assessment, prediction, and management yet strives for diagnostics of susceptibility through molecular precision (Rose 2007, 19). Susceptibility brings a potential future into the present and tries to make it the subject of calculation and the object of counteractive intervention. What is generated is the sense that, in principle, existentially healthy individuals actually are “asymptomatically or pre-symptomatically ill” (Rose 2007, 19). Following Rose, technologies of life intervene upon invisible pathologies in order to optimize the life chances of the individual rather than to merely reveal them. What in turn are forwarded are individual and collective subjectifications of those “at risk,” as well as extensions of the powers of expertise, potentially to all who are now understood as “pre-patients” (Rose 2007, 19). Optimization’s other dimension is enhancement, closely linked to susceptibility, both future oriented. Enhancement is not new, Rose argues, and neither is the will to enhance, as humans historically have tried to “improve their bodily selves,” which in turn has proliferated an array of experts. Referencing Clark et al. (2003), Rose argues that what is new is the shift from “normalization to customization” (Clark et al. 2003, 181–82; Rose 2007, 20):

“Contemporary recipients of medical interventions are consumers, making access choices on the basis of desires that can appear trivial, narcissistic, or irrational shaped by not medical necessity but by the market and consumer culture” (Rose 2007, 20).

This remark again hints at Rose’s understanding of media representations as generative in terms of consumption, subjectification, and objectification. Clark et al. (2003) can be said to exemplify Rose’s notions, addressing how media and biotechnological interrelations mobilize greater demand for consumption of biomedicine and biotechnological services.

According to Rose, the artificially enhanced body does not make the body less biological, referring to discussions of the concept of the cyborg (the fusion of human and artefact) or augmentations of the bodily powers with mechanical equipment that hybridize the body, making it less biological (2007, 20). The new molecular enhancement technologies rather seek to transform the body on an organic level, to reshape vitality from the inside, and in this process, Rose argues, “the human becomes not less biological but *all the more* biological” (2007, 20, original italics). Thacker, as I will elaborate in a following section, critically identifies and examines what energizes this trajectory, which effectively makes the technological intervention transparent. Critiques of this dimension of optimization, according to Rose, point to how molecular enhancement can be required without much

exertion, as opposed to previous practices of self-improvement that, to a greater extent, are associated with “exercise of the will, training over long periods, endurance” (2007, 21).

The disquiet about contemporary enhancement technologies thus can be said to arise from the belief that they have become more powerful, precise, and targeted. They are successfully powerful because they are grounded in a scientific understanding of the bodily mechanisms. The discussion of optimization and enhancement has not been limited to biotechnology; media theorists Vivian Sobchack (2000), Anne Jerslev (2006), and Tobias Ravn (2009) are among those who point to media representations of optimization as characterized by quick change, which makes the technological reshaping of the body appear effortlessly achievable. As with biotechnology, media technology – specifically digital – is believed to be a threat to the significance of the body for the experience of subjectivity. Following Sobchack (2000), the contemporary moving-image culture implicates a fatal and relentless intervention in the body, with ethical and moral implications for how we understand our bodies, ourselves, and others.<sup>29</sup> For others, such as Sarah Franklin (1997; 2013), it is intervention in sexuality and reproduction that is troubling, yet whereas Sobchack is concerned about the existential change, Franklin, like Rose, is interested in the (bio)political reasons for the new ways we reflect upon our (biological) futures, which she relates to the increasing individualization and reflexivity (Beck et al. 1994). Franklin also takes issue with how bio and media technological intersections play a role for the understanding of reproductive technologies as quick change, which I will return to and elaborate on.

The dimensions of optimization for Rose epitomize how contemporary individuals increasingly relate to themselves as somatic individuals “whose individuality is in part fleshly grounded and for the other part experience, articulate, judge and act upon themselves in the language of biomedicine” (Rose 2007, 21). What Rose arrives at is a third mutation, *subjectification*, which, closely linked to the former two, reorganizes the relations between individuals and their biomedical authorities, reshaping how individuals relate to themselves as somatic individuals. As consumers, individuals are not merely patients, passive recipients of medical expertise. The somatic orientation has spurred active individuals who choose and use “medicine, biosciences, pharmaceuticals, and ‘alternative medicine’ in order to maximize and enhance their own vitality” (Rose 2007, 23). Rose links this somatic orientation, health as imperative, to the rise of a somatic ethics, functioning rather as values for the conduct of life than as moral principles. The contemporary shaping of subjectivities by medicine distinguishes itself from former forwarding new forms of collective identification, by which Rose refers to Paul Rabinow’s

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<sup>29</sup> See Vivian Sobchack, ed., *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 18, 119.

(1996) term “biosociality.”<sup>30</sup> The project could certainly have followed this perspective and argued that the empirical material featured in this dissertation illuminates collective identifications around infertility in the plight of diagnostic knowledge. Rabinow’s perspectives, however, would have limited the material substantially as it is centered only on somatic well-being or the application of scientific expertise rather than experiences beyond these.

According to Rose, official discourses of health promotion to personal narratives of experiences of disease in mass media stress personal reconstruction through action on the body in the name of the health imperative, which effectuates an economy of hope yet paradoxically is based on fears and anxieties – in Lauren Berlant’s words, a cruel optimism acting upon individual’s sentiments, beliefs, and values – an ethopolitics. These developments, Rose argues, give rise to new ways of governing human conduct through multiple subprofessions that claim *somatic expertise* - the fourth mutation - and exercise their powers by managing particular aspects of our somatic existence. The role of these psy-disciplinary, quasi-authoritarian experts is to counsel, guide, and provide support to individuals and families dealing with personal, medical, and ethical dilemmas (Rose 2007, 24). The focus is on susceptibility rather than on eliminating pathological states in the interest of the nation state, where molecularization is conferring a new mobility on the elements of life, enabling them to enter new circuits – organic, interpersonal, geographical, and financial.

The fifth and last mutation, interconnected with the four others, is the rise of *economies of vitality*. It is a new economic space, bioeconomics, with a new form of capital, biocapital (Rose 2007, 25). It is an economy energized by investment in hopes for cure and optimality. Life has become decomposed into a series of distinct and discrete objects that have become amenable to the new economic relations. The simultaneous subjectification and objectification in the service of many distinct objectives has shaped a field where biopolitics has become inextricably intertwined with bioeconomics.

Central to Rose’s depiction of subjectivity is self-governance; thus he, like Foucault, looks to contemporary biopolitics that prescribes ways to conduct oneself (Rose 1996, 296–97). Ethopolitics is premised on the value of the optimization of the body and life, functioning as an “an order of pure decision” (Ewald 1993, 225). Individuals feel obligations and expectations toward their health issues and their lives in general, which transform the way they relate to themselves, promoting a somatic orientation where the natural, fertile body no longer functions as “a sacred objectivity we can refer to”

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<sup>30</sup> “The new genetics will cease to be a biological metaphor for modern society and will become instead a circulation network of identity terms and restriction loci, around which and through which a truly new type of autoproduction will emerge”; this term was christened “biosociality” (Rabinow 1996, 99). See Paul Rabinow, “Artificiality and Enlightenment: From Sociobiology to Biosociality,” in *Essays on the Anthropology of Reason* (West Sussex, UK: Princeton University Press, 1996), 91–111.

(Ewald 1993, 225). For Rose, the mutations in style of thought are important because they indicate the nature of the “in-folding” of exterior authorities. According to Rose, the mutations offer insight not into “states of exception” but into an emergent formation of life, which requires a consideration of immanent ways by which (bio)power operates that take into account changes in the complex web of authorities and their means of subjectification.

The five mutations do not explicitly figure in the articles; they have, however, furthered my investigation of the role of media representations, which is noted by Rose only briefly as playing a significant role in the distribution of the biomedical perception of the body. Furthermore, the mutations furthered my investigation of how the tensions within biotechnology have ramifications for understandings of technology, body, and kinship. The perspectives of Eugene Thacker and Sarah Franklin provided such possibility. They are presented more thoroughly in the following section. The appropriation of Foucault’s biopolitics as a lens through which to look at the body of the biomedical subject is also appropriated by Eugene Thacker, enabling the possibility to reveal how a medicine that is both biologically individualized – my body is specific to me – and universalized – my body is your body – can be generated in the lab (Thacker 2005, 264–65). This strategy to simultaneously universalize and individualize is the key strategy of biopolitics as identified by Foucault. Thacker explores tissue engineering (subsequently referred to as TE), which takes each body as unique but also implies that its technique can be applied across the population (2005, 263).

Thacker centers particularly on how these conditions set the stage for the “*contradiction, tension, and aporia*” (2005, 265, original italics) that accommodate incompatible notions of bodies and technologies. He particularly highlights three tensions: (i) the body caught between idealism and empiricism, (ii) the fantasy of the transparent body, and (iii) the biomedical body poised between medical healing and biotechnological redesign. In what follows, I will address these more properly because these tensions are relevant in relation not only to tissue engineering but also to ART, as well as for discussions of media representations of these.

## The loop and the spiral – the unique yet manipulative biomedical body

Biotechnology and biomedicine as a field of tension has, as Thacker and Franklin note, ramifications for our relation to technology, body, and kinship. Thacker discusses the intersection of bio and media technologies, pointing to this interrelationship as a vehicle for a cultural system that is driven toward opportunities and discovery of economic benefit from the objectification of the body.

A look at the technological approaches of tissue engineering (TE) through Foucault highlights the tensions and aporias of the body imagined by TE. What characterizes the approach to the body through the lenses of TE (as well as ART) is that it is not a liquidation of the body, nor is it an incorporation of the natural by the technological “if by natural we mean an essential, pre-discursive notion of” the body itself” (Thacker 2005, 260). TE is, Thacker continues, rather involved in a series of practical and technical renegotiations with biological materiality and biological function. The process can technologically be configured as a loop:

“The generated tissue or organ is recognized as self because the cell used to generate the tissue comes from the patient’s own body. Yet, the very act of biologically producing and introducing a tissue mass or organ into the patient-body also suggests a certain qualitative difference in the very artificially (re)introducing biological materials into the body” (Thacker 2005, 264).

The language of proximity, “just like new” or “the same as before,” claimed by TE rather suggests that TE forms a kind of self-differentiating spiral: the capacity for self-healing is fully technologized. Thacker therefore defines biotechnology as a technical enframing of naturally occurring biological processes. TE thus creates the condition for an approach to the body through a biopolitical perspective. The three tensions – (i) the body caught between idealism and empiricism, (ii) the fantasy of the transparent body, and (iii) the biomedical body poised between medical healing and biotechnological redesign – are all part of the biomedical normativity that furthers the “accommodation of incompatible notions of ‘bodies’ and ‘technologies’” (Thacker 2005, 265).

Idealism is a key logic of TE. Accordingly, the body’s natural component can be effectively regenerated in a non-natural context. It elicits an image of the body as open for technical intervention, which is countered by an empiricism emphasizing the body as a natural organic resource harnessed for medical ends. The growth of the body is characterized by a tension between growing the body in order to exceed it while this growing at the same time remains committed to the materiality of the body and to the notion of the biological body as the very foundation of its practices. Thus, rather than to exemplify Baudrillard’s notion that the body has freed itself from its reference and is preceded by its “hyper-reality” of the body as sign or media image (Baudrillard, cited in Thacker 2005, 266), TE remains committed to the materiality of the body. I made a similar argument in my discussion of re-encoded bodily experiences with IVF in “Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility,” pointing to how the

aesthetic-affective attunements in the video blog presuppose a shared physical existence, indicating simulacra or re-encodings as aesthetically relevant.

This balancing between empiricism and idealism leads to the second aporia: the fantasy of transparent technology, “technology that simply helps things along” (2005, 266). Technology seems to disappear as there is no prosthesis, mechanical parts, major surgical procedures, or foreign DNA (the procedure of IVF can differ here as it in some cases involves eggs and/or sperm donations). Technology thus remains transparent to the biological orders; what is seemingly produced is a fully natural body. What the body rather becomes, however, is a technical resource through “biomolecular recontextualization” (Thacker 2005, 267). Thacker identifies this as biomedica, which instigates a version of the body that is simultaneously natural (that is, it is perceived as unmodified by the techniques used) and yet unable to do without technology (2005, 267). TE is invested in the materiality of the body yet attempts to break away from the constraints of such. Accordingly, the body is, once again, objectified in a particular way, as a “self-regenerating black box” (Thacker 2005, 267).

The third aporia, Thacker argues, that needs to be considered is the tension between “medical healing and biotechnological redesign” (2005, 268). The body is perceived as simultaneously expendable and yet infinitely reproducible. It is relatable to the second aporia because TE appropriates the assumption of technology as transparent to upgrade what biological materiality can become. The body remains biological and material but is also impelled technologically to surpass itself (Thacker 2005, 268) or, as it has been noted, “biology constantly making itself ‘strange’” (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 303, 330). For Rose, this scale of intervention at the molecular level epitomizes the understanding by contemporary biopolitics of biology not as destiny / genetic determinism but as opportunity (2007, 51). Following Rose, to discover the biological basis for infertility is connected to the hope of rendering the condition open for intervention, transformation, and rectification at the molecular level, to “reverse engineer” the condition. The second aporia, in Rose’s vocabulary, is about the toning down of this probabilistic complexity of cellular mechanisms that spurns uncertainty in favor of certainty (2007, 52).

What characterizes the biomedical body of TE as well as ART is that it “returns itself in a spiral that simultaneously moves upward (an infinitely reproducible body) and downward (an expendable body)” (Thacker 2005, 260). The biomedical body is not treated, improved, or repaired by medicine. ART and TE are types of medicine that facilitate the generation of the body’s own materials from itself. The difference here is between a range of technologies intended to supplement the body<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> He here refers to drugs, surgical repair, and prosthetics in modern, therapeutic medicine.

and a technology whose aim is to be able to literally synthesize or materialize the body.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, Thacker asserts, there is no return to a previous, healthy state, though this is how the medical application of TE is presented. What the aporias within TE and ART illuminate is a deep-running anxiety over the maintenance, at all costs, of the divide between the natural and the technical orders, while at the same time perceiving nature as something that can be manipulated. Thacker identifies the fear of technological dehumanization as the basis for the contradictions where technology is mistakenly aligned with instrumentality, a basis which Franklin terms “technological ambivalence” (2013, 8).

Following Bruno Latour (1993), Thacker discusses how the mechanisms of this ambivalence, or “two-part asymmetrical epistemological process” – “hybridization” and “purification”<sup>33</sup> – result in, on the one hand, a relativist pluralism and, on the other hand, a reconfiguration of the modern world view to a non-modern one (2005, 270). Thacker points to the pertinence in considering the proliferation of the body’s cells outside the body, the production of the body’s materials, and processes in the lab as these materially enable the possibility to address the generative and synthetic model of TE and ART: the actual biomedical modification (2005, 266–67). For Thacker, Latour’s perspectives on the modern episteme enable this focus on the constitutive aspect of science. The engendered aporias examined by Thacker elicit how the human body is conceived within medical practice and health care, which follows Latour’s characterization of materiality as active participants (“actants”, Latour 1999) in the process of production of the body. This “flat” ontology of life, also considered by Rose as characteristic of the biomedical body, centers on the transformative aspect of the process by which the body is freed from its organism or organ and mobilized – connected into relays, circuits, and networks with other such elements in vitro, or in vivo in other organisms (Rose, 2007). The same goes for biomediated bodies, which “are not machine / human hybrids, or transcendental markers of erasure, and their mixed ontology (biological and digital) means the singular body is not expressed in the genetic / computer code hybrid. One does not ask, then, what a body is, but rather ‘what a body can do?’” (Thacker 2004, 6). TE and ART practices are forces as they weave transformative, productive, and affective networks.

Kinship studies’ interest in the biogenetics lab as a site of kinship production as well as materiality critically examines the material ways in which the realities of science are enacted (Franklin

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<sup>32</sup> He refers to the engineering of genes to grow organs.

<sup>33</sup> Hybridization operates by establishing connections and networks among elements, whereas purification operates by organizing elements into a set of dichotomies, i.e., nature/ technology (Thacker 2005, 270). I will not go further in to a discussion of Latour’s concept of hybrids or actants but will merely point to how this focus on materiality is not irrelevant in the discussion of the relevance of aesthetics. In chapter III, I will return to Böhme’s concepts and arguments, which include perspectives on Latour’s “flat” ontology.

and McKinnon 2001) and has proliferated investigations of sites (local, national, virtual, transnational) as significant aspects of kinship relations related to but not limited to ART. As I will turn to in the following and have examined briefly in “Relational (Trans)formations,” Sarah Franklin (2013) has made similar arguments in relation to the presentation of ART such as IVF and pointed to how this has a profound impact on understandings of IVF as miraculous and spectacular. Thacker and Franklin align in their approach to bio and media technologies as non-neutral, both arguing for a shift in attention from media representations of biotechnological and biomedical phenomena as mere responses or reactions to biotechnology.

## Technological ambivalence

The three tensions discussed above are relevant for the discussions of what characterizes media representations of IVF and how the material in this study differs from the critical issues raised regarding media representations of IVF and kinship practices. Like Rose and Thacker, Franklin in her latest work, *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship* (2013), is interested in “pioneering” in the context of biomedicine and biotechnology – more specifically, experimental embryology – and explores what she defines as “the ambivalence of the frontier – a place of oscillation, fluctuation, and instability” (2013, 9). She also engages art, which, she argues, is a way of returning the question of embodying technology, which she finds IVF poses in an “equivocal manner” (2013, 9).

Franklin’s take on media representations of IVF and their impact on public perception of the body, kinship, and (assisted reproduction) technology, however, are (more) critical. In *Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception* (1997), she identifies a discrepancy between the progress narrative deployed by media representations on IVF, displaying the treatment as a series of stages to be overcome, and actual experiences of the procedure (for the majority of couples) as a serial failure to progress (1997, 23–24). Accordingly, both the emotional toll and the technological dimension of IVF are rendered invisible in representations, appropriating a circular narrative equivalent to the loop discussed by Thacker in a previous section. In effect, IVF is represented as a miraculous and spectacular traceless technology whereas the process of kinship practices involving IVF is left unacknowledged. The normalization of IVF – becoming part of the daily currency of how we relate to one another – has not diminished the ambivalence felt by many who undergo it or, we might add, those who encounter kinship practices involving IVF in media. Ambivalence,<sup>34</sup> Franklin states, “indexes the

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<sup>34</sup> Rose, Thacker, and Franklin all offer more or less insight into technological ambivalence, which they claim not only is characteristic of our understanding of technologies but is a vehicle for further biomedical and technological developments. Carl Elliott points to several interrelated fears or worries of people connected to the technological

difference between the norms that IVF belongs to, and the extent to which it also challenges or contradicts these very same conventions” (2013, 7).

Referring to sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992), Franklin argues that the contemporary relation to technologies (television, e-mail, robotics, and biotechnology) is characterized by ambivalence (2013, 8). Ambivalence, she notes, quoting anthropologist Michael Peletz, is “the simultaneous experience of powerful, contradictory emotions or attitudes toward a single phenomenon” (Peletz, quoted in Franklin 2013, 8), which has ramifications for understanding “frequently overlooked continuity between the old and new kinship studies” (Peletz, quoted in Franklin 2013, 8). Technological ambivalence thus is generic: “it is a constitutive component of biological relativity” as well as generative of, as illuminated by Peletz, “critically important processes of sociality, domination, and resistance” (Peletz, quoted in Franklin 2013, 8). In order to understand the generative aspect of IVF, it is not only the technological aspect of IVF that must be addressed but IVF as a complex cultural form that works in and through other systems, such as technologies of kinship, clinical equipment, and technologies of sex, as well as the medium of the Internet (Franklin 2013, 8). For Franklin, this exemplifies how IVF can be thought as an evolving technological platform that aligns with both Thacker’s and Rose’s discussions of biotechnological methods aiming for the prospect of improved human cellular replacement and repair.

Her discussions of the scientific and technological enframing<sup>35</sup> (she refers to Heidegger’s “The Question concerning Technology,” which I will return to in relation to Böhme’s philosophy of technology, see chapter III) of body, technology, and kinship effectuates, she states, a widespread endorsement of hESC (human embryonic stem cell) research as a vital avenue of medical progress, and thus the successor “hope technology” to IVF (Franklin 2013, 66). The tensions that Thacker outlined, as well as Rose’s identification of susceptibility in this regard, play a crucial part for the enframing of TE and ART, which Franklin takes further, suggesting that they drive not only medical progress but widespread public endorsement. The celebration of IVF represents a “growing degree of consensus

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ambivalence in “What’s Wrong with Enhancement Technology” (2009). He discusses seven worries, which he relates to different diseases, needs and wants and which, he asserts, do not exhaust the concerns people have about technology but rather address some of the worries difficult to articulate: (i) the problem of cultural complicity, (ii) the problem of relative ends, (iii) the role of the market, (iv) the problem of authenticity, which Elliot argues is trickier than the abovementioned worries, (v) problem of relativism, (vi) the problem of competition, and (vii) the drive for mastery (Elliott 2009, 431–443). I recognize that the worries nuance the technological ambivalence touched on in the theories featured in this dissertation and that further investigations of these would have directed the thesis to other related discussions.

<sup>35</sup> According to Heidegger technology is enframing, and the essence of technology Gestell. “Gestell, literally ‘framing’, is an all-encompassing view of technology, not as a means to an end, but rather a mode of human existence,” see Mitcham, Carl. *Thinking Through Technology*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, 52

about the desirability and legitimacy of mechanizing human biology” (Franklin 2013, 66). This enables her to return to the role of the ambivalent aspects of IVF, which, she states, does not displace “earlier models of biological reproduction or biological kinship.” Rather, IVF is ambivalent because these logics, as well as others, are included while these at the same time are reproduced inexactly (a term Franklin adopts from Strathern) or, in the words of Thacker, “impelled technologically to surpass itself” (Thacker 2005, 286).

While the above stresses how ambivalence works within biotechnology and biomedicine Franklin also discusses how ambivalence is at play for couples undergoing IVF. She turns to two prominent contemporary affect theorists, Lauren Berlant (2006) and Sara Ahmed (2010), in order to center on the affectivity of ambivalence related to IVF: “Berlant’s attention to the inherent ambivalence of attachments to ‘compromised conditions of possibility’ and Ahmed’s account of ‘happiness means’ are highly pertinent to the problem posed by IVF” (Berlant and Ahmed, in Franklin 2013, 215). Paraphrasing Ahmed, Franklin addresses how expecting happiness to follow after IVF is to move toward that “which is not yet present, and thus to associate oneself with the happiness that is presumed to follow, even if the object of feeling never materializes. This is why IVF can offer a fulfilling orientation, whether or not it delivers a ‘take-home baby’” (2013, 215). Ambivalence in this perspective is affectively regulatory, allowing for an investigation of how the normative conventions of kinship, body, and technology persist through IVF. I will return to the concept of affect an elaborate on my use of it in this dissertation in chapter III. Franklin uses the word “unifying” to describe the performance of IVF, the linking of the normal and the technological biologically. It is not farfetched to claim that this argument aligns with Latour’s notions about the “two-dimensional asymmetrical epistemological process” presented by Thacker in relation to TE (Thacker 2005, 270). For Franklin, IVF is an elusive example of what a technology is imagined to be and to do; IVF becomes a sign of the “technological” altogether, but particularly where it meets the biological.

Franklin’s perspectives, as well as Thacker’s, have enabled a closer look into how IVF and related procedures (TE) establish a code for conduct that is modeled on a technological protocol that is itself modeled on a naturalized expectation for biological reproduction, which in turn imitates the facts of life as they are imagined to exist naturally as a biological base. The focus on technological ambivalence is used by Franklin to reveal the (affective) labor involved in pursuing the prospect of happiness. Her fusion of Foucauldian perspectives on the technology of sex and Beck’s perspectives on reflexivity and risk assessment in relation to technology in terms of IVF provides her with a lens to investigate patterns “involved in living a biological life that is remade by technique” (Franklin 2013, 242). She thus understands IVF as a complex pattern of subjectification that is arguably indigenous to

IVF as a way of life, which in turn can be found in other biotechnological and biomedical techniques as well. In the following, I will elaborate on how Franklin discusses how this process is witnessed – the public face of IVF as a set of visual images – which enables her to discuss the ramification of the representations of IVF in media.

## Media meets IVF

In order to understand how IVF has become conventional as a new norm based on a new set of exact mechanisms, Franklin turns to IVF as a technology of representation. The public face of IVF as a set of visual images adds, she asserts, a “crucial layer to the question of what it is doing and why people seek it out” (Franklin 2013, 244). IVF is not only a technology of reproduction but a refiguration through its interface with the mainstream media (Franklin 2013, 244). She is interested in the visual logic of IVF “and in particular its role as a source of symbolic imagery coupling biology and artifice” (Franklin 2013, 245). She takes the imagery of a fertilized egg as an example of how the visual logic of IVF is linked to this view as unordinary, spectacular. Embryological imagery as a potent contact zone is, she argues, acknowledged by artists, news editors, and lobbyists for its uniting of “scientific research, high-tech laboratory apparatus, biological substance, and powerful visualizing techniques with the promissory future of the age of biology” (Franklin 2013, 247). Images of embryos instigate a witnessing position to accumulated scientific knowledge, human reproductive substance, and technological artifice, or, as she also words it, “ourselves, our technology, our future, and our obligations to one another” (Franklin 2013, 248). What we look through is the keyhole of science, allowing us to observe a formerly hidden domain where “effects such as scale, dimension, perspective, framing, and context reproduce the scientific gaze, its instruments, and its object – as well as its labor – exactly” (Franklin 2013, 6). IVF is framed as “reproduction and its reproductive success biologically is what confirms, or proves, that it works technologically” (Franklin 2013, 6).

Viewing the process of IVF on television, according to Franklin, introduces a new convention of witnessing the exact mechanisms of reproduction live on screen: two reproductive technologies that encompass each other – TV meets IVF. The sense that these images, as well as IVF, conveys is made obvious, she argues, “in ways that obscure what is implicitly contradictory and even queer about such images”; what they dissolve are the counter-logics such a scene has the potential to suggest or imply (Franklin 2013, 254). As images of biological relativism, they dissolve all the surrounding elements of the composition (of the procedure) in order to make sense to the casual viewer. Mainstream encounters of IVF procedures as representation may be distant (as opposed to experiencing it directly as a patient or provider). They do, however, offer the possibility to investigate

the twofold interrelated condition after IVF. It is a condition where the retooling of reproductive substance exceeds the frames of existing understandings of body, kinship, and technology. It is also a condition that the logics of IVF are premised on while exceeding familiar ideas and conventions associated with reproduction, science, and technology, as well as parenthood, the family, and kinship (Franklin 2013, 258). It is, in short, a condition where the known converges with the unfamiliar.

Whereas mainstream media representations of IVF, according to Franklin, do not allow questions of the logic of IVF or offer alternatives, she turns to the art installation *The art of A.R.T.* (2009) by photographer Gina Glover. The installation represents the IVF encounter from the point of view of patients and clinicians, along with photographs of “flowers placed in Petri dishes,” “eggs, both real and constructed, donated by ACU staff, family and friends,” and “ties belonging to staff arranged to show the variations in human sperm structure.”<sup>36</sup> Glover’s work, according to Franklin, is best interpreted “as frontier bioart” (Franklin 2013, 260). I will not engage in her analysis of this particular artwork or her interpretation of Glover’s work as frontier bioart. I will, however, return to bioart in the recapitulation of chapter III. Here I will rather examine her argument on IVF in mainstream media, which has offered me the possibility to discuss how the material featured in this study nuances her (too) broad characterization of how IVF is (re)presented in media as a highly public spectacle. The article “Relational (Trans)formations” discusses some of Franklin’s points in relation to two documentaries, the American film *Technostorks* (2006) and the Danish TV documentary *The Baby Clinic* (2012).

One of the main critical aspects of media representations of IVF, apart from the refigurings of IVF as spectacle, as outlined above, is, according to Franklin, the deployment of what she terms “a progressive narrative” (Franklin 1997, 108). It is a circular narrative that stars a “‘desperate’ infertile couple” and includes an initial description of their emotional desires. As a circular narrative, it closes by referring back to their emotions and fulfilment (Franklin 1997, 95). In doing so, the description, in Franklin’s perspective, encloses the interior narrative of scientific progress “within a frame of reference to heterosexual reproductive desire and the maintenance of established social conventions” (Franklin 1997, 95). In this narrative, the test-tube baby serves as a crucial narrative plot, an obstacle to be overcome successfully. The public face of IVF characterized by this narrative structure, however, provides little coverage of the majority of couples who fail to progress successfully through IVF to the desired outcome of a “take-home baby” (Franklin 1997, 108). As a consequence, media accounts of IVF reflect the hope of couples and represent IVF as the miracle that leads to success in the context of assisted conception.

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.artinhospitals.com/art\\_art\\_intro.html](http://www.artinhospitals.com/art_art_intro.html) accessed 01/09/ 2014

The personal details of the couples do little, Franklin asserts, to convert the understandings of IVF as miraculous and spectacular. Rather, “the themes of hope, fulfilment and ‘dreams come true,’” Franklin continues, is “linked to the ‘miracle of modern science’” (1997, 95). Representationally personal details provide a “good story” but also reestablish the couple within “kinship as we know it” (Franklin 1997, 108). Although the known converges with the unfamiliar in media representations, the progressive circular narrative, it thus leaves very little focus on kinship, involving IVF as a dynamic and complex process. Furthermore, it results in a critical fading of the ambivalence related to this treatment. Franklin’s discussion led to an investigation of *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic* that took issue with these critical points of media representations. I suggested that the more-than-representational and affective dimension of the documentaries was structured by a composition composed to intensify *experiences* of infertility and assisted reproduction. Consequently, I discussed the documentaries as new distributions of the sensible, implicating a countering of Franklin’s notions of what characterizes media representations of infertility, IVF, and kinship. In “Relational (Trans)formation,” I centered on the ability of *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic* to make matters of kinship visible, audible, and felt rather than to represent them, to affect bodily states, and to connect bodies with places, other bodies, and objects.

## Summary

Here at the end of this chapter, I would like to summarize some of the key points of the theoretical perspectives and concepts that I have visited and revisited, as well as complemented, along the course of my research and in the articles. What can be found in this chapter are the perspectives and approaches that have proven most useful for how to understand what characterizes the contemporary perception of the body within the realm of biotechnology and biomedicine. I began by presenting Nikolas Rose’s five mutations, perspectives that led me to investigate how the material of this study examines the complex web of authorities that influences the management and understanding of the subjects’ bodies, kinship, and technology, fashioning subjectivities in a manner that grounds and perpetuates their power. In his analysis of the current biopolitical era, Rose describes the efforts of scientists and patients to manipulate biological life at a molecular level in the name of individual health. What permeates Rose’s work is that the understanding of self and world are structured by the power that social structures (which, according to Rose, have proliferated) wield over people. Rose is not uncritical toward the practices and economies of biological science, pointing to their integration with the production of biocapital. He is, however, also optimistic regarding the potential of the vitalization

of biological life, a “sensualisation of ethics” (Rose 2007, 258), which he argues is generated by responsibility and choice of biological life.

Risk and uncertainty derive not so much from “existential” changes but from the new ways we reflect upon our future, effectuating an emerging stratum of power and knowledge. His description is introduced here because it effectively captures the networked fluidity of mechanisms of performative power that are flexible, networked, and digital, and polyrhythmic in temporality. TE as well as ART, addressed by Thacker through the presentation of aporias, offered a more detailed insight into flexibility, the network of human and nonhuman actors, and polyrhythmic temporality, performative yet overlooked aspects of biomedicine and biotechnology. The three aporias have been useful in uncovering what is characteristic of a movement to recapture organic bodies, which took me deeper into molecular biology’s “wet lab” techniques in relation to computational bioinformatics “dry lab” (Thacker 2004, 2). A main point of Thacker’s that has been considered in this study is his assertion that “the biological and the digital domains are no longer rendered ontologically distinct, but instead are said to inhere in each other; the biological ‘informs’ the digital, just as the digital ‘corporealizes’ the biological” (2004, 7). Similar to Rose and Thacker, Franklin is primarily interested in the scientific framing of bodies, which moves towards more scientific renderings. Latour’s actor network theory, as I have pointed to in “Relational (Trans)formation” is considered valuable as a theoretical approach within kinship studies, in enabling a critical approach to science’s production of reality as well as a focus on how materiality co-creates / constitutes culture, “articulating those things that ceaselessly transforms life” (Thacker 2008, 135).

The discussions of biopolitics within biological science and medicine featured in this chapter are not uncritical. In the remainder of the chapter, I will point to a critique relevant for my complementation of the perspectives by Rose, Thacker, and Franklin with Gernot Böhme’s new aesthetics. According to Blencowe (2012), Rose’s discussions reduce differences and structures of biopolitics and discipline to modern scientific expertise. Blencowe maintains that biopolitics and discipline refer to different and often contesting structures of experience, fundamentally different formations of experience:” of temporality, spacing, and normativity” (Blencowe 2012, 132). Rose’s reconciliation of these through the deployment of (the molecular) scale does not acknowledge how Foucault’s work on biopolitics illuminates biological rationality and biopolitical formations of embodiment that reach far beyond the context of biological science and medicine. An equation of biopolitics with biological science and medicine, Blencowe argues, fails to consider how the development of biological rationality facilitated the production of a host of values, and a network of

analogies and strategies for organizing bodies and forces, that far exceed the scope of somatic well-being or the application of scientific expertise (Blencowe 2012, 132).

This has also been a main argument of the dissertation, which has taken interest in how questions of fertility and IVF are conceptualized, performed, expressed, and experienced in cultural and aesthetic terms. A turn to video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art in this context has been fruitful as it points toward aesthetics as a relevant field for investigations of biopolitics as an economy of experience, not just the politics of scientific expertise. For Foucault, Blencowe notes, experience is understood as “the transfiguration of subjects and objects, trying to reach the limits of the liveable, and as ‘a project of desubjectivation’” (Foucault cited in Blencowe 2012, 4). Foucault’s notions of experience play a crucial role in Rose’s, Thacker’s, and Franklin’s work; however, according to Blencowe, Rose’s version in particular limits an investigation of what influences the experiences of “man as a living being in question” to biomedicine (Blencowe 2012, 4). Franklin and Thacker, however, point to the interdisciplinary nature of biotechnology as they examine sites where the biopolitical economy of experiences is engaged: bioart as well as sites where the biological rationality is disseminated and allows for a broad distribution, popular media culture. I will return to bioart in relation to the material discussed in this dissertation in the summary of chapter III. The intersection of biomedicine and biotechnology with media has a long history; as I pointed out in chapter I in relation to TV and film documentaries, the works discussed in this dissertation can illuminate other biological rationalities of embodiment that go into the formation of understandings of kinship involving IVF beyond biological science and medicine.

The Foucauldian concern at issue in Rose’s and Thacker’s discussions of the role of modern biological rationality in the production of power, domination, and objectification is shared by the Frankfurt School–inspired German philosopher Gernot Böhme in his *Invasive Technification* (2012). Similar to Foucault, Böhme is opposed to nostalgia or romanticism about the past, the insistence that this rationality is necessary to the economic and cultural results that characterize “the West” and seems inseparable from “the mechanisms, procedures, techniques, and effects of power that accompany it” (Foucault 2000, 273). Just as Foucault regards the organizations of time and space, perception, fields of visibility, perspective, dimensionality, and verifiability as partly constituting experience into the category of knowledge, so too does aesthetics, according to Gernot Böhme (1993,1995). It is precisely the dominating biological rationality that Böhme discusses as pertinent to transform through the production of aesthetical experiences. He thus acknowledges that biological rationalities dominate current understandings of bodily existence, knowledge that is premised on (aesthetical) organizations of experiences. But he points to how these organizations of experiences, or mediations, also entail the

power to (trans)form experiences of bodily existence into one that is not premised on rationality. I have found this perspective highly relevant in relation to the works included in this dissertation and to the overall discussion of the significance of mediated experiences for cultural understandings of kinship, body, and technology.

## Chapter III

### Aesthetics

In this chapter, I will present and discuss the theories of aesthetics that, together with the Foucauldian perspectives on biopolitics and discipline characteristic of the biotechnological age, form the theoretical ground of this dissertation. As I pointed to in the preface to chapter II, Gernot Böhme interweaves critical theory from the early Frankfurt School and the new phenomenology of the German philosopher Hermann Schmitz.<sup>37</sup> According to Böhme, the phenomenology of bodily existence<sup>38</sup> is informed by the kinds of bodily practices, incorporating modes of thinking as well as acting, into which individuals have been socialized. Accordingly, Böhme acknowledges the historicity of humans and sociocultural conditions as important aspects of bodily existence, aspects that are usually not the center of attention of pure phenomenological accounts of corporeality.<sup>39</sup> Böhme's position reflects his critical approach to how the experience of the body as external to the self and world, and its objectification and instrumentalization, is facilitated by a dominating understanding of the body. He does not, however, argue for a more holistic account of human subjectivity. It would be illusionary, Böhme argues, to think that a holistic account could dispel the dominant Cartesian thinking, the mind / body split that privileges the former at the expense of the latter (Böhme 2003, 48–52).

According to Böhme, a turn to aesthetics as a matter of *aesthesis*; sensuous cognition as formulated by A.G. Baumgarten poses a counter-ideological potential to reverse a historical trajectory by enclosing knowledge produced aesthetically (Böhme 2001). A cultivation of a bodily existence attentive to sensing one's own bodily existence in the presence of other people, things, and places is the key point in Böhme's theory of aesthetics of atmospheres. The institutionalization (cultivation) of the sensible not as a moral but as an aesthetic capability relates to his argument that life is increasingly aestheticized with a profound impact on our understandings of ourselves (Böhme 2002, 24). The cultivation of aesthetics is pertinent as it enables a greater awareness of how our knowledge of the world is constituted by the power of aesthetics to impact on the bodily dimension of human subjectivity. A retheorization of aesthetics thus is needed in order to account for our understandings of

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<sup>37</sup> Böhme has written extensively on the history and philosophy of science, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy of nature. Some of his writings have appeared in English translation; thus when I quote works that have not, it will appear as *my translation*.

<sup>38</sup> Bodily existence refers to the particular way in which people in different times, places, and social situations experience their own corporeality.

<sup>39</sup> Such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hermann Schmitz.

ourselves, others, and the world based on sensing bodies in addition to conscious and self-conscious subjects. In *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (1995) he introduces the concept of atmosphere as a basic concept that points beyond the realm of art and in turn pays heed to all kinds of aesthetic productions of “spheres of presence” (1995,24; 1993 116). An aesthetics of atmosphere considers the manner in which spectators experience a space, it directs attention to the things that surround us. Far from attending to single objects, it is the constellations of objects that is considered pertinent in terms of the ability of such to impose a certain atmosphere onto the spectator’s mind.

According to Böhme classical aesthetics has taken issue with atmospheres of “the beautiful, the sublime-and then the characterless atmosphere or ‘atmosphere as such’; aura” (Böhme 1993, 122). The new aesthetics however is interested in the general production of perception and Böhme specifically points to three domains knowledge within aesthetic production that are based on the connection between properties of things, people, and places, and the atmosphere they generate (Böhme 1995, 122). Secondly the new aesthetics directs attention to the strategic use of atmospheres in the “aestheticization of reality”, and points to the close connection between atmospheres and the economy of experiences; consumption (Böhme 2003, 72). Third he points to the potential of an aesthetics of atmospheres in disclosing “the negative dimension of attempted domination of nature...overcoming our amnesia regarding the nature that we ourselves are by providing training in the experience, articulation, and production of atmosphere” (Rigby 2011, 145).

Related to this study all three dimensions have served as inspiration and revealed their relevance as reflected in the articles. All though I have argued in chapter I, that the empirical material is characterized by making usually unnoticed and unseen matters of everyday life matter through productions of “atmospheres,” I would caution against presupposing that they represent Böhme’s new ecological aesthetics of nature (Böhme 1992) in terms of exemplifying an actual shift from a dominant perception of the body or discuss their role in cultivating a subjectivity premised on sensuous cognition. I do, however, propose that the material has benefited from a theoretical perspective that acknowledges the social production of other-than-human nature *and* the bodily dimension of human subjectivity. Böhme’s critical aesthetical phenomenology poses an alternative not only to discourse-focused approaches on experiences with infertility and ART, kinship studies informed by science and technology studies (STS), and sociological anthropological studies of new reproductive technologies’ interest in the constitutive aspect of materiality – technology included. For the purpose of this study, Böhme’s discussion of the capacity of literature and art to generate *Gefühlsräume*, moods themselves, through constellations of people, things, and environments has also informed my focus (Böhme 1993, 119). It enabled the possibility to investigate “material” qualities and their potential effect on how

people conceive the world the way they do, positioning aesthetics as a real social power. As a theory critically engaged in *how* the world comes to mean, it furthered the investigation of how mediations make experiences with infertility and IVF matter.

This chapter serves several purposes. It situates the dissertation epistemologically within the German aesthetical theoretical tradition, emphasizing the significance of sensuous cognition which in terms of Böhme requires a twofold focus; on the production side as well as on the reception side (Böhme 1995, 24; 1993, 116; 2013, sec. 6). Secondly, it elaborates on the ramification of such an approach to the empirical material and, more broadly, what it brings to kinship studies' interest in materiality and social media. The chapter first introduces Böhme's philosophy of technology, which is inspired by German philosopher Martin Heidegger's perspectives (Böhme 2012) as well as German philosopher Walter Benjamin's perspectives on the symptoms of an increasingly technological world, particularly in relation to the concepts of aura and art (Böhme 1993, 1995). The chapter then outlines Böhme's theory of aesthetics and concept of atmosphere, informed by the German philosopher Hermann Schmitz's new phenomenology (Böhme 1993, 1995), which, together with the former, is intended to clarify the overall arguments of the dissertation. In short, the chapter offers more detailed perspectives on how Böhme's concept of aesthetics has affected my work than the format of the articles has made possible.

### Gernot Böhme's philosophy of technology

A main point in Böhme's work is that the task of critical theory is not only to bring processes characteristic of the technification of nature and the human body into confrontation (Böhme 2012, 19). Like Martin Heidegger, Böhme is interested in our *being* in the world and how we can come to imagine this *being* differently. This perspective has served as inspiration for my questions in terms of how video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations engage in productions of a *being*, their power to inflect the viewer's state of feeling. The possibility to investigate the (trans)formation of understandings of infertility and ART arises through Böhme's perspectives on technology in connection with aesthetics as a general theory of perception. As such, my collected material supplements his own examples mainly from literature, garden architecture, and art (Böhme 1995, 33-35) yet reflects his considerations of the significance of an interweaving of technology and aesthetics.

Böhme's philosophy of technology is greatly influenced by Heidegger, particularly Heidegger's later essay from 1954 "Die Frage nach der Technik" ("The Question concerning

Technology”).<sup>40</sup> As Böhme notes, the text is seminal in its explicit centering on ontological implications and effects of mass media more implicitly worked on in his *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)* from 1927 (Böhme 2012). Reaching back to Aristotle and the Greek word *techné*, Heidegger refers to technology as craftsmanship, crafts, and the arts. In “The Question concerning Technology,” however, Heidegger expands *techné* to encompass *poiesis* and *episteme*, Greek words that belong to the domain of revealing (*aletheia*) and hence have to do with engendering and truth. In doing so, Heidegger refuses the initial meaning of *techné* as a means to an end; *techné* rather involves a kind of knowing. Technology is understood as making things appear (*poiésis*; Heidegger 2009, 12); reveals the world to us (*aletheia*). *Poiesis* names that which brings something forth into presence, or that which renders the potentiality of the not-yet into explicit actuality. Any activity or action that brings something into presence belongs to *poiesis*. The essence of technology is the poetic process of bringing something forth into presence, and, as a mode of revealing (*Gestel*), it “frames” a world that is unfolded in the process. This framing is not neutral; rather it restricts our understanding of reality. The social implications of *techné*, *poiesis*, and *aletheia* became the basis of the Frankfurt School’s critique of technology.

Böhme follows Heidegger’s notion that modern technology poses an ontological threat. The essence of modern technology, according to Heidegger and Böhme, is not characterized by *poiesis*. Modern technology rather reduces the process of revealing and the power of bringing forth (*poiesis*) to instrumental ends. (Modern) technological “enframing” reveals the world only as a “standing-reserve,” a resource or thing to be used (Böhme 2009, 15). Inspired by Heidegger, Böhme calls attention to the ontological and social crisis brought about by a technological ordering of the world as well as by its organization of our cognitive perception. Its issue is our distress, caused by the technological understanding of being characterized by an understanding of our body as a resource to be ordered, enhanced, and used efficiently. For Böhme, the contrast between nature and artifice, however, loses its meaning, which also encompasses the nature that we are ourselves; the human body is no longer simply a given fact but has become subject to technological transformation. He extends this argument to the self-relation of modern human beings, which, he notes, is transformed by the possibility of bodily interventions. Accordingly, a return to natural ways is impossible because resistance to technification is undermined. Böhme relates this outcome to what Walter Benjamin called the “loss of the aura,” extended now from the domain of art to nature.<sup>41</sup> Böhme offers a critical theory of technological

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<sup>40</sup> English terms from the translation in Martin Heidegger, “The Question concerning Technology” (trans. W. Lovitt), in *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 9–24.

<sup>41</sup> Böhme proposes, with an expression from Ernst Bloch (1995), that instead of consigning “nature” to the past, “nature,” on the contrary, “represents a possibility that as yet lies before us” (Bloch 1995, 3, 1353). As Rigby notes, Böhme’s conceptualization of nature, which lies before us as a cultural project, “seem[s] overweeningly

development with Max Horkheimer's notion of "interest in rational conditions" as main point of reference. According to Böhme, a rethinking of biological rationalities does not require a dismissal of (bio)technological developments but rather calls for a supplement with knowledge premised on something other than objectification; a carnal kind of knowing / sensuous cognition. It is an approach I have taken that nuances understandings of kinship by means of IVF but also the practice of mediating individual experiences as an intersubjective orientation toward the viewer, extending beyond the individual fertility project.

In the perspectives of Böhme, a critical approach to technology is called for because it restricts our way of thinking and levels our understanding of being. His *Invasive Technification* (Böhme 2012) reflects a notion of technology that is informed by Heidegger as well as by the social critical thinking of the Frankfurt School. Accordingly, Böhme proposes that a philosophy of technology that deals with processes of technification by its very nature is critical insofar as it sees technology as standing in a relation of tension to what it is a technification of (2012, 19). Descriptions of the process of technification are critical because they bring into light what the processes of technification exclude in the very act of enabling particular forms of human relationships and behavior. Technology, according to Böhme, is not neutral; it rather structures the way we understand ourselves and the world. Böhme suggests that technology:

"is best understood using Foucault's concept of a *dispositif* – a conditioning factor that makes something else possible but also limits it, thereby giving shape to what it makes possible. Today we can speak of technology as a social *dispositif*, a communicative *dispositif*, and indeed a perceptual *dispositif*. What this means is that technology no longer stands over or against human beings; it structures humans life and social relations from within" (2012, 19).

The concept (*dispositif*) posits technology as idealistic; its diagnostic function epitomizes the structural configurations of the present reality. What is muted in this definition, however, are the concrete forms technology takes on, from craft tools and machine tools all the way up to the infrastructure of our communication and transportation systems. Following Böhme, human behavior and interaction are

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anthropocentric. Böhme's philosophy is nonetheless far from endorsing human supremacy. To begin with he assumes an understanding of natural phenomena as autopoietic, independent and communicative, and he follows Bloch in advocating for a technology of 'alliance' rather than domination" (Rigby 2011, 140–141).

thus conditioned “by material arrangements rather than discipline, education, strategies of individual self-cultivation or social convention” (2012, 19).

Other philosophical approaches to materiality are more prominent in research on media accounts of kinship involving ART that too engage in emphasizing the complexity of kinship as practiced in Euro-American contexts. In “Relational (Trans)formations,” I discussed how the emphasis on a proliferation of materiality – inclusion of nonhuman / human hybrids in a network of entities breaching the object / subject divide – is applauded in kinship studies. These perspectives mainly refer to Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) as well as Gilles Deleuze’s concept of rhizomes. The ramifications of a focus on materiality and substances inspired by Latour’s notion of “actants” (Latour 1999), I noted, “exemplified a shift from a lateral notion of human relatedness (the family tree imagery, Bouquet 2000) to a vertical Deleuzian (1988) inspired rhizomatic structure” (“Relational Transformations,” 5). These perspectives enable the possibility to attend to media technologies as important materiality in the formation of kinship. Including Böhme in this article related particularly to his emphasis on the *qualities* of the presence of people, objects, and surroundings and their effect in terms of their production of bodily and affective responses of the viewers of *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks*. Following Böhme, I argued for a consideration of the aesthetic dimension of *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic*, their composition, and the aesthetic power of such. The social implications of these aspects related to their potential to transform understandings of kinship involving IVF. It directed attention to the presence of buttons, ear-flip hats, buns, needles, and bodily gestures and their function as aesthetic markers, signals inflecting the viewer’s state of feeling. The presence of a constellation of things and events and the experiential encounters with this constellation in the material is effective because they direct attention to the relation of human beings to cultural norms, values, and ideals related to kinship, technology, and body.

The intersection of bio and media technology and their effect is also discussed by Eugene Thacker (2005) as well as by Sarah Franklin (2013) specifically in relation to IVF and infertility. For Thacker, Félix Guattari’s concept of postmedia in relation to biotech takes issue with computer technologies increasingly becoming available to nonspecialists, enabling political, critical, and ethical interventions – a bottom-up media that emphasizes polyvocality – that are critical (Thacker 2005, 307). According to Thacker, projects within bioart raise contentious issues, pointing to fissures in the social, cultural, and material effects of biotechnologies (2005, 318). Thacker’s approach comes close to reducing bioart to a reaction to and reflection of technoscience. His perspectives on the interdisciplinary nature of bioart, however, I argue, should be read as Guattarian-inspired perspectives

on how the possibility of outlining new ways of thinking and acting in the world are predicated on finding new ways of thinking about technology in relation to the subject (Thacker 2005, 318).

A similar undertaking is considered by Böhme, who points to how the processes characteristic for the technification of nature and the human body need to be confronted and how technification, in light of alternative technological possibilities, should be critically addressed (Böhme 2012, 19). Although Böhme's and Thacker's Guattarian-inspired perspectives seem to align on technology as part of an alternative way of thinking, they differ substantially when it comes to the question of ontology. One of Guattari's key arguments, Thacker presents, is that the main pathway to alternative ways of thinking and living is a transformation of media as *inseparable* from the subject (Thacker 2005, 307, my emphasis). This binding of objects, commodities, tools to humans by ontological fiat, in the perspective of Böhme, in turn mutes what he defines as most significant for changes epistemologically: material qualities and their effect on how people conceive the world the way they do. Böhme's philosophy of technology thus differs from post-phenomenological perspectives as well as an ANT-based theoretical perspective, the latter being particular problematic as it "uncritically embraces the obsolescence between nature and technology" (2012, 19). His critique is related to his insistence on human bodily connectedness with nature through its bodily existence and as an instance on a continually historical materialistic critique.<sup>42</sup>

In a similar manner as argued by his brother, cultural theorist Hartmut Böhme, Böhme sets a new subjectivism: the subject in nature that refutes the spastic formation of an economized, industrialized ratio (Müller 2011, 74). Böhme and Böhme have discussed what they term "the other side of rationalism," centering on an episteme "cramped in efforts of holding itself together, indicating a fear of what is centrifugal, of that what it cannot itself be or which it has excluded as its Other" (Müller 2011:74). The Modern Age has brought about a "double alienation" by the exclusion of aesthetics from knowledge: "barred by the modern sciences from a direct, bodily experience of nature, man was alienated both from nature and from his body" (Müller 2011, 74). Foucault poses a similar critique, arguing that self-cultivation and ascetic practices must be liberated from the compulsive urge for (self-) discipline and (self-)control in the quest for aesthetic existence, or creative self-cultivation (Foucault 1985, 28). It is close at hand to argue that Böhme's discussion of a subject in nature, with reference to

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<sup>42</sup> A strong moral position on the social use of science is traceable throughout Böhme's work. He played a significant role in developing the Darmstadt Declaration of Dissent 1984, signed by scientists as well as technicians. The intention with the "statement of abstention" (*Verveigerungsformel*) was to apply moral pressure to individual scientists active in military research. Furthermore, the aim was to deprive the military escalation intellectual bases of support. Böhme himself was the first signatory to the declaration (see <http://www.wissenschaft-und-frieden.de/seite.php?artikelID=0574> – accessed 25-10-2014).

Foucauldian thought, comes close to “a discursive configuration that relies on (and tries to reinforce) a premodern episteme marked by the non-alienation of nature and culture,” which, it has been argued, characterizes Hartmut Böhme’s perspectives too (Müller 2011, 74).

What I argue this proposed conceptualization neglects, however, is Böhme’s critique of exactly that: the notion of a possible return to a premodern notion of nature as a locus of a *promesse de bonheur*, as in Adorno’s aesthetics of natural beauty (Rigby 2011, 139). In Böhme’s perspective, such a return is both undesirable and impossible as nature as pregiven has disappeared. It does not mean, however, that the concept of nature should be consigned to the past as characteristic for “pro-modernist (and ‘postmodernists’)” thinking (Rigby 2011, 140). As the eco-critical cultural theorist Kate Rigby asserts, Böhme’s concept of nature is inspired by Ernest Bloch (a distant member of the Frankfurt School) and represents a possibility that yet lies “before us” (Rigby 2011, 140). This affiliation is not coincidental, as Bloch<sup>43</sup> theoretically took a critical position toward the Freudian psychological and psychoanalytical perspectives incorporated by the inner circle of the Frankfurt School.<sup>44</sup> Böhme aligns with this refute of the psychologically based perception of nature, which also is questioned in Hermann Schmitz’s phenomenological philosophy. Informed by Schmitz, Böhme argues for a concept of nature as intrinsically linked to our bodily praxis, “Leibliche praxis,” as a concept for the nature that we ourselves are, “die Natur, die wir selbst sind” (Böhme 2002, 19). He proposes a cultivation, making a virtue out of heeding our bodily impulses and sensations, or “leibliches spüren” (Böhme 2002, 91–94), as a performative transformation of constitutive life relations. This perspective, however, also requires a critical approach to the aestheticization of culture because the heeding of bodily impulses can be structured for the purpose of consumption. His theory of aesthetics is consequently a critical aesthetics (Böhme 1995, 37).

Böhme draws on Heidegger’s perspectives on art as a “realm that is, on one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it” (Heidegger 2009, 24). Art and literature, according to Böhme, play a key role in the discovery and cultivation of other-than-human nature, as well as the discovery of our being in the world qua bodily existence (Rigby 2011, 8).

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<sup>43</sup> Ernest Bloch’s seminal work is a three-volume compendium entitled *The Principle of Hope*, written during the years 1938–1947. This work reflects his interest in ways in which hope and the human desire for liberation and fulfilment appear in our everyday lives, and thus opposes Adorno’s cultural pessimism. He remained affiliated with the Frankfurt School but separated himself from their Freudian line. According to Bloch, Freud was too obsessed with trauma and nightmares about a repressed past. Bloch, by contrast, contended that what drives us are our daydreams of a better world and life.

<sup>44</sup> More specifically, Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm, and Löwenthal; see P. E. Jansen, “The Frankfurt School’s Interest in Freud and the Impact of Eros and Civilization on the Student Protest Movement in Germany: A Brief History,” *Phaenex* 4, no. 2 (2009): 78–96. Although Böhme seemingly refutes Horkheimer, he also aligns with his perspectives on not to presuppose what defines reasonableness.

Böhme adopts the paradox of enframing from Heidegger, positioning the artistic orientation to the world as a potential alternative enframing. It posits the artist (and in the case of this study, ordinary people also) as engaged in the world in order to understand it, creating mediations that do not seek to make the world and themselves into a “standing-reserve” (Heidegger 2009, 15). Böhme’s assertion that art as a realm resembles technology and his discussion of aesthetics as a critical theory have served as a foundation for my investigation. They have inspired my investigation of the material, where the production of the aesthetic-affective dimension and its reception side – premised on bodily participation – has functioned as keys for understanding the video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art. The aesthetic experience of infertility and ART may be constructed, but their formations cannot, following Böhme, be reduced to a metaphor for kinship practices or the perception of the body and technology. They are rather to be regarded as processes of engagement that produce a new kind of relation between subjects and their cultural entanglement.

For Thacker (2005) and Franklin (2013), bioart is a potent example of an alternative enframing of body, technology, and kinship. I have suggested that video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations too can be regarded as offering an alternative enframing of body, kinship, and ART. Furthermore, this approach has enabled me to discuss the materials as other than an aestheticization of bodily projects or consumption of ART. Art’s (as well as digital practices’) relationship with the world is, following Böhme, different from technology’s. This has influenced my approach to the material in this project, viewing it as more than mere reactions to, reflections of, or exact representations of a scientific phenomenon. This approach has not excluded biotechnology or biomedicine but has pointed to how the presence of ART in the material offers alternative perspectives, pointing to the aesthetical dimension of this realm as potent for understandings of kinship practices but also, more broadly, technology and the body. Böhme’s approach to biotechnology is admittedly normative, proposing that a strategic incorporation of the artist’s and poet’s vision / enframing into our own view of the world is crucial; It is crucial to establish a constantly questioning relationship with the technology that is constantly making new incursions into our lives. As a consequence, a theory of aesthetics has to include aestheticization because it enables the possibility to discuss the power of enframings, requiring a critical approach to the artistic materials in question and their production of atmospheres – video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art included.

Aesthetic production, according to Böhme, includes traditional works of art but is defined more generally as a category that, besides artworks, encompasses design, the art of stage setting, interior architecture, industrial design, home interior, and kitsch – all producing atmospheres (1995, 25). Böhme does not use (digital) media technologies as his main examples in his main work on

aesthetics, *Atmosphäre: Essays für eine neue Ästhetik* (1995). His examples take on more classical art forms, such as literature, paintings, and garden architecture. He does, however, with reference to Walter Benjamin, not rule out sensitivity generated by means of media technologies. Freed from the mystification of high culture, Benjamin believed that media culture could cultivate more critical individuals able to judge and analyze their culture. Accordingly, art and aesthetic production, for Böhme, is an archive of experiences, articulation, and production of atmospheres that can raise bodily experience into a transformative social practice. For this study, this particular perspective stressed as a necessity for a discussion of the material in terms of their capacity to raise bodily experience as a transformative social practice – a practice that directs the attention of the viewers to their bodily affectivity through experiences evoked, diminished, and intensified by the mediations.

### Aura – art in the age of technical reproduction

Böhme's theory of aesthetics, and particularly his concept of atmosphere, is greatly influenced by Walter Benjamin's essay "Kunst im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (1955). Benjamin's essay is not relevant merely for Böhme's definition of the concept; it also takes issue with some of the symptoms of an increasingly technological world. For Böhme, Benjamin's notions are interesting because he introduced a change in perspective on atmosphere from being discussed frequently within aesthetic discourse to becoming a concept of aesthetic theory in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproduction" (Böhme 1995, 116). New mass media, according to Benjamin, replaced older forms of culture whereby the mass reproduction of photography, film, recordings, and publications replaced the emphasis on the originality and "aura" of the work of art. Benjamin set out to indicate the difference between an original and its reproductions through which he could define a general development of art through the loss of aura, which was brought about by the introduction of technical means of reproduction into art production (Böhme 1993, 116).

The technologies of reproduction not only resulted in new forms of expression – the moving image of film – but also informed art in general, subverting the uniqueness of art. At stake in relation to reproductions is the disappearance of the "here and now," or authenticity. Authenticity evades the reproducible whereas the original in turn retains its full authority over manual reproductions, although the same cannot be said about the technical. Benjamin points to two reasons for this: The technical reproduction is (more) autonomous than its original, which, however, is not without valuable qualities; it accentuates and makes seen the unseen, which otherwise would remain unacknowledged and unexperienced. Secondly, the technologically reproduced circulates spatially as opposed to originals, which are limited to museums, galleries, and concert halls. Art accordingly becomes

accessible, effectuating a “Liquidierung des Traditionswertes am Kulturerbe” (Benjamin 1955, 16). The *here and now* of artworks is devalued by which “ein empfindlichster Kern berührt wird . . . Das ist seine Echtheit” (Benjamin 1955, 15). The indifference of the reproduction to the original object thus results in a wavering of the history of this object (Benjamin 1955, 15). What wavers is its aura. Benjamin closes in on a definition of aura through the history of decay by determining an array of characteristics of the aura of artworks. The expression “empfindlichster Kern,” however, does not make the definition of aura easy, reflecting Benjamin’s aim not to profane aura. By way of introduction, Benjamin illustrates how aura is related to historical objects through a determination of aura of natural objects:

“Diese . . . definieren wir als einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag. An einem Sommernachmittag ruhend einem Gebirgszug am Horizont oder einem Zweig folgen, der seinen Schatten auf den Ruhenden wirft – das heißt die Aura dieser Berge, dieses Zweiges atmen. (Benjamin 1955:18)

Thus, aura paradoxically is a unique appearance of something distant, however present it might be, and describes the “Kultwertes des Kunstwerks in Kategorien der raumzeitlichen Wahrnehmung” (Benjamin 1955, 53). For Benjamin, aura does not elicit anywhere to anyone, although he does point to certain exemplary constellations that allow aura to be breathed: those who remain calm and relaxed or alone on a sunny afternoon, as opposed to the distracted masses on the streets or in movie theatres. Accordingly, aura can be cultivated through devotion, contemplation, and respect. Consequently, the modern forms of reception are situated as less auratic in terms of their secularity and lack of respect (for the original). The essay predominantly expresses open-mindedness toward technologies of reproduction; Benjamin is neither merely for nor against, neither modernist nor reactionary romantic. The dissertation has not directly taken issue with Benjamin’s concept of aura, yet his concept is relevant in relation to Böhme’s concept of atmosphere featuring this thesis.

Böhme is particular interested in what is implied by Benjamin’s concept of aura for his development of the concept of atmosphere as a fundamental concept of aesthetics. He particularly takes issue with the genesis of aura as paradoxical: Benjamin introduced it to characterize works of art as such, but he derived it from a concept of nature. Benjamin, Böhme argues, “has already introduced the ‘unique’ and commits a *petitio principii*, since it is precisely through aura that the uniqueness of artworks is to manifest itself. The aura itself is not unique, it is repeatable” (Böhme 1993, 117). This leads Böhme to consider how the experience of aura derives. In what follows, Böhme dissects the

experience of aura as contended by Benjamin (the above quote) to “firstly a certain natural impression or mood as background and secondly a certain receptivity in the observer” (1993, 117). Aura flows forth spatially, almost something like a breath or a haze pointing to atmosphere as something that is absorbed bodily – aura is “breathed” (Böhme 1995, 27). This dimension of corporeality in the experience of aura disappears in Benjamin’s further use of the concept (27). For Böhme, however, the presentation of the *experience of aura* is exemplary and serves as its definition (27). It is a definition that reflects Böhme’s interest in the possibility of a new aesthetics that overcomes not only the intellectualism of classical aesthetics but also its reduction to the realm of art and to communication. Whereas Benjamin does not retain nature and bodily existence in his further descriptions of the experience of aura in the essay, Böhme wants to sustain these (27). Böhme sums up Benjamin’s notion of aura as that which is “perceptible not only in art products or original works. To perceive aura is to absorb it into one’s own bodily state of being. What is perceived is an indeterminate spatially extended quality of feeling” (27).<sup>45</sup> These considerations, according to Böhme, require an elaboration of the concept of atmosphere in the framework of Hermann Schmitz’s philosophy of the body.

### Affective atmospheres

Böhme traces the diversion of aesthetics from the study of perception and sensation to its current status as the site of theories of taste in the tradition of Kant, Descartes, and Lyotard, with whom “aesthetics . . . completely abandoned the field of sensual experience and affective understanding” (Böhme 2000, 15). Accordingly, the classical concept of aesthetics is to be regarded as a reduction of the true potential of aesthetics to an exclusively interest in the judgment of art as “eine Sache des Intellekts und des Redens, aber nicht des Empfindens” (Böhme 1995, 15). Kant’s theory of aesthetic is exemplary for the prompting of aesthetics as a:

“Question of judgment . . . the question of the justification for a positive or negative response to something . . . to facilitate conversation about works of art. It supplies the vocabulary for art history and art criticism, for the speeches at exhibitions and prize givings and for articles in catalogues. Sensuousness and nature have in this fashion disappeared from aesthetics” (Böhme 1993, 115).

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<sup>45</sup> “Wir halten fest: So etwas wie Aura ist nach Benjamins Zeugnis gerade nicht nur an Produkten der Kunst oder gar nur an Originalen spürbar. Die Aura spüren heißt, sie in die eigene leibliche Befindlichkeit aufzunehmen. Was gespürt wird, ist eine unbestimmt räumlich ergossene Gefühlsqualität” (Böhme 1995, 27).

Böhme's new aesthetics of atmospheres aims to correct this shift by rehabilitating aesthetics as *aisthētikē*, aligning with A. G. Baumgarten, who, in the two-volume work *Aesthetica* from 1750 and 1758, took exceptional issue with the disregard of aesthetics. Turning to the Greek word *aisthētikē* (the sensuously perceptible), Baumgarten argues for aesthetics as an ancient part of the philosophical discipline. Baumgarten's initial point of departure is the introduction of aesthetics as that which the body sensuously perceives.<sup>46</sup> Gernot Böhme follows Baumgarten and understands aesthetics as a matter of *aisthēsis*, making it "a general theory of perception" (Böhme 1995, 15). An exclusively intellectualistic interpretation of works of art is thus rejected as Böhme identifies the capacity and task of aesthetics, as other and as more than, to be a mere medium for the transmission of art. This perspective does not simply rule out aesthetic judgment but turns attention to bodily states, sensuous cognition, as the true power of aesthetics that enables aesthetic judgments.

To a greater or lesser extent, art has always had an atmospheric dimension, but this attained programmatic status only in response to the perceived deficits of rationalist reductionism as "Konstatieren von Daten" (Böhme 1995, 15). The new aesthetics extends the dimension of art to "das Affektive, die Emotionalität und das Imaginative" (1995, 15). The key concept of Böhme's new aesthetics derives from the German phenomenologically based philosophy of Hermann Schmitz and his notion of atmospheres, which requires overturning the banishment of the body qua *Leib* from European philosophies of the subject. The body in the perspectives of Böhme and Schmitz is "doubled appearing as *Leib* in one aspect and *Körper* in another" (Rigby 2011, 142), terms that generally appear and are used in German language about the body. Whereas the body as *Körper* refers to the body we have, the body as *Leib* refers to the body we are, which "lacks physical boundaries . . . flowing out into the circumambient space, mingling with other entities . . . indicating that 'we are not finished by the skin'" (Rigby 2011, 142).

Sensuous cognition is normally perceived as a "Konstatieren von Daten" (Böhme 1995, 15). The new aesthetics, however, is attentive through its centering on the production and reception side to all aspects of sense perception, including "das Affektive, die Emotionalität und das Imaginative" (Böhme 1995, 15). What Böhme seeks to transcend is the perception that the body is merely either a lived body or a rational thinking subject, or a perception of the body based on and interested in its biological and mental components. At issue in this perspective is what has been omitted by the "introjection of feeling" associated with modern psychologism and the understanding of the body we

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<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, aesthetics becomes the theory of sensuous perception and cognition, combining the Greek word *aisthētikos*, which concerns the distinguished, and *aisthanesthai*, which concerns feelings and perception; see Lis Engel, Helle Rønholt, Charlotte Svendler Nielsen, and Helle Winther, *Bevægelsens poetik* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2006), 12, my translation.

have, *Körper*. In accordance with Schmitz, feelings in Böhme's perspectives do not originate "inside" the self. They are rather given to experience as "unlocalized, poured forth atmospheres. . . . Which visit (haunt) the body which receives them . . . affectively, which takes the form of . . . emotions" (Schmitz, quoted in Böhme 1995, 119). Böhme's new aesthetics connects the understanding of humans as bodily beings with an understanding of objects as radiating spatially. For Schmitz, atmospheres are "affective powers of feeling, spatial bearers of moods" (Böhme 1993, 119). Although Schmitz discusses aesthetics, he does, as opposed to Böhme, not relate it to atmospheres. This leads Böhme to correct Schmitz's disregard of atmospheres generated from things as well as his assertion that atmospheres flow freely in space (Böhme 1995, 29). The correction relates atmospheres to the messy scimmages of everyday life as well as culturally and socially, enabling the possibility for this study to follow atmospheric productions as invested in the cultural dimension of IVF and infertility in media and art.

### A new aesthetics of atmospheres

Atmospheres have the power to inflect moods, affectively attune us, and hence their production refers to the manipulating of material conditions. The production of atmospheres is therefore confined to setting the conditions in which the atmosphere appears. These conditions can be conceptualized as generators of immediacy, a felt presence of something here and now. Böhme turns to Heidegger's term *Befindlichkeit*<sup>47</sup> as it encompasses the perception of bodily presence inflected by objects and situations (Böhme 1995, 27). *Befindlichkeit* is intuitive, sensuous, and bodily and it can be produced. The main theme for aesthetics or sensuous cognition is not only what one senses but what one feels by it, or atmospheres (Böhme 1995, 15). This provides a further definition of atmosphere: it is the felt presence of something or someone in space, or "tuned spaces" (Böhme 2008, 7).

The theme of attunement, the being-in-something (mood) as the energizing aspect of sensing, also occurs in Benjamin's concept of aura. This approach presupposes, Böhme argues, that we as bodily beings perceive all our surroundings, as well as objects, aesthetically. Aesthetic experience involves sensing, being in the presence, and is not disinterested or objective but always involves sensation and *Befindlichkeit*. Accordingly, one is always in space, and "Sich-Spüren" (Böhme 1995, 31) is to sense how I feel in these particular surroundings "wie mir hier zumute ist" (Böhme 1995, 31). Surroundings, within Böhme's contextualization, must be understood untraditionally. Classical ontology, which he traces to modern natural sciences and Kant, Böhme asserts, is occupied with the way in which qualities are conceived, namely as something that makes it possible to determine and

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<sup>47</sup> My aim has not been to discuss the distinctions between the levels of ontic and ontological that Heidegger's clarification of *Befindlichkeit* is part of: "Was wir ontologisch mit dem Titel *Befindlichkeit* anzeigen, ist ontisch das Bekannteste und Alltäglicste: die Stimmung, das Gestimmtsein" (Heidegger 1927, 178).

define objects from their surroundings. This definition reduces qualities to something objects have (properties). Böhme in turn argues that Aristotle's notion of *ecstasis* is more appropriate (Böhme 1995, 120) because it enables discussion of the qualities of atmospheres as well as their inflection on space and feelings.

“Ecstasies,” as opposed to the term “properties,” emphasizes the radiation of things. Things thus go forth from themselves; they are characterized by a mode of contemplation that is not self-enclosed. They give themselves to perception through particular qualities – size, shape, texture, color, etc. – determining the way in which things are felt present in space (Böhme 1995, 30). Böhme exemplifies this using a blue cup, suggesting that:

“rather than conceiving of the blue color of a cup as something that belongs to it, adheres to it, and determines its identity, that it would be more accurate to think of the blue as “something which radiates out to the environment of the cup . . . the blueness is a way of the cup being there, an articulation of its presence” (Grant 2013, 19; Böhme 1995, 30–31).

People, objects, and places present thus “tincture” the environment in which they are perceived and, in so doing, generate atmospheres (Böhme 1993, 121). In “Atmospheric Video Blogs,” I discussed how the atmospheric body, technology, and everyday life in the vlog of Silvia and Peter functioned not only as depictions of specific atmospheres but as productions of bodily and affective responses in the viewer. This stressed a focus on generators and their experiential qualities in the material and their capacity in terms of evoking bodily experiences, a notion traceable in several of the articles of this anthological dissertation. The aesthetic spaces of vlogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art constitute a realm, an affective space whose aim is not to depict a real place but, through the creation of a new by different constellations and augmentations, to inflect the viewer's bodily disposition.

Paraphrasing Rigby about Böhme's concept of atmospheres in relation to literature, this reminds us that the ideas elicited by people, objects, and environments in digital media practices and art can just as readily affect our bodily disposition, as can atmospheres generated by the physical environment affect our frame of mind (Rigby 2011, 146). What ultimately defines atmospheres, then, Böhme clarifies in this longer but illusive quote:

“Conceived in this fashion, atmospheres are neither something objective, that is, qualities possessed by things, and yet they are something thing-like, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities – conceived as ecstasies. Nor are atmospheres something subjective, for example, determinations of a psychic state. And yet they are subject-like, belonging to subjects, in that they are sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space” (Böhme 1993, 122).

As I noted, Böhme specifically exemplifies the atmospheric by referring to invocations of atmospheres by literature. He does, however, briefly point to the relevance of new media in relation to atmospheres (Böhme 1995, 11). Baudrillard and Benjamin, Böhme notes, have played a crucial part in taking seriously the aestheticization of reality furthered by media, pointing to the cultural transformation as well as the transformation of lived reality by a media-produced world (Böhme 1995, 11). What they miss, according to Böhme, is how this mediated reality is countervailed by a wave of immediacy. He proposes that an aesthetic theory of atmosphere complement theories of new media, as cyberspace and sensuousness are two sites of a cultural development in what he terms the “technical civilization” (1995, 11, my translation). I stressed a similar argument in the article “Atmospheric Video Blogs.” Vlogs, just like the other media discussed in this dissertation, are characterized by a reality created and re-created, webs of intertextuality that consequently do not refer to an original concrete experience (“Atmospheric Video Blogs” 2013, 3). Rather than making the body obsolete, however, a shared bodily existence following Böhme is presupposed and valued. The affective space created by vlogging entails a distinct social dimension; it is aimed at the participation of the viewer’s body.

Instrumentalizing Böhme’s argument, I discussed how this exclusion of the significance of the *presence* (perceived reality) in mediations endowed by people, objects, and environments deprives aesthetics of any real power in the generation of (cultural) meaning. The main point of the article was to argue for a consideration of the atmospheric dimension of the re-encoded materials as an equally constitutive power in the generation of cultural meaning – in the article, specifically related to infertility and IVF. The sensuous dimension of aestheticization of culture, including experiences with infertility and ART, is a fundamentally aesthetic concern, and *aisthesis* is central to the understanding of human sociality of this cultural production of atmospheres.

Art, as well as digital practices, in this regard entails the power to increase or diminish the aesthetic-affective attunement heeding experiences of corporeality. Following Böhme, presenting alternative experiences does not necessarily promise a radical break with objectification. It does,

however, entail a significant social dimension as the presence of people, objects, and surroundings entail the power to make usually marginal and insignificant aspects of mediated fertility projects matter. It reveals the need for a consideration of how compositions heed levels of being that are not about efficiency but are about being in the present, attentive to the bodily existence endowed by the affective space the mediations. The articulations of atmospheres and attentiveness to the qualities of things, places, and people that produce them, according to Böhme, raise a personal experience to the level of a transformative social praxis (Rigby 2011, 146). Following this argument, the dissertation has stressed that video blogs on YouTube, TV and film documentaries, and installation art, by producing affective spaces, play a key role in making explicit what is usually omitted by the public face of IVF in media. The close imbrication of the social and the aesthetic elements in the realm of atmospheres is complex and multilayered. The theorization of this attentive sensing of one's own bodily existence in relation to other people, things, and places constitutes the core concern of Böhme's new aesthetics.

The dissertation set out to attend to the production of aesthetic-affective attunement, which, I have pointed out in the articles, appeals to the sensing of not only the presence of people, objects, and surroundings in the material but also the viewer's / visitor's own bodily existence. Each article entails a discussion of how the empirical material, conceptualized as productions of atmospheres, heeds bodily impulses and sensations. It allowed me suggest how mediated experiences with infertility and IVF make the complexity and dynamics of kinship experiential by a shift in attention from stable signs and referential function (Böhme 1993, 115) to productions privileging life lived through sensory experience. It also led me to investigate how the materials address the socialization into having a body (*Körper*), serving both "as critique of and have an indirect effect on the social and political . . . inasmuch as they question the very nature of our accepted ideas and belief systems regarding new technologies" (Broadhurst 2007, 186).

## Affect

Before reaching the summary of this chapter, a few words need to be said about the concept of affect and, not least, my use of it, which largely follows Böhme's conceptualization, complemented with Brian Massumi's notions of affect and Sianne Ngai's expansion of aesthetic theory of ugly feelings. Böhme, Massumi, and Ngai all feature in the article "Experiences of Assisted Reproduction." There are two reasons for this combination of theoretical perspective: Firstly, it accommodates the focus on affect as the permeating theme of the anthology featuring the article. Secondly, the combined elements complement each other and have offered diverse possibilities to discuss the affective space produced by the material. I also turned to Ngai in "Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility" and her

considerations of the aesthetic category of the cute, explicitly present in one of the video blogs of Silvia and Peter.

### Affect – shared atmospheres

Nigel Thrift and Ben Anderson have pointed to obvious parallels between two contemporary affect-theoretical traditions: one German centered and featuring Hermann Schmitz, Gernot Böhme, and Peter Sloterdijk, and one American, featuring Brian Massumi, Lauren Berlant, and Sianne Ngai. Although their thoughts on affect and atmospheres are parallel, their interactions are limited by the fact that key works of, in particular, Schmitz and Sloterdijk are available only in German (Thrift 2008, 15–16, 220, 254; Anderson 2009, 77, 81).<sup>48</sup> Among those influenced by Schmitz is Gernot Böhme, who is frequently cited in English within an array of different areas: “ethics, environmental studies, architecture, and aesthetics” (Grant 2013, 23).

As present theories on affect and atmospheres, the two theoretical traditions are characterized by differing from classical theories on affect, passion, and moods in the tradition of Aristotle, Descartes, and Heidegger.<sup>49</sup> Whereas affect in this line of tradition was understood as occurring and concerning individuals, Schmitz challenges this “psychologistic-reductionist-introjectionist” objectification, where “the realm of experience is dissected by ascribing to each conscious subject a private inner sphere containing their entire experience” (Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011, 247). As Grant notes, the main aim of Schmitz is to question what he identifies as a “belief in a monopoly of mathematical and physical space, to look down upon surfaceless spaces as poetic illusions or metaphors for a vague sense of feeling” (Schmitz, cited in Grant 2013, 13).

Contemporary theories on affect and atmospheres are characterized by a shift in attention from the inner and private to the outer and collective, atmospheres as “shared rather than solitary” (Berlant 2011, 15). The conscious subject is understood as “being affected by and involved in with what goes on – an involvement both realized and mediated by corporeal feelings that in turn make manifest (disclose) goings-on in the environment” (Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011, 244). Their interest in affect can be read within the context of broader challenges to poststructuralist approaches to language, power, and subjectivity and a consideration of affect as a blind spot of ideology critical cultural analysis.

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<sup>48</sup> Schmitz, however, has influenced a new generation of philosophers in Germany with his seminal work *System der Philosophie (Band I–V, 1964ff)*, which has yet to be translated into English and, Grant notes, has yet to “establish its full impact” (Grant 2013, 13).

<sup>49</sup> This outline is similar to Brink’s in his discussion of affect related to atmospheres in Dante’s seminal work *The Divine Comedy*; see DM Brink, “Dantes litterære atmosfærologi,” *K & K* 2013, no. 116 (2013): 33–48.

What has gone unacknowledged is how contemporary societies, as a historical phenomenon, first and foremost reveal themselves affectively (Sharma and Dahl 2014, 7). Sharma and Dahl point out that Lauren Berlant's notions in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) align with cultural theorist Raymond Williams's call for considerations of what he terms "structures of feelings," outlined in his essay by the same name from 1978. Böhme can be read as taking a similar interest in attending to structures of feeling, revealing a particular historicity of the body with a tradition for omitting aesthetics and affect as generators of knowledge. Böhme and Williams align in their argument that we need to attend to social structures in the fullest sense, including their immediacy. Williams himself turned to and argued for studies of aesthetic works including popular culture as well as literature, attending to their generative immediacy as a constitutive aspect of culture, a notion also present in Böhme's new aesthetics.

Whereas Berlant can be said to represent more descriptive analysis, Böhme, Ngai, and Massumi take issue with affect's more critical function, particularly related to aestheticization as manipulation and instrumentalization of individual and collective feelings. Furthermore, as opposed to Williams and Berlant, Massumi and Böhme take particular interest in philosophical discussions of affect in relation to bodily existence – Böhme inspired by Hermann Schmitz's new phenomenology and Massumi's incorporation of Baruch Spinoza's conceptualization of affects as intensities related to bodily states and changes in the capacity of the body (Sharma and Dahl 2014, 8). In broad strokes, Massumi, Ngai, and Böhme advocate for overlooked aspects of the felt body and its ways of being constantly involved in the manifold forms of sensing of situations. Sianne Ngai is particularly interested in "ugly feelings," which she argues is a generally overlooked aesthetic category of minor yet nasty feelings that affect our possibility to act. Massumi relates affect to shock and thus does not take interest in impasse in relation to our possibility to act, as opposed to Ngai. Massumi takes issue with aesthetics as an unpopular position within media theory, arguing for media as technologies of emergent experiences aesthetically relevant for the capacity to act. Taking Massumi's and Ngai's perspectives into consideration in this dissertation relates to their notion that these exclusions – of ugly feelings, and aesthetics in relation to media – matter in relation to their capacity to transform the world we live in. Their relevance for this dissertation has to do with their analytical focus, which I regarded as particularly fruitful, wanting to foreground a level omitted in the discussion of the complexity of kinship – aesthetics. In addition, Ngai's category led me to consider the presence of such in the materials and their attunement of the viewer. Their perspectives proved particularly relevant because I wanted to nuance understandings of media representations as reductions of kinship involving ART to spectacles and miraculous optimizations.

I could have followed another affect-theoretical line of inquiry, such as Sarah Ahmed's (2006), more attuned to the perspectives of Foucault as a main inspiration for the theories on the regulatory and the persistence of the normative rather than what escapes these regulatory regimes. Another relevant approach could have been Richard Grusin's mediality, discussed in his *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (2004) as one modality of Foucault's governmentality. The concept of mediality for Grusin offers the possibility to explain the ways in which media work to govern populations by modulating collective affect. It is furthermore a concept that he argues counters the avant-gardism of the paradigm of new media (Grusin 2004). Premediation thus accounts for the confluence of cultural logics across different media increasingly becoming oriented toward the future rather than the present or past. Whereas these two theories could have provided central outlooks in regard to how bodies and kinship are kept in line, what has intrigued me is the embodied aesthetics at work within social media that have been regarded as less significant for the production of meaning. The minutiae and small-life and ambivalent movements evident in video blogs on YouTube, TV and film documentaries, and installation art calls for considerations of an aesthetics that reaches beyond the traditional concept of the grand affects. In the following, I will unfold in more detail my arguments for including Massumi's and Ngai's perspectives.

### Technologies of emergent experiences

Massumi is particularly interesting in relation to this dissertation as he points to how interactive media and technologies may open up new territories for engaging precognitive sensations and feelings in bodily experience. Media are regarded by Masumi as "technologies of emergent experience" (2002, 192). Massumi thus complements Böhme, not only pointing to media technology's potential in generating aura but, as opposed to Böhme, who mainly uses literary examples, discussing digital media and interactive art. Drawing on a different theoretical tradition, Masumi's terminology diverges from Böhme's. It has, however, not been the aim of the dissertation to provide a thorough investigation of the crossroads of these traditions. My aim here is to clarify the relevance of the included perspectives for the scope of the dissertation.

In "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens" (2008), Massumi points to aesthetics as an unpopular position within new media art, a position that nonetheless is one of the primary factors of art's social dynamics. According to Massumi, the appearance / presence of objects reencoded in infinite variations in media-based art and their affective capacity are indeed a matter of aesthetics. The impact of media technology in making affect visible has, Massumi asserts, important implications for knowledge formation (2008). One aspect of the formation of knowledge making affect matter is the

way in which interactive media and technologies open up new territories for engaging precognitive sensations and feelings in bodily experience. Massumi refers to this as “technologies of emergent experience” (2002, 192). This reconceptualization of affect and aesthetics as aspects of a microperception (Massumi 2008) takes the aesthetics of interaction in interaction-based art and digital art into consideration and critically engages this prepersonal attunement. The transitions instigated by affect are important as they concern our feelings. Transitions consequently affect our capacity to act on things and to recognize what those things might be, as the feeling invoked changes from moment to moment. Media technologies and interactive art are invested in capturing and directing these capacities or potentials, and not least in enhancing or diminishing them. Affect points to the experience of intensities, to the way in which media images are felt through bodies. I discussed this in relation to the affective attunements related to *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic* as this perspective seemed relevant in order to address aspects of the composition of these documentaries as creations of *what is* affecting the viewer’s bodily state in inchoate ways.

Massumi emphasizes that affect is inseparable from the concept of shock, or more specifically, the microshocks that populate every moment of our lives (2008, 4). These microshocks describe an interruption, a momentary cut, a shift of attention. Microperception thus describes something unconsciously felt and registered only in its effect. The use of technology to create unique encounters with each participant viewer has become interactive art’s signature feature, productively incorporating the audience into the work’s completion. What is important is not the elements of the work itself but rather what happens when we come into contact with them. “What interactive art can do,” Massumi notes, “is to take the *situation* as its ‘object.’ Not a function, not a use, not a behavior, exploratory or otherwise, not an action-reaction, but a situation, with its own little ocean of complexity” (2008, 13). Although I did not refer to Massumi in the discussions of Mukaiyama’s art installation *wasted*, these perspectives are relevant because he uses interactive art as an example in discussions of aesthetics and affect. His notion that interactive art takes the situation as its object, in the perspective of Böhme, becomes a parameter from which “something” can proceed. What is generated is an atmospheric attunement of the visitor through the principles of movement and bodily existence in space.

Massumi and Böhme both take interest in how affect can be produced by artists, which I, following Böhme, have pointed out in this dissertation, is at issue in Mukaiyama’s installation *wasted*, as well as the productions of Silvia and Peter (video blogs), Kirilenko (*Technostorks*), Van de Horst (*The Water Children*), and the producers of *The Baby Clinic*. Massumi’s arguments about the “qualitative relations” and “affective tonality” as well as “moods” (2007, 82) are relatable to Böhme’s arguments

about the ecstasies of things. The production of affect thus for both involves a shift in the notion of form, the ontology of objects. Massumi points to how art is able to “bring out the fact that all form is necessarily dynamic form” and that “there is really no such thing as fixed form” (2007, 77). This notion of form as dynamic is reflected in media studies and studies of interactive art, which accordingly regard aesthetic categories as problematic. By turning to aesthetics as *aisthesis*, the possibility exists to discuss two-way interaction, participation, and the evoking of behavior (Massumi 2008, 2) as a matter of aesthetics focusing on the production and reception of atmospheres.

Massumi also touches on how the dissemination of artwork, when it is networked so that the interaction is distributed in time and space and never ties back together in one particular form, is understood as aesthetically irrelevant. This disregard of aesthetics, as I contended in “Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility,” is also found in discussions of mediated consumption. A main point of the dissertation is that re-encodings of lived bodily experiences should be approached as productions of atmospheres pointing to not *what has been* but *what is* the aesthetic-affective attunement as a relational (trans)formative power. The article “Relational Transformations” specifically discusses how this point is valuable for kinship studies’ discussions of media and ART intersections.

Affect, according to Massumi, overrides the distinction between subject and object; thus affectation happens in between (2008, 1). Böhme has similar notions in his discussions of atmospheres, albeit drawing on very different philosophical theories.<sup>50</sup> For Massumi, the notion of the affective has been central for reconceptualizing the emergence of subjectivity, which is not a pregiven entity. In the introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, he clarifies how affect is not a personal feeling. Feelings, however, are personal and biographical, whereas emotions are social. Affect entails the capacity to activate other bodies, a notion Massumi arrives at through Spinoza’s conceptualization of ethics as a way of increasing energy in the others’ bodies (Spinoza 1997/1678). His definition aligns with Spinoza’s argument that affect is an ability to affect and be affected. Affect is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. Each such state is considered an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting body (Massumi, *Plateaus* xvi). Massumi is interested in affect as a series of forces that are in between bodies, within bodies, and between bodies and world. For Massumi, affect is about the changing capacity of the body as it engages with the world,

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<sup>50</sup> Although a discussion of the distinctions and similarities between these would be interesting, this dissertation does not take these considerations further than to acknowledge both and point to how further investigations of how they nuance and supplement each other would be fruitful for discussions of the relation between media, body, and affect.

an approach relevant for this dissertation's investigation of the significance of "the affective in image reception" (Massumi 2002, 24).

### Aesthetic categories and affect

Sianne Ngai (2005), similar to Böhme, addresses literature but includes also film as her analytical examples of how these works point to how dysphoric feelings are the fuel on which capitalist society runs. Along Adornian lines, she argues for a negative dialectics. Since for dialectics the adequate representation of a social antagonism is a contradiction, she claims that ugly feelings are contradictions that, by negation, reveal the system of domination in which they exist.<sup>51</sup> Her assertion that our relations to the world are often understood as opportunities, possibilities, and chances but do not necessarily result in them is a notion similar to that of Lauren Berlant, who has termed this state of impasse characterizing contemporary society "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011). While wanting to recuperate ugly affects for their critical productivity, however, Ngai is aware of the danger of romanticizing their capacity of social transformation. Accordingly, she asserts that the emotional idioms she examines are ambivalent; they can "resist any reduction to class *ressentiment* or counter-valorization as therapeutic 'solutions' to the problems they highlight and condense" (Ngai 2005a, 5, original italics).

In a similar manner as Böhme, Ngai is interested in literature and its ability to make ugly feelings appear that have gone unacknowledged in aesthetic theory focusing on grand emotions like anger and fear. Rigby points out that Schmitz's analysis is based on the argument that negative experiences of fear play a crucial part in our realization that we exist as bodily beings bound to a here and now (Rigby 2011, 142). A similar notion is at stake in Böhme's new aesthetics, where he, following Schmitz, argues for attending to how one feels in the flesh – to its messiness, discomfort, limitations, and peculiarities – to disclose the consequences of the disregard of such. But Böhme, following Schmitz, stays on the level of grand emotions of fear. Ngai, in turn, argues for an expansion and transformation of the category of aesthetic emotions to encompass ugly feelings. She suggests that the way to disclose our habitual state of being – affective disorientation – is by pointing to states of anticatharsis in literature and film. She turns to Kant's aesthetic category of the sublime, arguing that it can be characterized as "the first ugly (or explicitly nonbeautiful feeling appearing in theories of aesthetic judgment)" (Ngai 2005a, 5).

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<sup>51</sup> A paraphrase from Giovanna Borradori's outline of her Adornian-inspired take on the aesthetics of human rights. For the original phrase, see Giovanni Borradori, "Tiny Sparks of Contingency: On the Aesthetics of Human Rights," in *Philosophical Dimensions of Human Rights: Some Contemporary Views*, ed. Claudio Corradetti (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012).

Ngai's considerations of the categories zane, cute, and interesting in "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde" (2005b) was relevant for my discussions of how the presence of a birthday cake described as "cute in a twisted way" in the video blog by Silvia and Peter called for a state of alert, sharpening the senses of the viewer. Ngai's perspectives on the aesthetic category of the cute framed a discussion of how the presence of such cuteness in the video blog facilitated an awareness of the formation of everyday practices as they are organized around the realm of assisted reproduction (see "Atmospheric Vlogs on Infertility" as well as "Experiences with Assisted Reproduction"). I also followed Ngai's suggestion that there is a special relationship between ugly feelings and irony – an unpleasantly feeling about the feeling, or "a meta feeling" (2005a, 10) – to explore how the presence of these feelings in the analytical material, video blogs, destabilize the viewer's perception of the mediated fertility project. Affective gaps and illegibility, dysphoric feelings, and other sites of emotional negativity are aesthetics of ugly feelings that index the suspension of agency, situations of passivity that are aspects of social situations where we fail to comply with an emotional imperative. Because they are anticathartic, ugly feelings force the viewer to stay in the impasse, an attunement that calls attention to "a real social experience and a certain kind of historical truth" (Ngai 2005a, 5).

In relation to my discussion of the transformative potential of aesthetic-affective orchestrations of people, objects, and surroundings, Ngai's emphasis on ugly feelings led me to consider the presence of negative affect situations of passivity that were nonetheless affectively charged (Ngai 2005a, 9). Starting with Ngai's analytical focus on the tonality-ambiguous aspects of materials, I followed and extended her assertions to materials such as video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations and attended to the ambient aesthetics "founded on a temporality very different from the *suddenness* central to Aristotle's aesthetics of fear" (Ngai 2005a, 13) or Massumi's emphasis on shock. My attention toward the orchestration of ambivalence in *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks* relates to the consideration of Ngai's argument because the durations of the respective sequences in the material "make moments of remarkable idleness and silence matter affectively" ("Relational Transformations" 2014). Including Ngai thus added a relevant dimension to the investigation of what goes into kinship relations: ugly feelings as generators of bodily and affective responses in the viewer. Both Böhme and Ngai consider affective and emotional relations as primary factors in social dynamics. While Ngai centers on the repressive function of affect as a dynamic of the production of culture (I discussed the video blogs as such in relation to the aesthetic categories of Ngai), Böhme in turn centers on atmospheres and their capacity to heed sensuous experience in relation to the ethical question of what nature we want to embody individually and collectively.

Considering these different approaches to affect, I was able to address the complexity of mediated experiences with infertility and ART by attending to the different levels of aesthetic-affective attunements of interest for the overall aim of the dissertation: to engage relational (trans)formations produced through the aesthetic-affective orchestrations of atmospheres by digital media practices and art installations. Böhme acknowledges the critical aspect of affective attunements, pointing to how the new aesthetics provides a vantage point from which to critique the ever-increasing aestheticization of reality where particular atmospheric effects are strategically deployed. Massumi too argues that the affective is central to the analysis of our information and image-based (capitalist) society (2008, 14). Both thus can be said to acknowledge a critical point of productions of affect and its power to alter our perception of ourselves, others, and the world. Art, however, also claims the right to having no manifest utility, no use value, and, in many cases, even no exchange value (Massumi 2008, 14). The real social power of aesthetics, according to Massumi, is its ability to escape objectification, having, at its best, “event-value” (2008, 14) from which something can proceed. Affective politics within this perspective should be about seeding exploratory events rather than about the cultivating contents or particular ideas or behaviors performed.

Böhme does not disagree but claims that the new aesthetics must deal with productions of affective attunements as inseparable from the “invasive technification” and externalization of social constraint predicated on rationalism (2012). As “aesthetic production” has become the “dominant cultural logic,”<sup>52</sup> the new aesthetics provides the opportunity to critically address the aesthetic economy of atmospheres. This project’s use of Böhme’s aesthetic theory has, however, pointed to how productions of atmospheres in video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations offer bodily engagement – tickling, probing, twitching our haptic and optical nerves where they count – rather than functioning as an aestheticization of a bodily project that can be formatted into a slot in the next global market of ideas. With the new aesthetics, we can attend to atmospheric productions that are characterized by a new type of use value, which derives from their exchange value in so far as use is made of their attractiveness, their aura, their atmosphere. They serve to intensify life (Böhme 2003, 72).

## Summary

This chapter has provided insight into Böhme’s key arguments on the relevance of aesthetics in relation to (bio)technology that have influenced the perspectives discussed in the articles. Böhme’s theoretical thoughts on technology and aesthetics have guided my understanding of how TV and film

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<sup>52</sup> See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 4–6.

documentaries, video blogs, and art installations in the production of an affective space invest the people, objects, and places present in these materials with meaning and ascribe them in the viewer's affection. This argument has driven my consideration of mediated experiences with ART in digital media and art installations, which, following Böhme, concerns the way in which things manifest in human perception in potentially mood-altering ways. From this perspective, mediated experiences, together with other aesthetic productions, have a key role to play, and TV and film documentaries, video blogs, and art installations are particularly effective digital and art practices not only for the depiction of atmospheres but also for their production of bodily and affective responses of the viewers / visitors. The transformative potential I have discussed is linked to Böhme's arguments about how the space of media and art itself constitutes a *Gefühlsraum*, a mood, not so much through the detailed description of any "real" place but through the use of aesthetic markers and signals to inflect the viewer's / visitor's state of feeling. This has guided my arguments that mediated experiences in digital media just as readily entail the potential to affect as do atmospheres generated by the physical environment. I assert that such bodily and tactile motility, recognized as agents of embodied production, offer critical models to account for the deep organism-environment coupling one finds in the active embodied productions of social media where personal-public displays of affection dominate.

This approach led me to question mediated experiences as antiaesthetic as the informational and cognitive levels and remediation of music, text, sound effects, and comics in video blogs and TV and film documentaries in particular have been discussed. In Böhme's perspective, it makes little sense to talk about how mediations as re-encodings create the illusion of a direct experience of a real or original experience. This perspective stressed the necessity for this dissertation to uncover an overlooked aspect of the daily currency of familiar and unfamiliar kinship formations in media and art. The new aesthetics directed attention to how the presence of these people, objects, and surroundings could be addressed neither as merely expressions of the biotechnological understanding of the body nor as an aestheticization of an individual bodily project in terms of accumulating image value. Not only is the new phenomenological aesthetic approach valuable within media cultural studies of signaletic materials or mediated consumption in terms of the power of atmospheres to set the viewer in the mood for consumption, but as an unusual theoretical approach within kinship studies, it enables complexities of kinship to be experienced and points to the relevance of considering the inflection of the viewer affectively rather than how IVF and experiences are *represented* in media and art.

Cultural studies is still predominantly anchored in the second, linguistic turn with a linguistic and semiotic focus (Sørensen et al. 2008, 13). According to Böhme, theories of aesthetics have also been dominated by language and semiotics as the emphasis on judgment, taste, and its

communicational aspect reflects (Böhme, 1993: 115). Aesthetic theory in the tradition from Kant “completely abandoned the field of sensual experience and affective understanding” (Böhme 2000, 15). Aesthetic thus was diverted from sensuousness and nature to “the question of the justification for a positive or negative response to something . . . to facilitate conversation about works of art” (Böhme 1993, 115). Contemporary cultural studies is, however, also characterized by a shift in attention to involving affectivity, materiality, experience and perception as focal points of cultural analysis in what they assert as the third ontological turn (Sørensen et al. 2008, 30). Accordingly, aesthetics in contemporary cultural studies is not believed to be autonomous or transcending the world; rather it is embedded in the world and its “messy scrimmage of social relations” politics, power and ideology (Felski 2004, 34).

In that respect, in this dissertation I have turned to how atmospheres make these messy scimmages experiential related to a fertility treatment that has become a part of the daily currency affecting the way people think about and relate to one another. The relevance of an aesthetic theory of atmospheres in relation to experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in digital media and art installations is related to its attentiveness to intensities but also to diminutive aspects of these atmospheric productions. It has centered on the transformation of what I, referring to Franklin (2013), discussed as the public face of IVF and kinship practices involving ART. Digital practices and installations art make minor affective layers of sensation experiential, effectuated by the orchestration of “presence” of materiality of which we may not usually be aware. The study of the social dimension of the aesthetics of atmospheres provides a way into understanding the contagions of such aesthetic-affective space. Affect, characterized by emotional and sensory connections felt in the body and expressed through it and with it, is a defining feature of social media, documentary TV and film and installation art’s mode of experience-based production.

However forceful these experience-based productions might be, their capacity to energize action and change understandings of IVF in light of Böhme’s perspective are to be regarded as motivation of the viewer to become more aware of modes of bodily existence. I have discussed the material as potentially transformative as a consequence of the design of the study because it does not provide insight into the experiences of the viewer. It does not make it any less relevant to consider the material as productions that aim to affect how people relate to themselves, others, and the world. As I have noted, Böhme points to experience-based production that aims to inflect the viewer’s state of feeling as critical for an investigation of the aestheticization of reality – mediated experiences with infertility and ART included.

In the remainder of this recapitulation, I want to (re)turn to a perspective that I recurrently have come across during this study and that seems pertinent to take up: bioart. It is relatively new art format that nonetheless has drawn the attention of several researchers of the implications of intersections between biotechnology and media (Anker and Nelkin 2004; Franklin 2013; Thacker 2005; Broadhurst 2007; Kac 2009). In the appendix of *Biotechnology and Popular Culture; or, Mutants, Replicants, and Zombies* (2005), Eugene Thacker notes that popular culture is the site in which the ambiguities, anxieties, and tensions of the biotech industry, which are more or less intended, are played out. Yet, he argues, existing approaches, particularly those of cultural theorists, to biotechnology presented in popular culture remain at the level of representation, where science is presupposed as anterior to, for instance, science fiction. As a consequence, he argues, popular culture is reduced to a reaction or response to an existing scientific phenomenon (2005, 340). Thacker's point is, of course, not the determination of priority of origin, nor is it a naïve proposal of the role of popular culture as an ethical model for the future. Rather, he calls for the significance in the discovering of "a critical and necessary relationship between biotechnology and culture" (2005, 344) in terms of understanding biotechnology not only as techniques, therapies, and services but as a way of thinking of the body. The relationship between biotechnology and culture as an exploration of the political and ontological implications of subjectivity installed in one sector of a situation (e.g., as patient) and liquidated from another (the body-object) is crucial. Furthermore, Thacker points to the pertinence of engaging the increasing intertextuality characterizing the recombination of biotechnology (in the context of this project, narrowed down to ART) because it is an example of how biotechnology networks itself into the way we think of the body "socially, economically, and politically" (2005, 345).

Thacker particularly highlights four contemporary bioart projects<sup>53</sup> in order to illustrate sites where the interdisciplinary nature of biotechnology is taken seriously. Bioart, Thacker notes, is tactical; it critically engages the regulation management and a cultural system that is driven toward opportunities and discovery of economic benefit from the objectification of the body. Collaborations between scientists and artists in the incorporation of biological material as an artistic material are strategies of engagement in and critique of collective apparatuses of subjectification.<sup>54</sup> Bioart "point to fissures in the social, cultural, and material effects of biotechnologies" (2005, 318); the critical potential is, however, challenged by most of the work primarily circulating within the gallery system or reduced

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<sup>53</sup> He refers to the SymbioticA lab and their Tissue Culture and Art project, which began in the 1990s, the cyberfeminist group SubRosa, biotech hobbyists and the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) (2005, 308–318).

<sup>54</sup> But we should bear in mind Frances Stracey's argument that artists and scientists involved in bioart may have divergent or even conflicting intellectual, ethical, or aesthetic aims and interests (Stracey 2009, 500).

to a mere aesthetical spectacles.<sup>55</sup> Bioart and the biotech and healthcare industry share a mutual interest in culture, whether as the suitable realm for distributing and making accessible the projects of bioart or polyvalent matter in which biotechnology can be presented in recombination with TV, film, ads etc. (Thacker 2005, 344–45).

My aim with involving Thacker's reflections on bioart and popular culture is not to argue that video blogs, TV and film documentaries, or installation art falls under the category of the tactical media bioart. Nor do I want to stress that the materials of this study are sites where anxieties and ambivalence of biotechnology are played out as mere reactions to the encounters with assisted reproduction. I do agree, however, that this dissertation overall reflects that more attention is needed on how to question the (technological) enframings constantly making new incursions into our lives. What I will point to in the following are some interesting convergences between the empirical material in this project and bioart, which, not least, call attention to the potential of the aesthetic-affective orchestration of people, objects, and environments as critiquing and as having an indirect effect on the social as they turn attention to the complexities of kinship practices, assisted reproduction technologies, and bodily practices involving IVF. In what follows, I will discuss a bit further the convergences as they serve to illuminate how individuals as well as (bio)artists examine the interdisciplinary nature of biotechnology.

Similar to artists and scientists in bioart, couples in *The Baby Clinic*, *Technostorks*, and the video blogs on infertility “collaborate” with fertility doctors and nurses in optimizing the possibility to conceive as the main aim. It is a collaboration that I have stressed, in the articles, is driven by different interests that affect the collaboration. Whereas bioart typically does not explicitly address how the different disciplines involved in the collaboration on the artistic material affect the outcome (Stracey 2009), the divergent agendas are in turn made explicit in, for instance, the video blog of Silvia and Peter:

“We got a call the next morning from the embryologist who told us they (embryos) had all divided but had failed to progress to the stage they wanted for freezing. He had discarded them. He said, “They probably wouldn't have survived the freeze and thaw processes.” Nice of him to make that decision for us. We figure it is because the clinics want to produce the highest live birth rates they can to attract business. And this is one way of controlling that. (LucidIVF, IVF14: Our Experiences. Embryo Transfer 2009)

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<sup>55</sup> Stracey points to Eduardo Kac's GFP Bunny, 2000; see Frances Stracey, “Bio-Art: The Ethics behind the Aesthetics,” *Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology* 10 (2009): 496–500.

This excerpt asserts that the aims of the fertility clinic are to secure a high live birth rate, affecting the couple's matter of say in regard to the discarding of their genetic material (embryos). What is revealed is the relation between the couple and fertility clinic, the latter characterized by a perception of the body driven toward opportunities and discovery of economic benefit from the objectification of the body. The quote is interesting in relation to Thacker's discussion of bioart as the realm that critically engages this system of thought because it suggests that we need to consider other digital and art practices creatively invested in making the relations we are entangled in elicit.

As in bioart, the couples in *The Baby Clinic*, *Technostorks*, and the video blog of Silvia and Peter, and visitors to Mukaiyama's art installation (albeit differently) incorporate their biological material as "artistic" material; their genetic material is fragmented, optimized, reassembled, and re-implanted (a seemingly circular model) while being filmed for a TV or film documentary, re-encoded in a video blog, or featured in an art installation. This crossover of digital practices / art and the biological sciences, with "living matter as its new media" (Thacker 2005, 309) in *The Baby Clinic*, for instance, has the effect of exposing the less miraculous side of IVF, otherwise encountered in media representations as quick change, which, as pointed out, characterizes the public face of IVF (Franklin 1997). In "Relational (Trans)formations," I discussed how the variety of feelings, people, objects, and environments made experiential in the TV documentary point to the complexity and dynamic aspects of doing kinship, or kinship as relational. It lets viewers encounter what they usually do not, which, following Böhme, entails the potential of reminding them of their bodily affectivity. This aesthetic dimension of the constellation of matters of kinship practices and its effect on the viewer is premised on another understanding of the body than an object: a shared bodily being in the world. This in turn does not mean that the objectification of the body as a habitual state of being is not at issue in the documentary. It means, however, that it is made present by raising bodily experiences that aim to make the viewer discover *being* based on shared physicality and relationality. The production of atmospheres, as I have repeatedly stressed, entails a critical potential because it directs attention to what is omitted in the experience of the body premised on objectification. As in bioart, the critical potential of the documentaries can be said to be linked to the experimentation with relations between things, people, and environments that we fail to see in everyday life. A transaesthetic characterization of the material in this project is how their constellations are engaged in making experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction experiential.

Assisted reproduction technology has not gone unnoticed by bioart. In the context of the cultural and ideological aspects of new reproductive technologies, the cyberfeminist group SubRosa's *Biotech Sex and Gender Ed Workbook* (2002) took the format of a women's health manual to raise

“contentious issues that demand accountability within the biotech and healthcare industry” (Thacker 2005, 313). In other performances, such as *Expo EmmaGenics* (2002) and *Biopower Unlimited* (2001), SubRosa honors the critical issue of the rhetoric and semiotics of corporate biotechnology tradeshows (Thacker 2005, 313). The trajectory of SubRosa, for instance, differs from the material discussed in this project because it particularly examines discourses and cultural economic systems of ART, whereas the video blogs, art installation, and TV and film documentaries take issue with what is omitted in this political and discursive experimental focus, the aesthetic-affective attunement.

The necessity to retheorize in order to provide an “appropriate interpretation of digital practices” that considers the nonverbal signification omitted in the linguistic-based approaches to artworks has also been discussed by performance artist and theorist Susan Broadhurst (2007, 163).<sup>56</sup> She takes the work of Kac as an example but also points to how the shift in theoretical foundation extends to other digital practices that “allow the technical interface and accompanying corporeal prominence” (Broadhurst 2007, 163). I will not examine Broadhurst’s outline of Kac’s works but will note that Deleuze’s rhizomatic (1988) structure is asserted by Kac as appropriate because it considers the complex relations with a multiplicity of others, including nonhuman others.

Video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and art installations about infertility and assisted reproduction are not signs of fissures, nor do they reflect a manifesto. They nevertheless engage in the complex cultural debate complicating the discussion of who is responsible, and how, for the shaping of our biotechnological future, our understandings of kinship practices and our bodies. Böhme’s new aesthetics in this regard directs attention to how we are bound to our beliefs and desires through processes that operate on the level of sensuous cognition – the real aesthetic power.

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<sup>56</sup> In *Digital Practices* (2007), Broadhurst, amongst other philosophers, takes issue with Lyotard, whose emphasis on the political and experimentation and whose interpretation of the Kantian sublime, she asserts, has provided vital knowledge (162–163).

## Conclusion

This dissertation summary presents, discusses, and elaborates on the methodologies, theories, and analytical highlights involved in my study of mediated experiences with infertility and ART in video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art.

Although media is widely acknowledged as atmospheric (Hansen 2012; McCormack 2013), a definition and an analytical appropriation of the concept within media studies focusing on bodily practices involving (bio)technology have not yet been undertaken. This dissertation has, throughout the articles, pointed to atmospheres as a constitutive aspect of (trans)formations of how we relate to ourselves, others, and the world. Theoretically, I have complemented the new aesthetics of atmosphere as presented by Böhme with Rose's and Thacker's sociological perspectives on how the body is understood in contemporary (Western) societies. I nuanced this by including Franklin's sociological and anthropological theory on how media represents IVF, infertility, and kinship. This complementation of theories has enabled me to address the close link between biotechnology and aesthetics and discuss the relevance of considering the constitutive role of spaces of affect: the atmospheres of mediated experiences with infertility and ART.

I came to this project partly through a dissatisfaction with the way in which bodily practices involving biotechnology and biomedicine are understood as (uncritical) expressions of the biotechnological and biomedical perception of the body as an object. Chapter II outlines the theoretical foundation of the dissertation, offering a closer look at the ideals, norms, and values of the body that, according to Nikolas Rose, characterize our understanding of ourselves and our body, exemplified by five mutations. I complemented Rose's perspective by turning to Eugene Thacker, who provided important nuances regarding biotechnology as fraught with tensions. Moreover, his suggestions as to how the biomedical understanding of the body is dispersed culturally through a bioeconomy of experiences were highly relevant for the investigation of media and art practices encompassing infertility and ART. Thacker's perspectives turned attention to the role of media in relation to biopolitical formations of embodiment reaching far beyond the context of biological science and medicine. The chapter also presented Sarah Franklin's perspectives on ART, which the dissertation—particularly the article about *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic*—refers to regarding several issues that share similarities with Thacker's discussion of tissue engineering. Both Franklin and Thacker address how ambivalence lies at the heart of biotechnology and biomedicine, and they both argue for considerations of ambivalence as a generic force, a constitutive component of the processes of sociality, domination, and resistance. Franklin also proved relevant in terms of her discussions of IVF in media:

media representations as other-than-neutral vessels. In chapter II, I presented her approach to media and her discussions of such as a crucial aspect in the creation and dispersal of the public face of IVF as miraculous and spectacular. Her perspectives on the circular progressive narrative as characteristic of these representations and their generic force in terms of reiterating “kinship as we know it” both served as inspiration and called for a qualification. The analytical findings of the study of the TV and film documentaries addressed the need for a reconsideration of digital media productions related to kinship involving IVF while remaining mindful of Franklin’s argument that media is nonneutral. A site that recurrently surfaced throughout the study, not least in Franklin’s and Thacker’s work, is bioart, which they discuss as *the site* reflecting how the contemporary understanding of the body can be rethought and subverted. The summary of chapter III points to the similarities between the material of this study and bioart and concludes that other sites need to be considered based on their capacity to spark (trans)formations.

Another dissatisfaction that led me to the design of the project, and particularly to include Gernot Böhme’s aesthetic theory, was how bodily experiences with technology as they are disseminated into mediated forms have been discussed. As the dissertation has shown, it seems evident that the mediations through their social dimension do not merely serve as self-referential digital or artistic practices. Nor are they simply about the accumulation of an image value, just as they cannot be reduced to productions of consumption of biomedicine, clinical services, or techniques. Moreover, the results of the article “Relational (Trans)formations” points to the need for a consideration of how media practices do not reduce complexities and dynamics of kinship practices involving IVF but rather make them explicit and matter experientially. According to Böhme, technology and aestheticization are closely linked; in fact, as I point out in chapter II, he comes close to aligning with Thacker’s discussion of how biopolitics works through a bioeconomy of experiences. Consequently, I have argued throughout the articles and in chapter III that the findings point to how further considerations of the aesthetic dimension of biotechnological intersections with media and art are needed. I hold that the findings of this thesis further question the political and social implications of the experiential value of intersections of biotechnology and media and art, bioart included.

A discussion of the atmospheric dimension of bioart has yet to be unfolded. Such discussions could qualify the (uncritical) assertion of bioart’s ability to subvert norms, values, and ideals of biotechnology. What is needed in terms of bioart, I argue, is a consideration of how it works on the aesthetic level, as well as what voices this experimental site circulating in galleries and medical museums makes matter in terms of their effect on embodiment of contemporary biopolitics. I turned to mediated experiences with infertility and IVF in video blogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art

because I found these to be interesting sites for an exploration of their aesthetic dimension and because these sites seemed at odds with cultural understandings of infertility, IVF, and kinship practices, as well as understandings of mediations of experiences.

The transaesthetically and transculturally centered methodological design of the study inspired by Bal has enabled me to discuss how a diverse collection of digital and art practices take issue with experiences of infertility and ART. Furthermore, it has enabled discussions of the characteristic of these mediations as productions of atmospheres and the role of these productions in inflecting understandings of body, technology, and kinship. The force of a transaesthetic focus on an array of cultural productions characterized by biotechnology and media-technological intersections is the possibility to discuss how the constellation of people, objects, and environments make the complexity and dynamics of kinship practices involving IVF visible, audible, and felt. Discussing atmosphere as transaesthetic has not made the specificity of the respective media less significant. Rather, I have pointed to how the concept of atmosphere is intrinsically linked to how media practices make matters of infertility and ART experiential. By addressing these matters, the analyses of Silvia and Peter's video blogs, the TV and film documentaries *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks*, and Mukaiyama's installation art *wasted* all require the concept of atmosphere to be complemented. The threefold analytical study of the concept, the analytical object, and the object as socioculturally embedded has provided findings that have stressed the relevance of considering the significance of moving experiences with IVF and infertility in media and art.

In "Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs: On the Aesthetic-Affective Dimension of Individual Fertility Projects on YouTube" I discussed how mediated experiences with IVF in American video blogs structure feelings. The article analyzed video blogs of experiences with infertility and ART within a critical phenomenological aesthetic theory of atmospheres by the German philosopher Gernot Böhme and Brian Massumi's perspectives on the concept of affect. The article discusses how video blogs are characterized by a social dimension connecting performers to themselves and the viewer's pointing to atmospheres as shared. The article points to the relevance of considering how the aesthetic-affective dimension of media cultural productions have ramifications for how we relate to ourselves, others, and the world where the small, mundane, ambivalent, and ugly feelings play a crucial role. The study confirmed that aesthetics in relation to health-related digital media practices is highly relevant for viewer involvement (Liu et al. 2013) and pointed to how investigations of how cultural productions influence the way we perceive the world through aesthetic-affective attunements should be furthered. The article stressed that while the vlogs address the contemporary understanding of the body as an object to be modified and fragmented, their affectivity is premised on the notion of a

shared physical existence: the felt body. The article concluded that an aesthetic-affective focus on experiences with ART in media practices such as vlogs contributes with significant perspectives on how such practices structure spectator involvement in bodily experiences with biotechnology. I furthermore concluded that the vlogs reflect engaged individuals creatively participating in the production of understandings of the body.

Regarding the production of affect, whereas the first article primarily stressed the need to consider the receptive force of particular constellations of the vlogs, I more specifically took interest in the production of these constellations through the investigation of atmospheric space, time, and modality of everyday life, technology, and the body in the second article, "Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility." The article related experiences with infertility and ART to media theories on mediated consumption (Jansson 2002). I discussed vlogs as characterized by re-encodings, but destabilized and nuanced the understanding of re-encoding as anti-aesthetic, anti-narrative, about image production or about inspiring to consumption. I argued that such perspectives overlooks the force of the experiential value of constellations of people, objects, and space in the videos. The German philosopher Gernot Böhme's aesthetics of atmosphere (1993, 1995) was introduced and used to discuss how the aesthetic-affective dimension of the constellations attunes the spectator. Theories on how everyday life is characterized by movements, physical as well as emotional (Felski 2002), contributed to the article's discussion of movements in the vlogs and the article concluded that these movements, and their aesthetic-affective attunements is overlooked. The article addressed how the intertwining of the realm of assisted reproduction with the mundane in the vlogs does not express subordination to the forces of biotechnological or biomedical discourse, or that ART is naturalized. On the contrary, the article argued that constellations of people, objects, and space in the vlogs generate a state of alert sharpening the senses of the spectator. The article argued that the varying constellations create an unstable narrative which consistently forces the spectator to relate to the experiences with infertility and ART anew. The study stressed that far from functioning as representations of norms, ideals, and values, the orchestration of atmospheres is powerful not in terms of undoing sociocultural understandings of bodily optimizations or mediations of such but in terms of offering alternative experiences.

Whereas the article took issue with aesthetics as omitted from media studies on consumption, what I did not discuss but future studies could elaborate on is how productions of atmosphere set the viewer in the mood for consumption. It is critical, according to Böhme, to consider how consumption is structured on a prepersonal level, which in terms of contemporary biopolitics enables a discussion of how our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world is disciplined on this level. Another perspective that the findings point to for future elaboration is the relevance of the

concept of aesthetics of atmosphere in relation to the design of welfare technology, such as the robotic seal PARO, an advanced interactive robot developed by a leading Japanese industrial automation pioneer, AIST.<sup>57</sup> An aesthetics of atmosphere would critically address the premise of such designs and their implementation and would include aesthetics as a main factor in the production of welfare technology, as well as in discussions of their sociocultural implications. This perspective would take the discussion of the aesthetic dimension of biotechnology only preliminarily addressed in this dissertation further, not least its social force questioning the intersection of welfare and technology.

My subsequent study in “Relational Transformations” took an interest in discussions of ART in media representations within kinship studies: the public face of IVF as miraculous and spectacular (Franklin 2013; Bouquet 2002). Through an analysis of a Danish TV documentary and an American film documentary, the study took issue with how the presence of kinship matters comes to matter in mood-altering ways. This interest reflects a media-cultural movement from referential signs to signals (Thomsen 2012), and the findings supported the results of the articles on video blogs on YouTube. I revisited the aesthetic theory of Böhme’s, which in this study was complemented by recent media-theoretical interests in the more-than-representational and affective dimension of a digital media culture (Sandbye 2012; Stage 2012; Thomsen 2012; Shaviro 2010). I concluded that rather than representing sociocultural norms of kinship, the documentaries make the complexity and dynamics of kinship practices involving IVF visible, audible, and felt. The study confirms media as significant for generating connections and for changing notions of kinship; a subsequent critical approach to reenactment of IVF employing a circular and progressive narrative is needed. The study argues however for the pertinence in extending the critical approach to the affective dimension of media presentations of kinship, body and technology. Findings of the study also point to how digital media practices, rather than being invested in translating relational complexities into visual simplicity (Bouquet 2002), through attunements such as ambiguity, haptic experiences, and minor feelings deconstruct the simplicity of the public face of IVF and stress its complex dimensions.

I returned once more to the material collection of video blogs in the article “Atmospheres of Belonging” yet complicated the findings with a discussion of convergences between experiences with infertility and IVF in new media and the Japanese installation art *wasted*. The article point to a transcultural and transaesthetic denominator of the works: their critical approach to the perception of the body as object characteristic of biotechnology (Kato and Sleeboom Faulkner 2011; Rose 2007; Thacker 2005), and productions of atmospheres (Böhme 1993, 1995) as explorations of

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.parorobots.com/> accessed 20/10/2014

alternative understandings of body, technology and kinship. The findings confirm that individuals are invested in how feelings and the felt body are dimensions of infertility omitted by reproductive technologies (Kato and Sleeboom Faulkner 2011). The results support findings in the article on TV and film documentaries that point to mediations as critically involved in the public face of IVF. The study also points to how the extension of experiences into an art installation or vlog creates experiences that are process related as well as premised on the visitor's active bodily participation. I emphasized how diverse parameters such as abstractions and movements in *wasted*, and close-ups and haptic qualities in the vlogs are set to work as generators of an atmospheric attunement with the potential to transform understandings of kinship, body and technology. The article concludes that relations by the vlogs and art installation not are regarded as fixed or biological determined but move; they are structured by physical and emotional movements. I concluded that the experiential qualities of Tomoko Mukaiyama's art installation *wasted* and the vlogs move the spectator affectively involving them in sociocultural contexts of infertility and IVF. The study provides preliminary findings on the significance of further transcultural and transaesthetic discussions of atmospheres in digital media and art as constitutive aspects in the questioning of sociocultural ideals, norms, and values about body, technology, and kinship.

The collection of material required appropriating a method that could activate the transaesthetic and, to a degree, transcultural dimension of the empirical material while remaining mindful of the media specificity of the respective works. The methodical anchor of the dissertation within the Dutch project *Performing Culture*, and specifically Mieke Bal's perspective, has resulted in a theoretical dissertation that discusses the dynamics between the concept, objects/works, and context using the concept of atmosphere as departure. Atmosphere has been discussed as a transaesthetic characteristic of aesthetic productions and, in this dissertation, is regarded as a relevant yet omitted aspect in the discussions of issues of cultural relevance—here, issues related to infertility, ART, and kinship. The dissertation has argued that the subject matter of the study, be it vlogs, TV and film documentaries, or installation art, contributes to contingent cultural debates about infertility, ART, kinship, and the body. The spatial epistemology of the objects of study has been central for this discussion in terms of what they direct attention to.

A common denominator of the material that the dissertation has pointed to is that the atmospheres created by artists, directors, and producers—professionals as well as amateurs—do not merely reflect personal preferences or narratives. The re-encodings rather are intriguing as they are about adapting forces and combining them with others, effectuating a modulation of both. Using the concept of atmospheres has shown that atmospheric productions cannot be narrowly defined as traces

of something that *has been*. Nor can they be characterized as retrospect reflections on or reactions to biomedical and technological encounters. Analytically, the dissertation has pointed to the production of space of affect as the real power of the works and argued for an approach to media-cultural practices and installation art attentive to the affective, bodily, and relational dimension of mediations. I have complemented Böhme's twofold focus on production and reception, central for working with the concept of aesthetics of atmosphere, with Bal's threefold analytical focus on concept, object, and context, which analytically has brought interesting aspects of vlogs, TV and film documentaries, and installation art at the fore.

Bal's and Böhme's perspectives point to how mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction open for a public reception through their aesthetic reality—it is the *now-here* that contains the transformative power of cultural understandings. They point to knowledge formations not as objective but as intersubjectively constituted. Analytically, I have pointed to how bodies/people, objects, and spaces/environments and their constellations function as generators of affectivity. Bal's perspective of the triadic dynamics of concept, object, and context analysis has forced me to go beyond an approach to the material that confirms their experiential quality as something inherent in the works themselves. With the dynamics of atmospheres in mind, experience is rather created through shifting relations between the works' aesthetic reality (quality) and the spectator. By exploring the mediations through the concept of atmosphere, I have sought to discover the relations between the works, the spectator, and the sociocultural context and how the works provide alternative experiences actualizing an array of ways to be moved and relate.

The implications of the study and its method point to how the social dimension of making something experiential through media production is overlooked as a consequence of the disregard of aesthetics, although, as this dissertation has concluded, it adds relevant perspectives to cultural debates. Several studies, including this dissertation, have suggested that a retheorization of aesthetics is pertinent in order to address the force of objects working on a prepersonal level (Broadhurst 2007; Hansen 2012). There is a tendency in the discussion of the implications of distributed media environments to move from a phenomenological framing within media studies and cultural studies to framings inspired by philosopher A. N. Whitehead (Shaviro, Massumi, Manning, and Hansen are among those exemplifying this shift) occupied with the question of nonperceptual sensation. This dissertation has framed its study of mediated experiences inspired by Böhme's critical aesthetic phenomenological theory, which, albeit differently, also takes issue with the production of sensation yet foregrounds the human felt body as the focal point in aesthetics. There are, however, interesting convergences that could further discussions in fields of research that have taken interest in

media as atmospheric. Future discussions could take departure in their shared interest in environments as a focal point of study rather than subject's experiences effected and affected by that environment.

The findings point to the pertinence of considering the ramifications of the aesthetic dimension of biomedical and biotechnological intersections with media inasmuch as they question the nature of our accepted ideas and belief systems regarding new technologies. The question that is raised by this dissertation is how atmospheric media can be thought of in terms of its increasing invasive movements. It is a perspective that in media studies is discussed as "the subperceptual, micropolitical dimensions of life" (Hansen 2012, 497). According to Mark B. N. Hansen in "Foucault and Media: A Missed Encounter?" (2012), engagement on the part of media theorists with Foucault's later work requires a rereading rather than an adoption of the readings of Foucault through Deleuze (2012, 498). The promising aspect of this lies, according to Hansen, in Foucault's concern with exploring how the maintenance of subindividual aggregates over time supports a reconceptualization of the category of the individual. While there has been a strong emphasis within media studies on the theorization of the "dividual," Hansen argues that it is rather the reconceptualization of the individual by Foucault "that makes the posthumous encounter between Foucault and new media so exciting" (2012, 498).

The dissertation offers an alternative and preliminary outline in consistently referring to how the theory of aesthetics presented by Böhme can be related to such a perspective. There are interesting convergences between Böhme's theory of aesthetics of atmosphere and Foucault's later thoughts, which, as Hansen stresses, "manages to account for the multiplicity of environmental factors composing any instance of 'subjectification' while nonetheless retaining a focus on human subjectivity as a—perhaps even the—central focus of his research" (2012, 498). The new aesthetics of atmospheres considers objects, people, and environments and their constellations as components of the heterogeneous and multiscale range of any operation of power. While Foucault rejects any "orthodox phenomenological conceptions of agency" (2012, 498), his conceptualization of subjectification does not rule out contemporary media's atmospheric characteristics. The questions of such atmospherically oriented media theory would be about not control but rather discipline or cultivation of subjectivity. It is a targeting that is discussed by later Foucault as well as by Böhme as critical because it moves on the level of the micrological yet remains correlated with the body. Although neither Böhme nor Foucault specifically takes issue with new media, this dissertation has pointed to how Böhme's perspective is useful in revealing a level that has been omitted in considerations of production of knowledge. Moreover, Böhme's perspectives and Foucault's later perspectives on discipline working through strategic relations as a paradigm for sociotechnical agency are useful to a critical analysis of contemporary media-cultural and art practices.

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# Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs: On the Aesthetic-Affective Dimension of Individual Fertility Projects on YouTube<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper discusses how reproductively-challenged American couples engage with in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and their mediation of these experiences in user-generated video blogs on YouTube. Through the aesthetic-affective dimension of these vlogs, the couples create a greater sensibility concerning biomedical and technological optimisation by engaging the viewer in dialectics of involvement and detachment. By placing vlogs featuring physical pain, emotional distress and passion for kinship within the framework of mediated consumption, I explore how this aesthetic-affective orchestration serves to re-encode individual fertility projects. The re-encoding reveals a complex dialectic of involvement and detachment that is part of how couples digitally self-present their infertility, connecting not only the performer to themselves but to fellow patients and the viewer. Through the re-encodings insight is gained into how a different type of knowledge, one that

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is premised on recognition rather than objectification, is appreciated in a biotech century that emphasises fragmentation and modification.

## Introduction

We got a call the next morning from the embryologist who told us they (embryos) had all divided but had failed to progress to the stage they wanted for freezing. He had discarded them. He said, ‘They probably wouldn’t have survived the freeze and thaw processes.’ Nice of him to make that decision for us. We figure it is because the clinics want to produce the highest live birth rates they can to attract business. And this is one way of controlling that. (*LucidIVF*, IVF14- Our Experiences. Embryo Transfer 2009)

The quote above, from an American couple in their video blog (vlog) on YouTube, is remarkable because it illustrates how such couples are critically involved, and how in their pursuit of fertility, they are subjected to the biotechnological and medical perception of the body as an object. The extension of experiences with in vitro fertilisation (IVF) into vlogs on YouTube appears to emphasise that fertility projects arise from couple’s self-realisation and pursuit of individual wants, needs, and passion for kinship. Furthermore, the couple seem to align themselves with the biotechnological and biomedical perception of the body, where this can be transformed into a series of distinct and discrete objects, each to be isolated, stored, accumulated, and replaced. Although the value accorded to the body in these vlogs apparently reflects a distinctly idiosyncratic fertility project, their aesthetic-affective orchestration presupposes a shared physical and emotional existence – an appeal to the viewer to recognise our commonalities through affectivity, thus exemplifying an intersubjective orientation. Taking the aesthetic qualities of the vlogs on IVF as a starting point, my aim is to nuance perspectives on mediated experiences conceptualised as transformations of cultural and social discourses on kinship,<sup>2</sup> and as a self-technology.<sup>3</sup> Taking the video blogs *LucidIVF* (2009) and *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries* (2009) as examples, I discuss how the affective orchestration of these vlogs creates sensitivity to biomedical and technological optimisation, by way of a dialectics of

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<sup>22</sup> See Hvidtfeldt Madsen “Surrogacy Mothers, Travels, and New Reproduction Metaphors”; Grønning “How to Tell You Are Pregnant”. Both articles are provided with short English abstracts but are otherwise presented in Danish.

<sup>3</sup> See van Dijck “Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs”.

involvement and detachment. This enables an understanding of the fertility project, on the basis of relationality foregrounded by affect as ‘central in the process of perception’ (Featherstone 210).

*LucidIVF* (Silvia and Peter),<sup>4</sup> and *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries* (Jennifer and Marc), are vlogs produced, populated, and distributed by two American couples. These vlogs are configured on YouTube as personal profile channels: Pages with personal data as well as an overview of uploads/downloads, plus friends and subscribers. They share identical storyline structures; covering thoughts on being reproductively challenged, preliminary thoughts on hormone injections (drugs, shots and emotional distress), examinations and scans in fertility clinics, egg retrieval procedures, embryo transfers, the two-week wait, and the results of treatments. In front of a transportable camera or webcam, the infertile couples talk and move around in their homes, cars, and clinical surroundings before, during, and after the IVF treatments. This re-encoding of their experiences of undergoing IVF allows us to see things we usually do not see, offering a sense of relationality based on recognition, which is to say, a sense of community based on affect, in a biotech century that has ‘no sacred objectivities to refer to’ (Ewald 225).

### **The Unique and Yet Modifiable Body – Pursuing Fertility**

In *The Politics of Life itself* (2007), sociologist Nikolas Rose emphasises how rationales about perceptions of disease and health are transformed by continuous developments in pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. This sets the stage for a growing individual moral responsibility to administrate and secure the future – to secure the good life. Rose emphasises how encounters with the perception of human life as molecular human bodies open to targeted manipulations, and as physical commodities (embryo/sperm/organs) as possessing great bio-economic value, fuel the individual’s sense of moral obligation to optimise his/her body and life (Rose 5). Rose focusses on examining how the individual’s optimisation of body and self is thoroughly regulated and controlled by informal power structures, such as private fertility clinics, organisations, and corporations. The moral obligation to optimise one’s body and life in this way is an illustration of what Francois Ewald has termed ‘an order of pure decision’ (225). Individuals feel obligations and expectations towards their health issues and their lives in general, which transform the way they relate to themselves,

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<sup>4</sup> I have, in light of the private content, chosen to make the authors of the vlogs featured in this paper anonymous. *LucidIVF* and *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries* are vlogs that in total represent the material of my PhD research.

promoting a somatic orientation.<sup>5</sup> Both Rose and Ewald, for the most part, argue that we increasingly perceive ourselves as biological beings for whom the natural, fertile body no longer functions as ‘a sacred objectivity we can refer to’ (225). The commodification of human reproduction – eggs, sperm, and embryos – has recently been addressed by Charlotte Kroløkke, Karen A. Foss, and Samuya Pant, in “Fertility Travel: The Commodification of Human Reproduction” (2012). They identify bioethical concerns with a new form of citizenship that arises due to the reproductive movements and fragmentary bodies involved in assisted reproduction (Kroløkke, Foss, and Pant 273). In *LucidIVF*, the fragmentary aspect of the body is also at stake, since experiences are expressed through complicated medical terms, and a picture of a petri dish showing ‘our babies,’ for instance, exemplifies an understanding of the couple’s bodies and lives in terms of reproduction technology (IVF14- Our experience. Embryo Transfer).

Paradoxically, the ideal, norm, and value of the natural human body – and concerns about alterations to this ‘sacred objectivity’ – lie at the heart of biotechnological and medical practices: the body here is at the same time both ‘a very biologically unique body and a technologically modifiable one’ (Thacker 262). The body is modified in order to optimise its ability to function as a natural body; in terms of reproductive technologies, medical experts assist the infertile body in becoming fertile. According to Eugene Thacker, the understanding of the body as unique and yet modifiable within biotechnological realms validates technological alterations of the body in the pursuit of its “natural’ function/state’ (262). For Thacker, this is an example of how the natural capacity of the body to heal through the assistance of technology is emphasised, rather than of actual biomedical modification (266-267).

This tension is also present in *LucidIVF*, where emotional reactions during hormone treatments are naturalised by relating them to natural symptoms of the body, such as menopausal hot flashes (IVF15- Our experience. Symptoms and silly). However, these vlogs are not expressions of individuals who in their pursuit of fertility uncritically optimise their infertile bodies, challenge nature, or conform to a narrow cultural ideal of the natural fertile body. What they appeal to is a recognition based on a shared physical existence; our ability to relate to them is brought to the fore by an orchestration of affectivity. Precisely how powerful the relational dimension of the body can be is discussed by Danish cultural theorists Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, who define the

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<sup>5</sup> The contemporary somatic orientation exemplifies, according to Rose, a change in scale; ‘It is now at the molecular level that human life is understood, at the molecular level that its processes can be anatomized, and at the molecular level that life can now be engineered’ (Rose 4).

potential of the body as a question of ‘both its contagious ability to attune other bodies and its semantic ‘wildness’ (144).

Negotiations and transformations of kinship are reference points in contemporary cultural studies on kinship and infertility. These are concerned with the cultural, political, and social potentials of the discursive and semantic ‘wildness’ of the fragmentary bodies and kinship enabled by new reproductive technology. This tendency also extends to research on weblogs (Hvidtfeldt Madsen 79) and Facebook (Grønning 63) featuring experiences of relatedness. The aim of this chapter is not to question these perspectives, but to bring more nuances to fields of research emphasising cultural transformation due to the fragmentary aspects of assisted reproductive technology. By focussing on mediations of experiences of IVF as re-encodings, we gain insight into how individual fertility projects (trans)form perceptions of pursuits of kinship that involve assisted reproduction through affective attunement.

### **Re-encodings – Strange and Yet Familiar Fertility Projects**

In “The Mediatization of Consumption: Towards an Analytical Framework of Image Culture” (2002), André Jansson explores the intersections of everyday life, consumption, and (digital) media. He suggests that the challenge of an experience of society characterised by fragmentation is to apply new topologies and genealogies that reflect its polyrhythmic aspects. He characterises the process as one of encoding, decoding, and re-encoding,<sup>6</sup> where individuals disassemble, transform, and give new meaning to their experiences/consumption. By emphasising the individual’s processes of transforming and reflecting on experiences, Jansson points to how classical (aesthetic) distinctions – such as taste, lifestyle and consumption – are surpassed. In this way, vlogs exemplify how experiences and use of IVF treatments are fragmented, transformed, and given new meanings.

One criticism of this culturalisation<sup>7</sup> exemplified by the mediation of physical optimisation is particularly concerned with the fragmentation of the body. In *LucidIVF* and *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries*, this optimisation reflects an understanding of the body as a distinct and discrete object, to be isolated, stored, accumulated, and further, re-assembled. This illustrates a detachment from the

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<sup>6</sup> Jansson elaborates on what the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1980) meant by encoding and decoding (Jansson 18).

<sup>7</sup> Along broad Adornian lines, Jansson argues that the production of culture has been removed from the sphere of everyday life into profit-making institutions, a movement in which the media is a key element (Jansson 12).

body, and, not least, from the perception of the body as a shared point of reference. In *LucidIVF*, making a baby is expressed as uncomplicated, quick, and smooth. As Silvia, sitting in the car outside the fertility clinic just before having an embryo transfer says, ‘So this film is so that we can show our kids how to make a baby. We’re gonna go make a baby now’ (*LucidIVF*, IVF11- Our Experience. Egg Retrieval). This normalisation of IVF as the new natural way of making a baby echoes Ewald’s notion that nature – here the fertile body – no longer serves as a ‘sacred objectivity.’ Re-encoding as a matter of anti-aesthetic intertextuality as discussed by Jansson does not acknowledge the affective attunement by the presence (Böhme 115) of people, objects and environments in the vlogs. Neither does Ewald’s notion of an ‘order of pure decision’ encompass how knowledge based on recognition of a shared physical existence form and inform our feelings, thoughts, and actions towards the mediated fertility project.

Her statement in the vlog ‘IVF11- Egg Retrieval’ illustrates Silvia’s reflection on the experience of going in to a procedure that is performed in order to optimise her body’s ability to conceive. What Silvia reveals is an awareness of the potentially unnatural and unfamiliar features of optimisation through egg retrieval procedures. As a consequence, it is not the optimisation itself that is shown or commented on, but the fact that they are on their way inside to make a baby – an idea that is quite familiar. This apparently seamless customisation of the fertile body is countered in *LucidIVF* by close visual encounters with Silvia and Peter in states of emotional distress and pain, as well as with her swollen and bruised body during and after hormone injections, egg retrieval procedures, and embryo transfers. This tinting of thoughts, sensations, and perceptions reveals the significance of the body and emotions in the circulation of symbols and imaginative appeals in social life.

Humour plays a key role in the vlogs. In one sequence, Silvia is injected with hormones, but the sound effect of a gun firing is added, with a cartoon clip of a ‘pow’ just as she injects the needle (IVF2-Our experience. First Lupron Injection). These elements amplify the unfamiliarity of the situation, and also dismantle any potential shock of and repulsion towards not only the injection, but also towards the fertility project in general. Such humorous effects disrupt the conventional view of fertility projects and vlogs as idiosyncratic or limited to a certain audience; that is, to others trying to conceive with the assistance of IVF. Through humour, the vlog’s experiential quality is enhanced by photographs from everyday life, such as a meatloaf, and Silvia’s comment that this is how her buttocks looks post-injection, affectively involving the viewer. The IVF experiences featured in *LucidIVF* and *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries* are both fascinating and repulsive, as Silvia comments of a

cake resembling a buttock with 31 needle marks and a needle in it: ‘It is cute in a twisted way’ (*LucidIVF* IVF14- Our Experiences. Embryo Transfer). In another sequence, music from the film Willy Wonka, ‘A World of Pure Imagination’ performed by Gene Wilder, appeals to *our* imaginations: an appeal through affectivity to ‘Take a breath, count to three. Come with me, and you’ll be in a world of pure imagination. Take a look, and you’ll see into your imagination’ (IVF14- Our Experiences. Embryo Transfer). In this re-encoding, an actual experience of IVF is combined with music, text, sound effects, and comics. What is produced by the presence of objects, people, and spaces through the re-encoding is a ‘qualitative fringe’ (Massumi 6) brought about by the aura (Massumi 6) or atmosphere (Böhme 113) of the likeness of objects.<sup>8</sup> What is at stake is the potential of this relationality to trigger changes in our perceptions of the fertility projects in the vlogs. This calls attention to how these vlogs, alongside biotechnology (IVF), not only fragment the body, but structure feelings (see Williams 1978), and cultivate our perception of ourselves, our bodies, and the bodies of others, through affective attunement.

Sianne Ngai’s conceptualisation of ‘ugly feelings’ as a generally overlooked aesthetic category invites us to consider how vlogs may fuel cultural productivity by making the flipside of western capitalistic societies possible to encounter (Ngai 5). The affective orchestrations of vlogs, in this sense, not only relate to pleasure and passion, but also to envy, fear of exclusion, and irritation about not being understood. They also express paranoia of being “a small subject in a ‘total system’” (Ngai 5) – in this case, the system of assisted reproduction. Further, the orchestration of ‘ugly feelings’ promotes recognition of these emotions as shared states of being through their affective contagiousness. Thus, the aesthetic-affective qualities of the vlogs enable critical emotional engagements (by the performers themselves as well as the viewer) in needs, wants, and passions that involve technological and medical interventions in the body.

However individualised the iconographic characteristics of these vlogs may be in their choices of remediation of online communications with offline genres – journals, diaries, comics, novels, music, and sound effects – their aesthetic-affective dimension expresses a significant social codification. This potentially enables viewers to recognise and to become actively involved in the everyday lives

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<sup>8</sup> Both Massumi and Böhme, although from different perspectives, discuss perception of appearance/presence of objects re-encoded in infinite variations, and their affective capacity as a matter of aesthetics. Aesthetics is not a popular position in new media art, Massumi asserts (2), nor in studies of mediated consumption (see Jansson 2002). For a thorough discussion of the likeness of objects and their potential to capacitate the body see Massumi 6-16.

orchestrated in vlogs. Neither this re-encoding nor the aesthetic-affective orchestration is accidental. As Jennifer in *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries* states, after excusing the low light setting because of the blinds:

We feel not so left out, I guess. You know what happens if we keep a diary of our progress. Then what happens is people can get an idea of what IVF is like. Obviously you cannot experience it first hand until you go through it yourself, but obviously you can understand a bit of the fun, kidding. (*Jenkins Family IVF Diaries*, Very First Introduction 2009)

Although the value of the body and emotions mediated in the vlogs is an expression of the significance of these to the couples making the vlogs, the orchestration of their aesthetic dimension is characterised by a quality of experience that spurs thoughts, sensations, and perceptions (see Massumi 15) in the viewer of themselves having experienced being infertile and undergoing IVF.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Vlogs like *LucidIVF* and *Jenkins Family IVF Diaries* exemplify how the creation of certain perceptions and narratives of the body and the self is a task individuals have taken upon themselves when dealing with biotechnology, medicine, and medical experts (see Liu et al. “Health vlogging and viewer interaction in chronic illness management”). Such vlogs contain insight into how shared physical and emotional states of existence are given value, adding new perspectives to a field of research that centres on mediated experiences as negotiations of kinship.

The vlogs create sensitivity to biomedical and biotechnological optimisation by way of a ‘dialectics of involvement in and detachment’ from how the body is optimised, and the variety of feelings orchestrated (Elias 226-252). The aesthetic qualities of these vlogs, in this sense, foreground certain imaginings of the world, but they also allow the viewer to experience the world from a different perspective. The aesthetic value of the vlogs is related to their contagious capacity to attune the viewer to the banal and sensational aspects of mediated individual fertility projects. Our involvement in and detachment from the strange and yet familiar elements in these vlogs is at same time created and challenged by this aesthetic-affective dimension. By treating these re-encodings as significant contributions to the circulation of symbols in social life, and acknowledging their imaginative appeal, insight is gained into how individuals actively engage in and produce cultural perceptions of contemporary bodily (fertility) projects. These vlogs may reflect a fragmentary orientation towards

the body, but they also reveal how knowledge premised on abstract recognition is valued and produced in a biotech century. Not only this, such vlogs show how our lives are structured by feelings, and how feelings as cultural productions influence how we perceive the world.

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# Atmospheric video blogs on infertility

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## Abstract

This paper explores how the presence of bodies, objects, and spaces in a video blog on YouTube about infertility attunes the viewer. The paper questions mediated experiences as matters of reflexivity and image value and points to how the aesthetic dimension of mediated experiences with infertility is of experiential value. I begin by discussing the relevance of aesthetics and the concept of atmosphere in relation to mediated experiences in new media. I then illuminate how the atmospheric body, technology and time, space and modality of everyday life and their constellation are significant for the viewer's involvement in the mediated fertility project.

## Introduction

In Silvia and Peter's video blog (vlog) on YouTube<sup>1</sup> the viewer follows an American couple in front of a transportable video camera, webcam, or mobile phone as they talk and move around in their home, car, and fertility clinical surroundings. The vlog is produced by, distributed by and revolves around the couple as they undergo in vitro fertilization (IVF).

In the following I will discuss Silvia and Peter's vlog in relation to the philosopher Gernot Böhme's (1995) theory of aesthetics and concept of atmosphere and media theorist André Jansson's (2002) perspectives on mediated consumption. The concept of aesthetics in the field of new technology is, according to André Jansson, to be abandoned in order to understand new topologies and genealogies characterizing mediated experiences and consumption. Mediated experiences are make-believes; they do not refer to an original concrete experience, but consist of fragments transformed into new meaning and hence are 'anti-aesthetic and non-narrative' (Jansson, 2002: 18). By expanding the classical concept of aesthetics to aesthetics concerned with experience, the possibility arises to address the significance of the experience of the mediated presence of persons, objects, and

environments. Echoing Böhme, I suggest that the body, spaces and technology in Silvia and Peter's vlogs are orchestrated<sup>2</sup> in order to attune the viewer affectively. The experiential qualities of these atmospheres are understood to be significant for the viewer's involvement in the couple's fertility project.

My reading of the vlog suggests how the expansion of aesthetics, rather than abandonment, offers insight in individual's valuations of the body and mediated experiences of people, space and technology as shared points of reference. The vlog does not express an 'attrition of collective forms of life' as Lauren Berlant (2011: 11) states, but is a result of increasingly individualized and differentiated ways of living. On the contrary, the possibility of involvement of the viewer in the individual fertility project arises through the atmospheric body, technology and everyday time, space, and modality. Thus the aim is to illuminate how the aesthetic dimension becomes the link between people and how relatedness is expressed through the intensification of the usual unseen and undetected aspects of a fertility project. The vlogs and the atmospheres orchestrated by Silvia and Peter offer, as coined by Mike Featherstone, 'greater possibilities for these affective intensities to be transmitted and experienced' (Featherstone, 2010: 212).

### **Silvia and Peter's vlogs**

The video blog by the American couple Silvia and Peter consists of 20 videos uploaded since May 31, 2009 with durations between 38 seconds and 11 minutes. In the vlog *IVF 14-Embryo Transfer* the viewer is introduced to the system of assisted reproduction; the terminology and clinical approach to a blastocyst transfer.<sup>3</sup> The vlog consists of almost two minutes of complicated medical terms, a picture of a petri dish showing 'their babies' and a comment on the fertility clinic's discarding of their embryos as a way of 'producing the highest live birth rates they can to attract business.' In accordance with Jansson's concepts this mediated experience with the system of assisted reproduction exemplifies the reflexive accumulation characterizing mediatization of consumption. Furthermore the re-encoded experience and the couple's reflection on their experience contain an image value, as Silvia and Peter's consumption and reflection become important fragments in their expression of a cultural belonging. However, I argue that this perspective neglects the significance of the experiential quality generated by the presence of 'their babies', petri dish and description of the realm of assisted reproduction. The two minute long vlog ends with Silvia's birthday filmed in their kitchen. She is filmed just as she receives a birthday cake resembling a buttock with 31 needle marks

and a needle in it, with 'Happy birthday' written across. These two atmospheres offer different aesthetic experiential qualities, which nevertheless affectively involve the viewer through the presence of the body, technology, and spaces. Relatedness is orchestrated through a presupposed shared experience of the presence of persons, objects and environments and their experiential qualities (Böhme, 1993).

In *IVF 4-Drugs and background*, Silvia is being filmed by a friend while introducing the viewer to cost and effect of her hormone stimulating medication, as well as tips for which size of needles to use for the injections. Similar to *IVF 7-Follicle Stimulating Hormones*, Silvia and Peter film three injections of hormone stimulating medication, where Peter shows how to assemble the needle and extract the medicine. The video combines this content of the filming with stills that add explicatory written and drawn comments on the effects of the injection, including bruising and bleeding. Not only the informational and cognitive levels of this vlog, but also the fact that the vlog consists of remediation of music, text, sound effects and comics, appears to make it seem anti-aesthetic. The mediation as re-encodings of fragments in Jansson's perspective creates the illusion of a direct experience. In this sense, the vlogs express the convergence between media culture and consumer culture, as well as the dynamic interaction between simulation and interpretation, which, as Andre Jansson argues, characterizes contemporary '*image culture*' (Jansson, 2002: 11).

The question remains whether the value of the mediated experience of IVF is purely communicational and reflexive, or whether the re-encodings are orchestrated in order to attune the viewer in a specific way by expressing norms and values in a sensuous form. In the following I will elaborate on Jansson's perspective on contemporary mediated experience/consumption as anti-aesthetic.

### **Vlogs as mediated experience**

In *The Mediatization of Consumption: Towards an analytical framework of image culture* (2002), André Jansson argues that the distinction between consumer and producer in image culture is increasingly blurred creating 'closer and closer webs of intertextuality' (Jansson, 2002: 19). In order to encapsulate what characterizes cultural production and reproduction, Jansson expands on cultural theorist Stuart Hall's classical model of encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980). Mediated consumption, Jansson stresses,

is continuously created and re-created, which must be contextualized as a process of decoding/re-encoding; interpretation/ expression. Thus, collective forms of life take form as webs of intertextuality and in consequence, do not refer to an original concrete experience. Cultural meaning is, as a result of the constant fragmentary transformation into new meaning, a negotiated business in which ‘the fixation (however temporary) of cultural meaning is established through interpretations made by consumers in contexts’ (Jansson, 2002: 19). This indicates that orchestrations of relatedness in Silvia and Peter’s vlog depend on what Jansson puts forward as ‘the subject’s cultural frame of reference in order to (perhaps) function the way intended’ (Jansson, 2002: 19).

Accordingly, the orchestration in Silvia and Peter’s vlog depend on the viewer’s ability to decode the individual fertility project in relation to its cultural frame. Following this perspective the complicated medical terms and clinical surroundings in *IVF 14-Embryo Transfer* suggest that these are part of the viewer’s cultural frame; that individuals increasingly perceive themselves in relation to the biotechnological perception of the body and subject (Rose, 2007). Moreover, Jansson’s perspective suggests that the mediation of the fertility project itself is a means to an end; a negotiation and transformation of the couple’s cultural frame. As such, concrete experiences with assisted reproduction become part of a culturalization process predominantly characterized by ‘simulations’ (Jansson, 2002: 16). In this sense, Silvia and Peter’s mediation of their experiences with assisted reproduction do not consist of stable signifiers, as their fragmentary characteristics are detached from referents in the real world. By consequence, the vlog does not offer information on reality because reality itself does not exist. The cultural meaning derived from the decoding/re-encoding is solely of de-materialistic value. What Jansson highlights is how the process of re-encoding is characterized by floating interpretations with a non-narrative logic and anti-aesthetic intertextuality. The media in this regard is significant, as it provides the means for circulating discursive knowledge and self-reflexivity.

The divergence between Jansson and Böhme’s perspectives is not related to the accumulation of reflexivity. Both emphasize how individuals are actively involved in the encoding, decoding, and re-encoding of experiences and atmospheres. The divergence is, rather, connected to Jansson’s exclusion of the significance of the *presence* (perceived reality) in mediations endowed by people, objects, and environments in the generation of (cultural) meaning. In the following I will expand on

Böhme's (1993) concept of atmosphere and discuss the relevance of the orchestration of the atmospheric vlogs as possibilities for the viewer to relate to the mediated fertility project.

### **Atmospheric presence**

Through a combination of Walter Benjamin's (1979) production of atmosphere (*Aura*) and Hermann Schmitz's (1964) phenomenological conceptualization of the experience quality of atmospheres, Böhme suggests 'a reconceptualization of the classical concept of aesthetics' (Böhme, 1993: 114). In line with Richard Shusterman (1999) and his concept of soma-aesthetics, Böhme (re)turns to aesthetics as an 'art of living'. The human is perceived as essentially a bodily being and our mood (*befindlichkeit*) is a result of our sense of bodily presence, which is endowed by 'the experience of objects, spaces and people' (Böhme, 1995: 27). Atmosphere and aesthetics is related to our senses, to our bodily being in the world, to everyday life, and is 'concerned with the relation between environmental qualities and human states' (Böhme, 1993: 114). Opposed to Jansson, Böhme is not interested in the image value, but in the value of the experience generated by the perception of people, objects, and spaces as present.

Böhme is particularly interested in the setting of our emotional state by tuned spaces. From his perspective, the new aesthetics is a critical aesthetics; it turns attention to the aestheticization of everyday life in terms of a focus on tuned spaces, as well as on how production of atmospheres puts the subject in a mood for consumption. This inclusion of everyday situations and their sensuous conditioning of our actions and reactions requires a break with 'the question of real, true, high art, of the authentic work of art, the work of art of distinction' (Böhme, 1993: 115). This new aesthetic is a general theory focusing on the production of atmospheres where perception equals the experience of the presence of persons, objects and environments. As such the concept of atmosphere is diffuse and yet powerful, 'something beyond rational explanation and with an emphasis which suggests that only there is the essential, the aesthetically relevant to be found' (Böhme, 1993: 113). As I will show in what follows, the indeterminate quality of affectivity and emphasis on the body, technology, time, space and modality of everyday life in Silvia and Peter's vlog conditions the viewer's perception of the fertility project.

The atmosphere in Silvia and Peter's vlogs presupposes a common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. What coincides is 'the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality

of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere she/he is bodily present in a certain way' (Böhme, 1993: 122). Rephrasing Benjamin, Böhme suggests that to perceive an atmosphere is to absorb it into one's own bodily state of being. Although the atmospheres in the vlogs emanate from people, objects and environments and require bodily presence in order to be perceived and experienced, the specific object of affectivity remains diffuse. In opposition to Herman Schmitz's aesthetics of reception, Böhme argues that despite this ontological uncertainty, atmospheres are not free floating in space. On the contrary, 'they proceed from and are created by objects, persons, and their constellations' (Böhme, 1993: 122). The presence of persons, spaces, and objects in Silvia and Peter's vlog thus endow weight and orientation; an involvement through the orchestrated experiential qualities. Thus, tuned spaces must be approached twofold, with a focus on affect (the subject's experience/reception) as well as the production itself; the presence of specific objects, people and spaces and their constellations (Böhme, 2008).

By addressing the vlogs as a production of atmospheres, a possibility arises to follow a bodily attunement as a result of the presence of objects, spaces, people and their constellations. This requires an investigation of the sensuous conditions that are orchestrated to set the viewer in a specific emotional state in terms of the interaction between body, technology and everyday life, which will be addressed in the following sections.

### **The atmospheric body**

*IVF2-First Lupron injection* is a 1 minute and 15 second vlog where Silvia receives an injection from Peter containing a drug that stimulates hormones, called Lupron. At the opening, Silvia films Peter as he asks her whether she wants to film 'all of it'. He looks worried. As they proceed with preparation for the injection, she films him close up as he extracts the drug for the injection with great care and attention. As he is about to inject Silvia in the belly, he squeezes the belly, and laughs nervously. What follows is a close up of his concentrated facial expression as he injects the needle. We see how the needle meets resistance as Peter slowly pushes it into Silvia's flesh. We see how he empties the needle. Peter then comments: 'that was not so bad,' but falls down, as if he is about to faint, indicating relief.

The orchestration of the atmospheric body; its attunement by its presence is no coincidence, neither in its constellation with fertility hormones or the surrounding environment of the couple's bathroom. Before turning to how these aspects condition our sensate experience (which I will return to in the following sections), I want to elaborate on the immediate aesthetic experience that the atmospheric body brings about. It is, following Böhme, on an atmospheric level that Silvia and Peter's expressions affect the viewer. In *IVF2-First Lupron injection* Peter is insecure about what to record, worried about the injection and nervous about injecting the hormone the right way, as well as being nervous about hurting Silvia. The viewer absorbs Peter's disorientated emotional state, his facial expression, his tone of voice and his laughter into his/her own bodily state of being. The viewer becomes Peter, uncertain about what to feel. But the close ups of his concentrated facial appearance and his expression of relief supersedes the uncertainty. His shift in emotional register is intensified by the close ups of his facial appearance, voice and bodily movements. These suggestions of tension and emotional shifts enable involvement in their fertility project by drawing on recognizable states of being.

In the same manner, the haptic quality of Silvia's body as Peter squeezes her belly and slides the needle hesitantly into her flesh creates the perception of a shared bodily being of the perceived and the perceiver. The close ups intensify the experience as it magnifies our perception of the needle and the feeling of it sliding into the body. However strange the injection with hormone stimulating drugs may seem to the viewer, the experience of injection and the anxiety about the potential pain is perceptually recognizable, familiar. The atmospheric body of Silvia and Peter thus involves the viewer in a multisensory way and changes their perceptual register; it sets the viewer in a specific mood by orchestrating recognizable spheres of involvement. Moreover, the atmospheric body has the power to intensify or diminish our emotional states.

In *IVF10-HCG*<sup>6</sup>, the vlog opens with a written comment describing what we are about to see: Silvia's 'absolute look of horror.' Following on from this, a video clip of the couple in clinical surroundings shows them making their way in to the fertility clinic for Silvia's ovulation inducing injection. In the same manner as *IVF2-First Lupron injection*, an experience of uncertainty is created; the viewer does not know what to expect. The specific object of affectivity is indeterminate. In the following video clip, the uneasiness of the couple is intensified by Silvia's numb facial expression and Peter's tight embrace, as well as their mumbling and nervous laughter as they explain what they are about to undergo. Their feeling of uncertainty sets the viewer in an uncomfortable but also

intrigued state. This feeling of uncertainty attunes the viewer to the following sequence, where Silvia is injected in her buttock. The video shows a close up of a circle drawn by the nurse on Silvia's buttock to indicate where the injection is to be done. What follows is a close up of the needle as it enters Silvia's flesh. The vlog ends with a written comment on a video clip showing Silvia after the injection, stating: 'Wow, I look tired, sick, and pasty.' Her body attunes space and the experiential quality of the presence of her body becomes the link between people. The way Silvia and Peter orchestrate the vlogs and succeed in intensifying and diminishing the viewer's possibility to react echo their own experience of emotional distress, pain and uncertainty about the hormone injections and fertility project in general. As part of media technology, vlogs offer a possibility for Silvia and Peter to transmit and let their fertility project be experienced by intensifying and diminishing the atmospheric attunement (Featherstone, 2010: 212). As such, they reveal how the atmosphere of assisted reproduction also encompasses an aesthetic dimension. In the following section I will elaborate on how the presence of assisted reproduction technology and medicine attunes space.

### **Atmospheric technology**

The extension of aesthetics to encompass people, objects and environments enables the possibility to address the atmosphere produced by the re-encoding of medical terminology related to assisted reproduction, procedures, injections, clinical surroundings and personnel. As noted by Carl Elliott in his *Better than well: American medicine meets the American dream* (2003), 'there is a sense of uneasiness related to enhancement technologies and the source of this worry is indeterminable' (2003: xx). My aim here is to illuminate how this worry is present in Silvia and Peter's vlog and how this attunement is related to the atmosphere produced by complicated medical terms, a petri dish, and a picture of embryos.

The atmosphere produced in the vlogs through encounters with assisted reproduction fills the receptive space with a certain tone of feeling, evoking a very specific perceptive encounter. I suggest that the atmosphere produced in the vlog entries on drugs, hormones and embryo transfer enable connectivity through worry in a twofold manner. As the petri dishes, injections, clinical procedures, surroundings and terms in Silvia and Peter's vlogs are linked to the realm of assisted reproduction, the vlog first of all contains an element of unfamiliarity for the viewer whom is not accustomed with this domain. The strangeness is connected to a worry, echoing Elliot's (2009) diagnostic approach,

about the influence of technology on human interaction and human experience. Secondly, there is an element of uncertainty linked to the enthusiastic consumption of drugs, procedures and services expressed by the couple. It is an enthusiasm linked to Silvia and Peter's pursuit of fertility despite their worry about their engagement with the realm of assisted reproduction.

In their orchestration of events, Silvia and Peter emphasize an atmosphere of ambiguity by placing the experiential quality of assisted reproduction technology and medicine at the fore. The atmosphere of the couple, the clinical staff, objects (needles, medication) and surroundings attune the viewer as they are made perceptible by their presence. As the aesthetic 'contains our norms and values in a concrete sensuous form' (Böhme, 1995: 31), the atmosphere of petri dishes, injections, clinical procedures, surroundings and terms contain the concern about the attrition of collective forms of life. Thus the state of affective disorientation is not just negative. Rather, it enables a different connectivity; an investment in the values, norms and ideals of collective forms of life through fascination of the state of atmospheric ambiguity. By making something that usually remains unseen and undetected (their own sense of ambiguity about the fertility project), Silvia and Peter influence the viewer's sensate condition and mood. I read this orchestration of the atmosphere of assisted reproduction as a presupposition of uncertainty/worry, an awareness of the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. The orchestration of the atmospheric presence of assisted reproduction and medicine orients the viewer towards lived experience: the norms, values and ideals of technology in relation to collective forms of life. Silvia and Peter reveal a conscious awareness of their worries and focus upon how this connects to the consumption of technology through their intertwining orchestrations of atmospheric body, time, space and particular modalities of everyday life.

As the vlogs consist of fragments or re-encoded experiences, they offer, as Mike Featherstone (2010) suggests, a possibility to engage the specific potential for aesthetic experience offered by digital computer technology. According to Featherstone we have to consider ways in which new information technologies offer greater possibilities for these affective intensities to be experienced (Featherstone, 2011: 210). As such, the re-encodings, atmospheric presence of objects, people and spaces in the vlogs bring about a synesthetic experience. This experience of relatedness is brought about via the atmospheric body and the

atmospheric realm of assisted reproduction. As I will elaborate in the following section, time, space and particular modalities of everyday life reveal how Silvia and Peter are intersubjectively oriented.

The vlog of Silvia and Peter offer encounters with collective forms of life in the sense of body, space and technology as shared lived experiences. In line with Böhme and Jansson, Featherstone suggests that contemporary individuals, rather than being considered as passive and manipulated by technology, actively engage themselves in revealing ‘a new register of affect previously undetected in the flow of facial and bodily movements’ (Featherstone, 2010:211). The atmospheres of the vlog are not just perceptible as distant subjective experiences, but present, attuning the viewer through atmospheric encounters of the usual unseen. Through the re-encoding of experiences with body, technology and everyday life, Silvia and Peter expand the atmosphere, surrounding the viewer, as they undergo IVF treatment.

Thus the aesthetic dimension offers insight into the role of an aesthetic-affective dimension through the formation of knowledge in terms of the role fertility treatments or the realm of assisted reproduction technology plays in human-world relations. The vlogs reveal reflexive individuals involved in how their life is conditioned through the sensate body as well as how they reflect individuals ‘enjoying a new register of affect’ (Featherstone, 2010: 211). The re-encodings of experiences with IVF in vlogs promote the aesthetically relevant, as they offer insight into how the conditions lived under are valued. The re-encodings’ fragmentary composition brings about shifts in affective intensities, since they are generators of atmospheres by means of media technology surrounding the viewer and involving them at a bodily level.

### **The atmospheric everyday**

According to Böhme the classical concept of aesthetics has primly focused on three atmospheres; the beautiful, the sublime, and the characterless atmosphere; aura (Böhme, 1993: 122). Thus the significance of how the everyday production of atmospheres and the qualities of objects are linked to their atmospheric influence has been neglected. Extending this to Silvia and Peter’s vlogs, the orchestration of time, space, and particular modalities of everyday life are bearers of mood. The orchestration of the ordinary allows for an investigation of the less conspicuous but nonetheless

aesthetic-affective. It allows for a view into how the aesthetic-affective dimension conditions the viewer's perception of Silvia and Peter's fertility project.

Rita Felski (2013) suggests that the definition of everyday life is grounded in three key factors: 'time, space and modality' (Felski, 2000: 18). She argues that 'temporality of the everyday is that of repetition, the spatial ordering of the everyday is anchored in the sense of home, and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit' (Felski, 2000: 18). As noted earlier, the vlog *IVF 14-Embryo Transfer* consists of two atmospheric attunements: the aesthetics of assisted reproduction and a birthday party in Silvia and Peter's kitchen. The couple intertwines the realm of the ordinary with medical terms and petri dishes. The re-encoded experiences with IVF express 'displacement from the ordinary but at the same time reveals our normal way of being by pushing it to its limits' (Carel, 2013: 346). In the vlog the realm of the ordinary in the form of a birthday cake is expressed as 'cute in a twisted way.' Something usual in terms of its yearly repetition, spatial arrangements, and particular modality is thus infiltrated by feelings of ambiguity; their everyday life has become twisted. By orchestrating the atmosphere of the ordinary through a cyclic temporality exemplified by the birthday cake, the scene becomes opposed to the realm of assisted reproduction as futuristic and worrying.<sup>7</sup> As such the quotidian reveals its powerlessness in relation to these twisted elements. But the alteration of these experiences the ordinary also calls for a state of alert; it sharpens the senses. The atmosphere of 'the cute art of living in a twisted way' facilitates an awareness of the formation of everyday practices as it is organized around the realm of assisted reproduction.

However, the intertwining of the realm of assisted reproduction with the mundane does not express subordination to the forces of biotechnology or biomedicine. What is expressed is the couple's engagement with and response to their environmental expansion, a way of familiarizing themselves with the repetitions, space and particular modalities related to assisted reproduction. As Felski notes: 'everyday life is characterized by a concentration of emotional energy; a belonging so profound that it functions as an extension of ourselves' (Felski, 2000:26). Hence the aesthetic attunement of this intrinsic aspect of human life is powerful. The cuteness of the cake expresses the changeability of the ordinary, but also reminds us how new routines, spaces and particular modalities related to assisted reproduction are disarmed. The two atmospheres bridge past and present aspects of everyday life and express a search for contingency, which link people together. Silvia and Peter's

change in atmospheric setting creates an unstable narrative forcing the viewer to relate to the mediated experiences anew. The shift in atmospheric attunement edifies the sensate conditions of the realm of assisted reproduction and its impact on the organization of the everyday. The presence of people, objects and spaces in the vlog thus locate the couple; disclose their norms, values and ideals in a sensate form, affectively connecting them to the viewer.

## Outro

In this paper I have suggested that an expanded concept of aesthetics, which encompass objects, people and space, addresses more properly the perception of the fertility project in the vlog. To speak of vlogs as production of atmospheric bodies, technologies and everyday space, time and particular modalities is not only to speak of image value, but also of the production of experiential qualities that at the same time locate us and connect us to one another. Analytically, the presence of the everyday life and its aesthetic-affective tuning of mood have been neglected, as pointed out by Felski and Böhme. The infertility vlog, as well as health vlogs on Cancer, HIV, chronic illnesses (Liu et al. 2013) and body modification vlogs (Modblogs), share commonality by the way in which they are orchestrated. Not only do they express biocentric and biogenetic conceptualizations of life experiences, they also simultaneously offer ways to relate through the presence of usually unseen aspects of collective forms of life; the familiarity of time space and the particular modalities of the everyday that such experiences instill. What is needed is not only a consideration of how the presence of bodies, technology and spaces in mediated form spurs on consumption, accumulates reflexivity or functions as representations of medical perceptions of the body, norms and ideals. The individualized and differentiated mediations in vlogs, which document bodily experience, produce a resonance with the contingency of relatedness, which in turn are woven into the fabric of vlogs and mediated as expressions of the polyrhythmic aspects of everyday life.

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to keep the authors of the vlog featuring in this article anonymous in light of the private content.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term orchestrated in order to highlight the production side of the way the vlogs are composed. But I also use the term in order to underline the attunement of the specific composition of objects, people and environments in the vlogs.

<sup>3</sup> With blastocyst transfer, embryos are cultured in the laboratory incubator to the blastocyst stage before they are transferred to the womb.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Jansson media products are commodities ‘which in some way function as mediators of meaning (...) embedded in complex intertextual patterns, which in turn interact with the practices and communities of everyday life. They are part of a developing image culture’ (2002: 11)

<sup>5</sup> Böhme uses Heidegger’s term ‘*befindlichkeit*’ (1995: 27).

<sup>6</sup> HCG is short for *human chorionic gonadotropin*, which relates to assisted reproduction and is a drug injected to stimulate ovulation.

<sup>7</sup> Sianne Ngai (2005) has worked with the significance of the expansion of aesthetic categories of judgment.

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Accessed August 9, 2013

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q95JA2qQho4>  
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Silvia and Peter' s vlog (2009) IVF 7-Follicle Stimulating Hormones  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4U8wleb4t5Y>  
Accessed August 9, 2013

*Silvia and Peter' s vlog (2009) IVF10-HCG* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoPWgQsg6qI>  
*Accessed August 9, 2013*

*Silvia and Peter' s vlog (2009) IVF 14-Embryo Transfer*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxnHzvRKi3A&feature=relmfu>  
*Accessed August 9, 20113*

## Biography

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# Relational (Trans)formations

*The matter of kinship substances in Technostorks (2006) and The Baby Clinic<sup>1</sup> (2012)*

Nathalie W. Soelmark

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## Introduction

The American box-office hit *Sex and the City* (2008), the British TV series *Downton Abbey* (2010), and the American series *House of Cards* (2013) are some of the sites where infertility and assisted reproduction recently have occurred as subplots. In other works, infertility and assisted reproduction feature as a main theme, such as in the Danish TV documentary *The Baby Clinic* (2012) and the American film documentary *Technostorks* (2006).<sup>2</sup> These sites are part of an array of media representations of a new world of possibilities for relatedness engendered by technological interventions. Experiences with familiar and unfamiliar kinds of reproduction have become part of the daily currency of media productions, affecting the way people think about and relate to one another (Carsten 2004; Strathern 1992a). Media representations of reproductive technologies and infertility have predominantly been discussed as critical<sup>3</sup> in terms of the way that they either turn assisted reproduction into a spectacle or deploy a progressive narrative that does not allow the dynamics of kinship to be encountered (Franklin 1997, 2013). This is also the case with photographic practices that continue to play a substantial role in making kinship relations explicit (Bouquet 2001). Paradoxically, Bouquet notes, photography became desired for its ability to simplify increasingly complex relations in the wake of assisted reproductive technologies. In effect, the complexities and dynamics of kinship are cut out of the frame as kinship is

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<sup>1</sup> My translation original title "Babyklinikken"

<sup>2</sup> The TV and film documentaries that this chapter discusses is one of three collections of material empirically engaged in my PhD project, where I focus on mediated experiences with infertility and assisted reproduction in TV and film documentaries, video blogs on YouTube, and installation art. These collections are chosen as examples for further theorization of kinship in relation to ART and digital media and artistic practices. The documentaries used in this paper and my study are related to existing and previous documentary formats on experiences with infertility and reproductive technologies and health documentaries more generally. See Leslie J. Reagan, Nancy Tomes, Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Medicine's Moving Pictures: Medicine, Health, and Bodies in American Film*. University Rochester Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Thacker points to the critical aspect of the polyvalent ways biotechnology networks itself into the way we think of the body "socially, economically, and politically" via its recombination in media (2005, 345), while Clark et al. (2003) address how the recombination mobilizes greater demand for medication and services, i.e., consumption. See Adele E. Clark, Janet K. Shim, Laura Mamo, Jennifer Ruth Fosket, and Jennifer R. Fishman. "Biomedicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine." In *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 2, 2003: 161-194.

corseted into recognizable form. Taking Franklin's and Bouquet's discussions into consideration, I ask: How do contemporary documentaries about infertility and IVF make matters of kinship practices come to matter, and how do these impact existing understandings of kinship practices involving IVF?

Both Franklin's and Bouquet's perspectives on media representations are relevant as they point to a potent material—media representations—in the continual discussion of how kinship matters come to matter individually and publicly. This chapter takes issue with two digital media productions where the experiences with infertility and fertility treatments are the main theme and that, albeit quite differently, contribute to the currency of familiar and unfamiliar ways to relate.<sup>4</sup> The documentaries are interesting for several reasons. As the documentaries combine real-time recordings and multimodal data layers, “the ability to differentiate between past, present, and future time, as well as cause and effect relation” (Thomsen 2012) is destabilized. As the causal relation between the profilmic—that which was in front of the camera—and the image partly disappears (Shaviro 2010), mediations can be approached as signaletic materials with the potential to intensify (but also diminish) matters of kinship. The social force of aesthetic signaletic kinship practices is to affect bodily states and to connect bodies with places, other bodies, and objects. Thus, in this chapter, the documentaries will be followed as aesthetic productions that make kinship substances matter affectively.

This article takes its theoretical framing from two sources: firstly, from the German philosopher Gernot Böhme's conceptualization of aesthetics and secondly, from Bodil Marie Thomsen's and Carsten Stage's characterization of digital media as signaletic material. Böhme's conceptualization of aesthetics is valuable because it centers on the production and reception of experiences of presence of objects, people, and surroundings. *How* the presence of substances comes to matter in mood-altering ways is a significant but overlooked aspect of how people relate to themselves and others (Böhme 1993, 1995). As a general theory, the new aesthetics complements recent media theoretical interests in the more-than-representational and affective dimension of a digital media culture (Sandbye 2012; Stage 2012; Thomsen 2012; Shaviro 2010). These theoretical perspectives, I argue, are fruitful perspectives on contemporary kinship practices made experiential through digital media

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<sup>4</sup> Here I take issue with what characterizes digital mediations and practices more generally as aesthetic and signaletic productions. This does not mean that these productions are not in any way limited in relation to their transformational force by, for instance, accessibility. The Danish TV documentary can be streamed online but only in Danish. *Technostorks* can be purchased online but, to my knowledge, has been screened publicly only at New York International Independent Film and Video Festival 2006. My online search for documentary material led me to comments from viewers of *Technostorks* indicating that it offers insight into the process of IVF. This, however, does not mean that American or Danish media productions do not share similarities in composition and how they strive to attune the viewer affectively. My aim is not to discuss local or national differences but to draw attention to the way the documentaries are composed as significant for the production of a greater sensibility towards kinship practiced locally and globally.

productions such as *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks*. They are significant because they direct analytical attention toward the “affective, bodily, and relational dimension of mediations” (Stage 2012). Thus at issue is an overlooked force of these mediations—aesthetics—and how they contribute to explorations of the potential of the generative immediacy to capacitate (trans)formations of public perceptions of IVF. As I will show, *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks* are able to intensify an array of dynamics and complexities of kinship practices that strive to matter affectively. Thomsen’s (2012) conceptualization of the signal will be discussed as aesthetic markers in making the sensation of kinship practices visible, audible, and felt.

In what follows, the article first turns to how media representations of infertility and assisted reproduction are discussed as critical for the dynamics and complexity of kinship relations to be encountered by the public (Franklin 1997, 2013). Secondly, I turn to Mary Bouquet’s (2001) discussion of how family photography makes kinship relations appear and function as a kinship substance yet also corsets complexities of kinship practices into representations of particular ways to relate. Finally the article will make the argument, based on examples from *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks*, that these relevant perspectives have to be reconsidered in light of contemporary digital media-cultural practices in which sociality is also a matter of aesthetics. The chapter concludes with brief analytical highlights.

### **Spectacles and progressive narratives**

In *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship* (2013), social anthropologist Sarah Franklin argues that representations of IVF typically reproduce and condense familiar narratives while simultaneously framing IVF as reproduction, the success of which biologically “confirms, or proves, that it works technologically” (2013, 6). In the following, I will expand on her concerns about the public face of ART in media and about experiences with ART represented in media.

The critical approach to media representations of IVF is also present in Franklin’s *Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception* (1997). Here Franklin discusses the consequence of the general public becoming more accustomed to assisted reproduction as a normalization of IVF. Normalizing leads, she argues, to a conceptualization of the traceless optimization as miraculous. The optimization of the body and its “technological dimension” (Franklin 1997, 105) is lost in the public perception of IVF as extraordinary, as “quick-change.”<sup>5</sup> Franklin

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<sup>5</sup> According to media theorist Vivian Sobchack, quick-change characterizes the contemporary perception of the body, where the fascination of the possibility for effortless transformations and the human-material interaction take form as a “morph” (see Sobchack 2000, xiii).

identifies a discrepancy between representations of IVF as a series of progressive stages—with a matching progress narrative—and the experience of the procedure (for the majority of couples) as a serial failure to progress (1997, 23–24). The discrepancy furthermore renders it impossible to acknowledge the exercising of will, long period of hormone treatments, hardship, and endurance required by this process. Even as representations encompass personal details about infertile couples’ jobs, houses, holidays, and happiness as constitutive aspects of their kinship relation, these accounts, Franklin argues, reestablish “the couple within the conventions of heterosexual romance, confirming the unity of the conjugal and the procreative function, buttressed by references to upward mobility, social approval and establishment through becoming a family” (1997, 108). Following Franklin, “the potentially disruptive implications of a ‘test-tube baby’” (1997, 108) serve as a significant narrative plot: an obstacle to overcome successfully.

This point is also present in Franklin’s recent work (2013). Here she centers on how the progress narrative characterizing the public face of IVF results in a critical fading of the ambivalence related to this treatment. IVF has been naturalized, Franklin argues, because the techniques and procedures made by clinicians and researchers in the field have been increasingly embedded within familiar, recognizable details of ordinary, everyday life. What Franklin draws attention to is how IVF, despite its ubiquity, is characterized by being a paradoxical technology: IVF functions as a bridge to new life and new kinds of life, a lens through which to depict changes in the meaning of biology, technology, and kinship (2013, 10). It both confirms the relative and contingent nature of biology and creates new biological relatives. The ambivalence of IVF can be conceptualized as an index of “the norms IVF belongs to and the extent to which it also challenges or contradicts these very same conventions” (2013, 7). Franklin stresses particularly that the ambivalence at stake is a “technological ambivalence,” functioning as a constituent component of biological relativism (2013, 8). Accordingly, Franklin argues, IVF “circulates as a highly public spectacle,” as a sign of the technological that “epitomizes what technology is imagined to be and to do” (2013, 243–244). The “absent presence” of the technological ambivalence discussed by Franklin as characteristic of the public face of IVF can thus be said to structure feelings and cultural perceptions, with profound implications for “critically important processes of sociality, domination and resistance” (Peletz 2001, 414). Following Franklin, Mary Bouquet (2001) adds another perspective to the technological ambivalence of kinship production that involves assisted reproduction by considering the articulation of kinship through (family) photography. I will return to Bouquet’s critical perspective on media technological reproductions of kinship relations later.

According to Franklin, the circular narrative of media representations is an exact

reproduction of a notion of the body that Eugene Thacker (2005) coins “regenerative” and “self-healing.”<sup>6</sup> What is validated in that process is the technological alteration of the body in the pursuit of its “‘natural’ function/state” (2005, 262). Accordingly, what is emphasized is the natural capacity of the body to heal through the assistance of technology, rather than the actual biomedical modification (2005, 266–267): “biology constantly making itself ‘strange’” (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 303, 330).<sup>7</sup> Kinship studies’ interest in the biogenetics lab as a site of kinship production creates the possibility to critically examine the material ways by which the realities of science are enacted. Additionally, it turns attention to how science constitutes its subject of study rather than merely reflecting it (Latour 1999; Strathern 1992a, 1992b; Franklin and McKinnon 2001), and it has proliferated investigations of sites (local, national, virtual, transnational) as significant aspects of kinship relations related to but not limited to ART.

In *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies* (2001), Mary Bouquet discusses the generic conventions of family photography as substantial coding of kinship relations. Bouquet’s perspectives on photography, I argue, are important as they further investigations about the reciprocity between production and reception as well as conventions of “placement or display” for perceptions of kinship circulation also in digital media culture (Bouquet 2001, 85). Her perspectives open for considerations of media as significant materiality for generating connections and for changing notions of kinship. These perspectives relate to similar discussions on how kin is increasingly being explored digitally on the World Wide Web (Pálsson 2007; Helmreich 2001). Inspired by Latour’s (1999) notion of “actants,” this online exploration of kinship focused on materiality and substances exemplifies a shift from a lateral notion of human relatedness (the family tree imagery, Bouquet 2000) to a vertical rhizomatic structure (Deleuze 1988).

These perspectives turn attention to media technologies as important materiality in the formation of kinship, photography included. In order to discuss the significance of photography in relation to kinship formation, photographs, according to Bouquet, need to be approached in a threefold manner: the production side, how photography is structured by conventions about pose, camera angle, background, lighting, etc.; the reception side, the interpretation/decoding of the photograph; and the sites where photographs circulate.

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<sup>6</sup> Thacker highlights how the circular model is a rather persistent yet inadequate characterization of the processes of tissue engineering and in vitro fertilization (2005, 260).

<sup>7</sup> Thacker discusses how biotechnology and biomedicine operate with a spiral rather than circular model of the body. The spiral constitution of the biomedical body is one that “returns to itself in a spiral that simultaneously moves upward (an infinitely reproducible body) and downward (an expendable body)” (2005, 260).

### Visual-substantial representations of kinship

Analogue to the increasingly complex and entangled kinship practices made possible by assisted reproduction, family photography, rather than documenting this complexity, simplifies it by framing particular relations. Consequently, “kinship as we know it” is reproduced. In *Making Kinship, with an Old Reproductive Technology* (2001), Bouquet exemplifies the relevance of family photography to new reproductive technologies. Bouquet centers on the *potential* of family photography to convey how family portraits, which seem to attest to a connectedness of an archetypical hetero nuclear family, may be much more complicated than they appear. She discusses the role of family photography in a paradigmatic shift from a linear conceptualization of human relatedness to a vertical network structure. The democratization of photography had a profound impact on exposing the store of visual traces of relations, promoting the latter conceptualization of kinship (2001, 111). Accordingly, family photography “circulates as a kind of substance that parallels other constitutive substances of kinship” (87) that are “used to make contact, to make kinship with one another” (111).

Simultaneously with photography exposing the dynamics of kinship by making them appear, family photography became desired because of its ability to refer back to and render visible particular relations and groups (111). The complexity and tangled lives that people live after “their respective explosions of chemicals,” according to Bouquet, resulted in photography becoming a substantial code in kinship, translating relational complexities—emotional ties, commercials, desire, and techniques—into visual simplicity that captures and solemnizes families (97). A press photograph from 1997 related to the process of IVF exemplifies Bouquet’s points of the double role of the photography. The photograph, which was part of the publicity around a woman’s giving birth at the age of fifty-six, features an Italian gynecologist holding “his” child, Donelda, while posing with Donelda’s mother. It is a photograph, Bouquet asserts that “could easily fit a family album celebrating a high point of family life” yet in this case “circulates in the imagined communities of newspaper readers” (88).

The photography renders the complexity of kinship involving new reproductive technologies intelligible and simultaneously functions as a “narrative device for unifying and making sense of situations that might otherwise remain alien” (96). A critical aspect of the photograph is that it cuts all out that goes into constituting the frame, which in Donelda’s case is her murdered brother, the Dutch state, Dutch gynecologists, the egg and sperm donors, and nursing staff. Thus, the framing solemnizes particular relations (96). The conventions of photography are just as unnatural as any diagram (e.g., the family tree) that in a similar manner freezes relationships by prioritizing marriage and conception as decisive moments in kinship (105). Photography corsets relations into recognizable forms and functions as a persuasive associative or rhetorical device in which the rhizomatic structure

“encourages people to cling to and/or (re)constitute what they can in the way of tangible evidence of meaningful relations” (2001, 93). Photography practices in relation to ART thus end up with connections of familiar dots rather than less familiar dots (Weston 2001).<sup>8</sup>

A focus on mediations as aesthetic productions is particularly relevant because such a perspective acknowledges Bouquet’s and Franklin’s discussions of the function of mediations as more/other than mere neutral vessels of retrospective reflections. The significance of aesthetics relates to the polyvalent ways in which ART is recombined with people, surroundings, and objects and the potentials of this composed, layered material to capacitate affective situations/events from which transformations can proceed. In the following, I will discuss two documentaries and illustrate the relevance of aesthetics in discussions of the potential of digitally produced mediations of infertility and assisted reproduction to transform public perception of kinship involving IVF.

### **Aesthetics, presence, and signals**

Although in the following I do not analyze digital photography or photographic practices, these perspectives are nonetheless relevant for my material. *Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic* are digitally mediated material, and as such, they are characterized by bearings similar to digital photography. Mette Sandbye (2012)<sup>9</sup> suggests that photography’s ability to document “what-has-been” characterizes the “old” analogue medium.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, new digital photographic practices on the Internet move out of this analogue model and instead show “what-is-going-on,” or *presence*. What is neglected in the study of photography as signs to be read, as texts, or as memory embalment is the significance of how photography is practiced, its affect, the creation of “presence,” sociability, and community (Sandbye 2012). Susan Murray (2008) and Søren Mørk Petersen (2009) draw similar conclusions pointing to photographic practice and presentation on blogs and websites as closer to *life*, as what is registered are the banal aspects of everyday life that is shared (Mørk Petersen 2009, 149). Online family albums, blogs, and websites are about “an immediate, rather fleeting display of one’s discovery of the small and mundane (such as bottles, cupcakes, trees, debris, and architectural elements)” (Murray 2008, 151). The

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<sup>8</sup> See K. Weston. “Kinship, Controversy, and the Sharing of Substance: The Race/Class Politics of Blood Transfusion.” In *Relative Values. Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, edited by Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon. Duke University Press, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The online paper features no page or paragraph numbers.

<sup>10</sup> “What-has-been” is reflected on by Roland Barthes, and its fulfilling of a “mummification desire” to embalm time is discussed by André Bazin. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980 [1945]).

same can be said about the documentaries, which, I will argue, make the presence of people, objects, and surroundings matter affectively.

According to the German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1993, 1995), aesthetics as an analytical tool entails the potential to attend to matters of everyday situations and their sensuous conditioning of actions and reactions as productions of attunement. Analytically the new aesthetics enables a twofold approach that in relation to the documentaries requires a centering on the reception site, on perception “as the experience of presence of persons, objects, and environments” (1993, 116). In addition to a focus on reception, considerations of the production side are equally important. In relation to the digital TV and film documentaries, this not only encompasses the real-time recording but also postcinematic practices of “giving things, environments, or also human beings such properties from which something can proceed” (1993, 123). As compositions of composed, layered materials, the documentaries do not represent experiences with infertility and IVF but rather produce experiences with the potential to (trans)form perceptions of kinship practices involving ART. Although Böhme’s new aesthetics is a general theory, it is nevertheless relevant for considerations of the potential of nonrepresentational media productions and their compositions.

Whereas the new aesthetics as conceptualized by Böhme enables a twofold approach to digital media productions centering on the production and reception side, a new media-cultural movement from sign to signal enables a particular focus on the properties of digital media as generative, making the sensation visible, audible, and felt (Thomsen 2012). Mediations thus can be approached as signaletic materials with the potential to intensify (but also diminish) matters of kinship. In this media ecology, where the components of the expression are multiple, they nevertheless “pass through a stage of being processed in the form of digital code.” In effect, the distinction between reality and its multiple simulations become meaningless; “they are all woven together in one and the same fabric” (Shaviro 2010, 8). This does not, however, mean that these productions are less aesthetical; they too have the potential to affect us.

As compositions combining layers of input, including but not limited to the sound of a ticking clock, a voice-over, a prerecorded song, and real-time recordings, *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks* exemplify Shaviro’s and Thomsen’s characterization of digital media. The recorded imagery is altered on a computer, manipulated, and scenes from different times and places are combined (Shaviro 2007, 65). In relation to Böhme’s theory, this signaletic material can be approached both from the production side, as formal features, and in terms of its affectivity, as it qualifies the sensuous experiences of, in this case, kinship practices and matters in the documentaries.

The signal is a useful concept emphasizing the intermediary, transversal, and relational aspects of digital media productions, according to Thomsen (2012). The concept points to the more-than-representational and affective dimension of the documentaries, composed to intensify *experiences* of infertility and assisted reproduction—a now-here (Thomsen 2012), what *is* (Sandbye 2012), or presence (Böhme 1993). It turns attention to the documentaries as new distributions of the sensible (Thomsen 2012), which, I argue, counters Franklin’s and Bouquet’s discussions of what characterizes media representations of infertility, IVF, and kinship. Kirilenko’s aim to document the process of IVF honestly in *Technostorks* is linked to the ability to make matters of kinship visible, audible, and felt rather than to represent it. Audio signals, such as a voice-over, a ticking clock, and a prerecorded song, and signals such as color, light, and sound have either a diminished or heightened function as aesthetic markers. This opens for a consideration of TV and film documentaries on infertility and assisted reproduction as other than reinstallations of kinship as we know it. The potential of the documentaries is precisely that their transformative effect is reducible neither to their aesthetic-affective markers nor “to subjective state of minds” (Böhme 2003, 5).<sup>11</sup>

The concept of the signal turns attention to the force of varying modalities of “blocks of affect” that Steven Shaviro suggests is a crucial part of the compositions of digital mediations (2010, 3). The affective quality of the images we encounter in the documentaries also arises due to the exposition time of the image and effects intensifying or diminishing the force of signals. As “digital coding has made communication very direct, immediate, and very close to, for example, oral, face-to-face authentic experience” (Thomsen 2012), aesthetics renders it possible to analyze how this experience of presence is produced. Similarly Böhme’s new aesthetics directs attention to the generative qualities of experiences in terms of their potential to impact understandings of kinship practices involving IVF. In the following, I will present the TV documentary *The Baby Clinic* and the film documentary *Technostorks* and additionally discuss these as aesthetic signalitic material that can be said to sensuously condition the viewer’s experiences of couples undergoing a cycle of IVF.

### ***Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic*—the material**

Documentary filmmaker Andrei Kirilenko’s *Technostorks* is a fifty-one-minute-long documentary film, complete with a title sequence and end credits. The film was screened at New York International Independent Film and Video Festival 2006, where it subsequently was given the award Best

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the documentaries allow me to focus only on the production of mood and to discuss the potential of such affective attunement. What they do not grant access to are the thoughts and feelings of the viewers and how these impact the involvement in what the documentaries generate.

Independent Health Documentary. The film was initiated by the experiences of Kirilenko and his wife, Shelly, of six years of infertility and multiple fertility treatments and their need at that time for material centering on the many aspects of in vitro fertilization—the physical, the emotional, and the scientific. *Technostorks* follows three couples from Washington whose medical histories vary, as does the number of cycles they have undergone before the one followed.

*The Baby Clinic*, produced by Koncern TV and Film Production, began airing on December 3, 2012, and ended with the eighth episode on February 4, 2013; reruns were aired during June and July 2013. The duration of each episode is forty-two minutes. The TV documentary had seventy-five thousand viewers and placed four times in the top twenty most-watched programs on TV4 in the period it was aired. It is a multiplatform-oriented series accessible via the TV channel's webpage and an app offering access to a gallery with pictures of the couples, a news section covering additional information on infertility, fertility treatments, sexual transmitted diseases, factors influencing fertility such as age, etc., and direct links to streaming services (nu.tv) where full episodes can be watched. In this paper, I engage only with the documentary material as aired on TV4. Similar to *Technostorks*, the main aim of the documentary, the TV station's website states, is to give the viewers an open and honest insight into what it means to be reproductively challenged, how life is organized around fertility treatments, the personal emotional distress, and reactions of friends and family.<sup>12</sup> In the documentary series, six couples from different regions in Denmark are followed during a cycle of treatment. The number of cycles they have undergone before the one followed varies.

The overall story line in *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks* is a three-act structure, which includes an introduction of the couples, preliminary information on their medical history, and key points on the treatment. This structure is followed by the couples' treatment and medications, the side effects, the emotional toil, and finally the result of the treatment. In other words, we follow the couples before, during, and after a cycle of IVF—a seemingly straightforward progressive narrative. But *Technostorks* complicates this narration as it oscillates between the three couples telling their stories as they talk and move around in their homes, fertility clinic, and cars; half a dozen experts highlighting the key points; and the voice-over explaining things. This oscillation is also characteristic for *The Baby Clinic* between the couples introduced; their home (cooking, eating); walks in parks, the zoo, and local surroundings; shopping (local and abroad on a trip to New York); and clinics where they discuss treatments, possibilities, and results with experts, their families, and friends.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.nutv.dk/video?video=4178> last accessed 25-10-2014

## Relational (trans)formations

*Technostorks* and *The Baby Clinic* emphasize that their aim is to engage with and counter the public face of IVF as a sensational quick change as they follow the couples in everyday life situations during a cycle of IVF. For Kirilenko, presenting the truth about the process of IVF also requires a break with the public face of IVF as an always-successful procedure. *Technostorks* aims, Kirilenko notes, to be true to the statistics on achieved pregnancy through IVF,<sup>13</sup> and hence two of the three couples featured end their cycle IVF. A successful quick change is also countered in episode 8 of *The Baby Clinic* (Ill. 1):

*Danni and Mette are leaving their house with their dogs. They walk in a forest by the sea. They sit while watching their two dogs play with leaves. Danni wears a pink winter hat with earflaps similar to Mette's. They keep a close eye on the dogs playing while revealing their big decision: to end their pursuit of fertility, their baby dream.*

*Danni: "...otherwise we could go on the next twenty years with 'Does it happen or does it not?' and 'Should we spend more money?' It would be a long and monotonous grind of fertility treatments in order to have a child."*

*Mette: "Yes, and in the pursuit of this... 'When should you start over with the injections?' and 'When can you start again?' and..."*

*Danni: "It has all just been too hard."*

*(The Baby Clinic (Babyklinikken) Episode 8, January 29, 2013, my translation).*

This sequence is not only significant in revealing critically engaged couples in the pursuit of kinship in terms of their reflections on the impact of IVF on their lives but is also interesting as it enables alternative ways of living and explains actions usually not part of the public face of IVF: ending the pursuit of fertility before successfully having “overcome” the obstacle of infertility.<sup>14</sup> This alternative way of living (with infertility) is made experiential by the real-time recording of the couple in their everyday surroundings, the dogs, and the close-ups of their earflap hats. The close-up of Danni wearing the hat while revealing their decision to end their pursuit of biological kinship through IVF dismantles the possibility that this “alternative” way of living can be turned into a spectacle. Rather the presence of the earflap hat—its haptic quality<sup>15</sup> (Staving Thomsen 2012) of the texture, pattern, and color—the walk by the sea, and the dogs playing create sensations that move us as viewers. This production of movement entails the potential to forward engagement in ways of living rather than confirming

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<sup>13</sup> Beckman, *Waiting Woom*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Equally interesting is that what follows in the episode is not considerations on how kinship otherwise can be pursued where adoption often is introduced as “obvious” option—a problematic but common outline placing adoption as a secondary altruistic choice. This intersection of ART and adoption has recently been debated in Danish newspapers (see <http://www.information.dk/492353> - last accessed 15-10-2014).

<sup>15</sup> Staving Thomsen (2012) refers to the term as it is discussed by Laura U. Marks in relation to documentaries, film, video, and new media where the haptic is the capacity of visual perception to experience a kind of “touch” when looking at patterns, carvings, and details in woven materials.

particular ways of living and relating, which, Franklin argues, media representations encompassing personal details effectuate. The composition of the signaletic material makes the earflap hat matter affectively. The force of the composition is its ability to make this material bodily and relationally matter sensuously—the haptic quality serves as an aesthetic marker.



Ill 1. Frame grab from *The Baby Clinic (Babyklinikken)*, Episode 8, January 29, 2013

The documentaries, owing to their exposition time and close-ups of the objects, people, and environments, distribute the quality of them as present. In *The Baby Clinic* this is exemplified not only by an earflap hat: in the first episode of the TV documentary, the presence of banal aspects of everyday life counters the usual presentation of IVF as miraculous and quick:

*Sarah is in her apartment. She is preparing to go to the local shop to buy a pregnancy test. She has to get dressed and is filmed while she ties her boots and wraps the scarf around her neck. The camera follows her as she walks out of the door, pushes the button to make the traffic light switch, and waits to cross the street. The camera follows her into the shop, where Sarah talks quietly to herself, looking around the row for what she needs. The camera follows her to the counter where she asks where they keep pregnancy tests. The shopkeeper finds a test for her. “Oh, so they were back there after all,” she responds as he hands her the test. She pays and leaves (Ill. 2).*



Ill. 2 Frame grab from *The Baby Clinic (Babyklinikken)*, Episode 1, December 4, 2012

The time spent in the shop shows the experience of shopping, of not being able to find what one is looking for but to discover that it was where it usually is. It is a banal situation of lived experience of everyday life that appears through the framing, surroundings, people, angles, lighting, and their constellation, or, as Shaviro notes, a block of affect. Referencing Böhme, the aim is to make present her experience of having to wait for the result of the pregnancy test. The sequence intensifies this experience, epitomizing Shaviro's point about how the affective quality of digital images lies beyond their representational function, as the affectivity of what we have encountered arises due to the layered, timed exposition. In effect, I argue, kinship is made experiential as a process.

This block of affect is also composed to move us through the sensuous impact of everyday lived experiences, like a close-up of Sarah pushing the button on the traffic light. The close-up creates a haptic experience of the round, golden button—we can almost feel the cold, round, even surface of the button and how it feels to push it down. Another clip from *The Baby Clinic* particularly stresses the sensuousness of the presence of buns, food being blended, and the kitchen, exemplifying Murray's and Mørk Petersen's arguments about digital media practices offering a discovery of the ordinary:

*Trine and Martin are in their kitchen cooking. She is mixing ingredients with a hand blender while he stands in front of*

the oven. He opens it and takes the baking tray out. The camera centers on the buns while he repeatedly taps them in order to establish whether they are done. He talks with Trine about them being soft. After centering on the buns, the camera zooms out, and he puts the tray with the buns on the kitchen table and turns the oven off (Ill. 3).



Ill. 3 Frame grabs from *The Baby Clinic (Babyklinikken)*, Episode 1, December 4, 2012

Such presence of buttons, buns, and food being mixed reflects a development of a communal aesthetic that does not respect hierarchies of what might be considered important in the process of IVF and kinship practices. The documentaries indicate a shift from those things that, according to Franklin, have been traditionally privileged in media representations of IVF to that which is minute and/or peripheral. The documentaries are characterized by an overload of aesthetic markers of space, time, and modalities of everyday life—the presence and haptic quality of the button, buns being tapped, soy milk, and a hand mixer serving just as a few examples. Whereas such encounters for Franklin amount to a reestablishing of conventions and confirmations of particular ways of living, I propose following Dereck McCormack in considering that they, as aesthetic-affective productions, are “generative intervals of potential from which new thinking, feeling, and moving, however minor, might emerge” (2013, 10).

The generative intervals in both documentaries are related to the constant oscillation between different spaces, close-ups of people, objects, and things but also longer intervals that through close-ups, angles, lights, etc. turn our attention toward what is present, allowing for an exploration of the matters and process of IVF. The voice-over and the sound of a loud ticking clock in *Technostorks* occurring more frequently as the cycle comes to its end prepares the viewer sensuously for a new stage in the process of IVF. These layers inform and create an awareness of the amount of stages of IVF, and as signals they intensify a feeling of being overwhelmed (by the flow of information) and tension (the end of the cycle comes nearer with every tick, and so does the result). In *Technostorks* the feeling of ambiguity becomes experiential, related to Rodney’s ambivalence about IVF as a questioning of God’s work, his desire for children, and Wendy’s emotionless expression:

*Wendy and Rodney are sitting in their sofa. The camera has closed in on them and stays there as Rodney says that their family is God fearing. “If God wants to put a child in our arms, I am all for it. If he wants us to serve as messengers or do some other duties, then I am for that too. I don’t want to get caught up in a conflict where I question God’s work. That is my biggest obstacle in this whole ordeal. However, I have a strong desire for having children” (Ill. 4).*

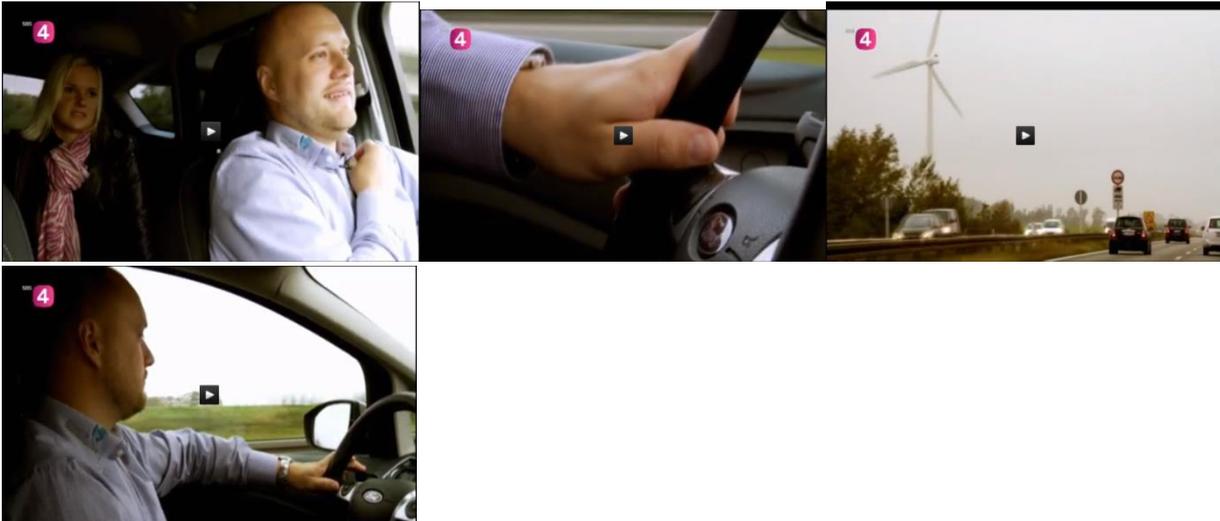
The stillness of Wendy’s facial expression while Rodney talks creates a feeling of uncertainty effectuated by the framing of them, as she hardly moves a facial muscle the entire time he is talking. The origin of the affective disorientation cannot be traced but is linked to, following Böhme, the constellation of their appearance—their placement in the room and in relation to each other, his tone of voice, her numb facial expression, the lighting, the angle of the camera.



Ill.4 Frame grab from *Technostorks*, 2006

The examples above not only illustrate how the potential to (trans)form perceptions of kinship practices involving IVF is related to the production of presence of particular settings, objects, and people and their constellation; they also make moments of remarkable idleness and silence matter affectively, such as in the sequence in *Technostorks* featuring Wendy and Rodney, as well as a sequence in *The Baby Clinic* featuring Danni and Mette in their car:

*Mette and Danni are sitting in their car going to the hospital. A voice-over explains where they are going and why—Mette is having a surgery before they can start their third cycle of IVF. While the voice-over informs us, the camera films the couple in the car. The voice-over is replaced by Mette explaining that she always feels strange when they are on the way in the car. She wants to proceed with their cycle of IVF but is scared the doctors will find something bad inside her. While she explains this, the camera films her sitting in the backseat. As Danni comments on this, the camera films his hands stirring the wheel. While he talks, the camera films the road, what they pass on their way—a windmill, traffic, road signs, landscape (Ill. 5).*



Ill.5 Frame grab from *The Baby Clinic (Babyklinikken)* Episode 1, December 4, 2014

The sequence forces our attention to the banal aspects of their trip and lets us discover the small and mundane (road sign, windmill, landscape) enabled by the exposition time of each camera angle. This angle is generated through the composition of the situation—Mette on the backseat becomes an important position from which something can emerge as it enables the camera to close in on her bodily gestures. The composition in this situation, the exposition time of inactivity, the couple sitting idle in their car, shifts in voice-overs (Mette, Danni, and the speaker) informing, explaining, and commenting produce a state of affective disorientation or ambiguity. The documentaries this way counter Franklin’s argument that ambivalence related to IVF has faded in the wake of its naturalization. The force of documentaries is making the frictions of kinship practices present through the production of ambivalence. The feeling of ambivalence also appears in a sequence where Wendy is injected with hormone-stimulating medicine by her mother:

*Wendy and her mother are standing in the dining room at a table filled with bottles and packages with medicine, Wendy’s mother holds the needle and medication bottle very close to her face, and she reads on the bottle. The camera shifts to Wendy, who stands a bit further away while affirming that it sounds right. The camera shifts to her mother and in a close-up centers on her as she tries to remove the needle cap and prepare it for the extraction of medicine from the bottle. The camera shifts to Wendy, who reads a patient package insert. She then takes a pill out of a package and swallows it. The camera shifts to the mother, this time a bit longer; she has trouble with the extracting. The camera shifts to Wendy, who continually reminds her mother to assure that all air is out. The mother walks to Wendy with the needle. The camera zooms in on Wendy as the mother is about to inject her. Wendy utters a sound; she looks scared and she cries while repeating that she is not ready. The mother squeezes the flesh together on Wendy’s arm in order “to make the injection less painful,” she states, while Wendy uneasily moves around, repeating that she is not ready yet. “I am scared,” she cries. She*

dries her eyes with the back of her hand says, “I am sorry.” Her mother injects her (Ill.6).



Ill.6 Frame grabs from *Technostorks*, 2006

The many affective augmentations in this block/composition intensify the couple’s facial expressions and bodily gestures through close-ups and zooms in and out, sounds of sniffing and crying, the texture of Wendy’s skin, their place in the room and in relation to each other, and their tone of voice, which show the experience of how they react to each other and make it possible to move us through the rhythm of the interaction. The clip also makes bottles, patient information leaflets, needles, flesh, and the kitchen space matter affectively, matters usually left out of the frame of the public face of IVF.

The power of the documentaries is the production of affectively calibrated kinship practices: a mood-altering now-here that is revealed also is generated by the peripheral and ordinary. Accordingly the documentaries do not function as evidence of possible and impossible relations, which, Bouquet argues, is the case with family photographs. Rather, as exemplified, the presence of an array of matters of kinship and their constellation in the documentaries contribute to the continuous investigation of what goes into kinship relations and create a sensibility toward the polyrhythmic aspects of kinship relations through *what is*.

## Outro

As I have argued, Franklin’s and Bouquet’s critical perspectives on media representations have their own right. Certainly Franklin’s observation that media represent the circular model—the public face of assisted reproduction—is relevant for a rich body of kinship studies engaged in this critical reenactment of IVF. The same can be said about Franklin’s discussion about the progressive narrative, which she notes is characteristic for media representations of assisted reproduction since ART as spectacle leaves very little focus on kinship involving IVF as a dynamic and complex process. Equally, Mary Bouquet’s arguments about the conventions of photography are valuable. The reciprocity between production/reception she identifies as relevant in discussions of family photography is also relevant in discussions of *The Baby Clinic* and *Technostorks*, namely their critical potential to intensify or diminish aspects of kinship practices that influence how kinship is understood. I have pointed to how digital

media culture is characterized by being aesthetic signaletic productions composed to give things, environment, persons, and their constellation powers of attunement. As analytical tools, the concepts of signal and aesthetics complement each other in an analytical approach encompassing a focus on the production side and on reception, *how* the process and polyvalent matters of kinship becomes present, and the generative potential of this *how*. Rather than corseting kinship practices, the composition of the documentaries make an array of matters intelligible, implicating dynamics and complexities of kinship involving IVF. The compositions of the aesthetical attunement are by no means uncritical, as the aesthetic signaletic material in these documentaries affects how kinship is understood. It directs attention to how these materials structure feelings, which requires a shift in considerations of the material from representations and a one-directional reception mode to the power of aesthetics and participation of the viewer.

I have argued that the documentaries counter the public face of IVF as spectacles and engage with the understanding of IVF as a miraculous quick change. Ambivalence related to IVF has not faded but appears in the documentaries, making frictions matter in what is understood as a seamless procedure. I have pointed to merely three examples in this paper: the production of haptic experiential qualities, the presence of the small and mundane, and ambivalence, leaving a material yet to be exhausted for aesthetic signals that make the complexities and dynamics in digital mediations of kinship practices visible, audible, and felt.

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## **Atmospheres of Belonging.**

### **The Aesthetic Qualities of the Japanese Installation "wasted" on (in) fertility and American Video Blogs (vlogs) about IVF on YouTube**

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#### **Abstract**

The Japanese installation “wasted” (2009) by Tomoko Mukaiyama is a remarkable work of art on the theme of (in)fertility orchestrating an atmosphere of affectivity through a cathedral-like space out of thousands of white dresses. In a similar way American video blogs (vlogs) about IVF on YouTube orchestrate aesthetic- affective atmospheres valuating ontological and emotional relatedness in a biotech century that understands life as unique and yet modifiable. Existing research on narratives of IVF experience (Kato and Sleeboom Faulkner 2011) suggest that reproductive technologies in Japan advances without taking the feelings and ontological valuations of the reproductively challenged into consideration. This paper argues that the Japanese and American sociocultural understandings of the fertility projects as essential individualistic and rational pursuits of relatedness that echo the understanding of the body and life in terms of reproduction technology converge. All though the installation of Mukaiyama and vlogs on experiences with IVF seemingly reflect a distinctly idiosyncratic experience project, the aesthetic - affective orchestration presuppose a shared bodily being in relation - an appeal for recognition through affectivity exemplifying an intersubjective orientation. The world of Mukaiyama’s installation and the American vlogs lifts the individual stories to the universal whereby, I argue, a possibility arises to understand how individuals oscillate between involving and detaching elements responding to the paradoxical ways life is understood in the biotech century as both unique and modifiable. Through the orchestration of atmospheres of belonging, an active bodily and critical emotional engagement in emotional and ontological significance of the body is enabled.

## Introduction

In the biotech century the continuous developments in the realms of reproduction technology fuel a perception of the human life as molecular and the body as fragmentary influencing on how pursuits of fertility are perceived. Kato and Sleeboom Falkner points to how pursuits of fertility in America and Japan are discussed as essentially individualistic and rational (Kato and Sleeboom Falkner, 2011: 444). The individualized and differentiated fertility treatments reflect a movement from optimization of the infertile body as normalization project to a hedonistic spun customization, proliferating an array of new bioethical concerns and issues of belonging greatly influenced by assisted reproduction. Neglected in the discussions of perceptions of the human body in a biotech century, Kato and Sleeboom Falkner argues, is how individuals ontological valuations of embryo defines their attitude towards fragments of their bodies involved by assisted reproduction (Kato and Sleeboom Falkner, 2011: 444). Following this perspective I want to propose, that what is at stake in *wasted* and the *vlogs of Silvia and Peter* are orchestrations of belonging that centers on the a valuation of the human body and emotions as shared points of reference, that in turn define how they tune atmospheres of belonging. In the following I will discuss two expressions of (in) fertility, where atmospheres of belonging are orchestrated through which an active and critical engagement in emotional and ontological significance of the body is enabled. The first work discussed is the installation *Wasted* by Japanese artist Tomoko Mukaiyama from 2009, the other is a video blog (vlog) produced, populated and distributed by *Silvia and Peter* (2009)<sup>i</sup> an American couple expressing their experiences with in vitro fertilization; IVF. *Silvia and Peter's vlogs* seemingly reflect a distinctly self-referential experience project but presupposes, as I will argue, a shared bodily being in relation as key point of reference. This enables the viewer to involve themselves in the strange and yet familiar fertility project mediated. While the same premise is at stake in Mukaiyama's installation it is not conditioned by intimate close ups. Through the abstract cathedral-like space out of thousands of white dresses (in)fertility is presented in an unrecognizable form with no place despite the gigantic and excessive space for individual and personal experiences or narrations of (in) fertility. But it is, as I will argue, precisely the abstraction that allows for a breakaway from existing perceptions of (in) fertility. The affective disorientation caused by the abstraction allows for individual experiences to elicit. In both the *vlog* and *wasted* atmospheres of belonging are orchestrated, which address and reflect the dialectics of involving and detaching elements of experiences with (in) fertility responding to the paradoxical ways life is understood in the biotech century.

## Atmospheres

Atmosphere<sup>ii</sup> is an expansion of the classic concept of aesthetics and offers insight into how the everyday production of atmospheres and the qualities of products condition the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world as the German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1995) has put it. It is an aesthetics that is concerned with the description of the dialectical connection between the qualities of our surroundings and our emotional state as a general condition for our valuation of what we experience. In order to address to aspects of aestheticization of everyday life we must according to Böhme focus on the production of atmospheres *and* their affective experience quality, thus atmosphere refers to what is aesthetically relevant; that what is sensed. The aesthetic contains our norms and values in a concrete sensuously form (Böhme, 1995: 31)

Atmospheres, Böhme argues, implicitly contains a perception of something; it is orchestrated in order to cause a specific reaction, although it remains difficult to trace the specific object of affectivity (Böhme, 1995:21). This lack of transparency has led to a discrediting of the experience of aestheticization as hedonistic, superficial, and beautification; a seduction which by definition has been viewed as manipulative. However seduction and orchestration of atmospheres are key elements of perception; through fascination we invest our attention and the quality of this experience is valued. Through the aesthetic value attached to the orchestration of our surroundings/experiences, we invest us in these. The aesthetic object fascinates us in ways that evoke fascination influencing on how we organize our lives. Atmospheres thus are characterized by a dynamics of power between individuals need for being present in surroundings that makes them feel at ease and through this presence to affect the surroundings/ set the atmosphere. Individuals are actively involved in the orchestration of experience qualities. The concept of Atmosphere in this regard opens for a sensibility towards the conditions we live under, hereunder but not limited to the manipulation and power of these elements.

Swedish media theorist André Jansson (2002) explores the intersections of cultural products, communities, practices, and particular how people interpret and evaluate transformations in the representational sphere. Consume, he argues, is communication, and hence not about a products functional value, but instead the image provided/ identified with the product. To emphasize the process of how individuals disassemble, transform, and give new meaning to their

experience/consume he suggests the terms encoding, decoding, and re-encoding (Jansson 2002, 19). He is particularly interested in the dynamic of signification and interpretation stressing how it results in a reflexive accumulation, where people orient themselves towards simulations creating an image culture. Their endless re-encodings create the illusion of a direct experience. Hence the re-encodings are anti-aesthetic in so far as they are make-believe or second natures; they do not refer to an original concrete experience, but are fragments transformed into new meaning. Jansson points to, how classical aesthetic distinctions such as taste, lifestyle and consume must be abandoned in order to capture the new genealogies and topologies characterizing the polyrhythmic aspects of contemporary image culture.

Both Jansson and Böhme focus on the production of mediated consumption/ atmospheres and its connection to the good life; our valuation of atmospheres. They address how the interrelation between the generation of experience qualities and their economic value is problematic, in the sense that this relation affects us in specific ways; consumption. Jansson and Böhme however also address how individuals play a crucial part in the production of atmospheres as actively involved in the encoding, decoding and re-encoding of experiences.

The American theorist Sianne Ngai (2005) argues along the lines of Böhme for an extension of the concept of aesthetics. She notes, that we need to take the trivial feelings such as envy, irritation, paranoia, and fear of exclusion into consideration as these emotions also attune our bodies and influence on our experiences and perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world. The affective orchestration in this regard not only relates to pleasure, wants and needs but also ugly feelings which according to Ngai's Adorno inspired arguments fuel the capitalistic system of production. Arguing that dysphoric feelings ( Ngai 2005: 11) are the fuel the capitalist society runs on, echoes Lauren Berlant's (2011) notion that contemporary society is characterized by "Cruel Optimism" (Berlant, 2011: 3). The focal point of Berlant (2011) and Ngai (2005) is how our relations to the world is understood as opportunities, possibilities and chances but does not necessarily result in them (Ngai, 2005:4). Taking the trivial feelings into account poses the possibility of addressing the role of ugly feelings in the setting of atmospheres pointing to, Ngai notes, their role in the aestheticization of life as understood in terms of Berlant as a cruel optimism.

For Böhme the critical potential of an aesthetic theory of production of atmospheres and experience quality address in terms of Ngai the naturalization of aestheticization as the only way to obtain the

good life (Böhme, 1995: 37). In that sense Böhme and Ngai both note that (ugly) feelings expand and transform categories for aesthetic feelings which our surroundings set the stage for, and are characterized by being non-cathartic; they do not offer satisfaction (Ngai, 2005:6). Atmospheres of non-cathartic feelings in that regard produce and foreground the unredeemed allowing for an attunement and contagiousness appealing for recognition of this state of impasse as a shared emotional state characterizing contemporary life. In relation to the production of atmospheres in the perspective of Ngai the polyrhythmic aspects of the tuned spaces is addressed; it is not only through the affective recognizable settings we are affected but also through the moments of striking inactivity. What is produced are experience qualities of ambiguity; a state of affective disorientation that fascinates and results in involvement “in a particular emphatic way” (Ngai, 2005:12). Atmospheres of ugly feelings promote an ironic distance which the nontrivial feelings are unable to, that enables involvement in the state of impasse related to the fantasy of the good life ever unreachable.

The new aesthetics critical potential consists of a critique of the perception of how only a specific atmosphere affects us, such as Art stated by Walter Benjamin (1937) or the influence on the perception of subjectivity by the biotechnological realm argued by Nikolas Rose (2007). What is neglected is the orchestration of our everyday life and its polyrhythmic characteristics. The concept of atmosphere however also offers critical insight into the naturalization of aestheticization; and its claim as *the* perspective of the world.

Atmospheres are first and foremost phenomenological; they sharpen the senses. Humans must accordingly to Böhme be understood as bodily anchored in the world; we experience the world bodily (Böhme 1995:23). The experience of the presence of humans, objects and surroundings and the awareness of this presence points to the centrality of affect in the process of perception and their power to increase or diminish our possibilities to act and react on the organization of our life world.

*Wasted* and the *vlogs of Silvia and Peter* orchestrate atmospheres which experience qualities foreground certain imaginings of the world but also appeals to experience it from a different perspective. The affectivity of the atmosphere in the *vlogs* and *wasted* is related to their contagious ability on a bodily and emotional level, to attune the viewer/visitor to the banal and sensational bodily and emotional aspects of the (in) fertility projects mediated. The involvement in and detachment from the bodily

and emotional strange and yet familiar elements is at same time presupposed and challenged by the aesthetic-affective dimension.

### **Tomoko Mukaiyama's *wasted***

The abstract cathedral-like space of thousands of white dresses in *wasted* (2009) engage the visitor on a concrete aesthetic- affective level through the walk through and touch of the dresses, torn and blood soaked linen hanging at the center of the installation, and an invitation to contribute with own stories. In *Waterchildren*, a documentary on *wasted* from 2011, Tomoko Mukaiyama notes that the installation is connected to her realization of the expiration of her ability to give birth, and that the installation this way is about the ability to give life, life itself and death.<sup>iii</sup> Visitors are invited to actively engage with the installation by contributing their own menstruation blood to one of the 12.000 dresses and share their thoughts about the meaning of this blood. Their narratives in form of video, photos, text, poetry, objects, paintings provide inspiration for Mukaiyama's improvisations of Bach's Goldberg Variations, a way for her to connect the many individual stories brought about by the engagement with the installation; stories of oneself and others. In that sense *wasted* illustrates the fragmentary re-encoding, as argued by Jansson. The center of the installation where blood soaked, torn dresses hang heavily down provides the gauzy abstract work with an ontological gravity that also is reflected in the title of the work. The work is as a visitor reflects" a requiem for the life that had the potential of being born but is washed away; life ultimately lost" (Water Children, 2011).

In the documentary *Water Children* (2011) the work of Mukaiyama is added an informational component extending the work as an expression of an artist experience of loss to the stories of individuals and couples on meanings of (in)fertility. The installation is engaged in taking the feelings and valuations of the visitor regarding the (in) ability to give life into consideration. In *Water Children* (2011) the installation is taken to the village Sanga Mura<sup>iv</sup> in Japan where most residents never have visited a museum. The abstraction of the installation however is not viewed as problematic on the contrary the experience quality of the cathedral-like space aspirates through its aesthetic and affective dimension for narratives about something shared. Through tiny sparks of sign and gestures the installation attune the body of the visitor, the organic form of the installation with the gauzy, transparent, and white dresses leads the visitor further into the center of the work; from sociocultural norms, values and ideals of (in) fertility to their own experiences.



Ill.1: Frame grab from the documentary *Water Children*, 2011

This way Mukaiyama on the level of abstraction addresses the sociocultural understanding of pursuits of /loss of fertility. The many layers of anonymous, neutral, assembly line dresses (Ill.1) exemplifies the understandings of the pursuit of infertility as strange rational project and the body as a commodity. The abstraction displays our powerlessness regarding the biotechnological and bio-economic powers at play; their organization of contemporary lives. Thus the form and content at the same time detaches the visitor from other perspectives on (in) fertility than those discussed in Japan, but also involves the visitor in those discussions. With the transparent assembly line dresses Mukaiyama draws attention to the fantasy of the transparent as well as transformable body, a body that can be identified, isolated, manipulated, mobilized and recombined as noted by Nikolas Rose (Rose 2007). The installation also addresses this understanding of the body in terms of the location in Japans rural area Sanga Mura. Mura; one of the three types of waste, and waste reduction are key concepts in the Japanese industry, which focus on profitability through waste reduction (Taiichi, 1988: 18). This approach is implemented in Toyota's Production System (TPS) and aligns with the biomedical and technological perception of the body of great economic value.



Ill.2 Frame grab from the documentary *Water Children*, 2011

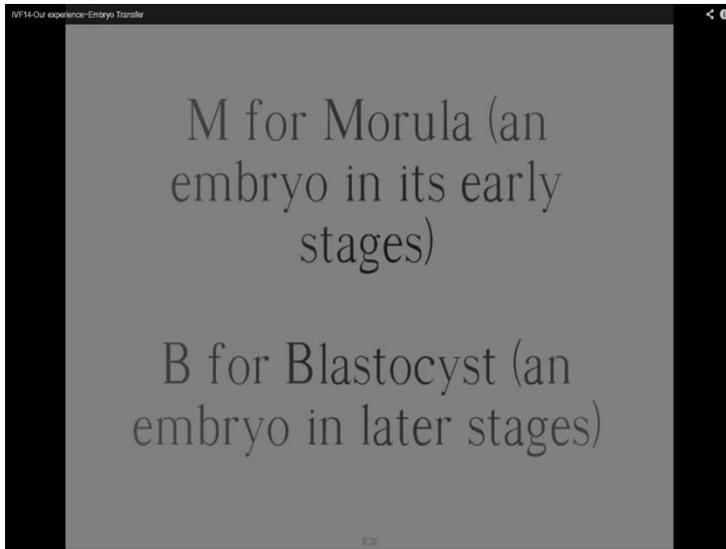
At the center of *Wasted* the natural function state of the body is put forward: it's (in) ability to produce life. Framed by the assembly line dresses the installation at the same time addresses the commodification of the body; the perception, that the life washed away is one of bio economic value and hence unexploited. By adding gravity through the blood soaked dresses (Ill.2), Mukaiyama makes the invisible visible, anchoring the visitor ontologically, which seems to reflect Roses notion, that we are not becoming less biological but more (Rose 2007:20). Centering the (in) ability to produce life could exemplify a concern for dehumanization; a concern of how the body's ability to produce life in Japan is understood and approached. Through the title and abstraction an atmosphere of belonging is orchestrated, an attunement of ugly feelings that addresses the sociocultural discussions or non-discussed issues, as pointed out by Kato and Sleebom Falkner (2011). The aesthetic qualities of the installation in that sense foreground certain imaginings of the world but also appeals to experience it from a different perspective nuancing understandings of individuals' valuation of the body in a biotech century. In terms of Böhme the atmosphere of wasted creates a sensibility towards how the biotech industry influences the conditions we live under; their power to define life.

The visitor is involved by *wasted* in the sociocultural norms, values and ideals about (in) fertility actively engaging them in the paradoxical ways life is understood as both unique and modifiable. The orchestration in *wasted* not only touches upon how people in Japan attach cultural meaning to their blood, eggs and embryos. What is enabled through the abstraction is a different connectivity; an involvement facilitated by the sparsest of signs and gestures that also appeals to a recognition of the

body as a shared condition and a valuation of this joint experience. Thus through the continuous alternation between the objective and subjective features of the installation; an unstable narrative, the affectively disoriented and confused visitor is forced into motion. By the unknown and unfamiliar space they are forced to address the ambiguousness of their experience that extends to the conditions of their life world. Ugly feelings elicited by the engagement with the installation, create an ironic distance to the life conditions of the biotech century as noted by Ngai (2005: 3). The aim of this ironic distance is not to encourage political resistance, but to address the suspension of redemption as a condition of contemporary life. What is addressed is in terms of Berlant (2011) the cruel optimism characterizing the way individuals' pursuit the good life- here fertility. In other words, *wasted* addresses how these feelings fuel the aestheticization of everyday life and the biotechnological perception of the body. The atmosphere of *wasted* involves the visitor in their own experience in relation to the many facets of belonging in a biotech century. What is revealed through *wasted* is the centrality of affect in the process of perception and how the atmosphere functions as catalysts for a conscience of a shared being in the world endowed on particular level (the fragmented body/embryos) as on a universal level ( the body as a shared reference) stirring peoples course. The Atmosphere of belonging in *wasted* reveals the significance of the body and emotions in the circulation of symbols and affective appeals in an era mostly understood as individualistic orientated and contentious.

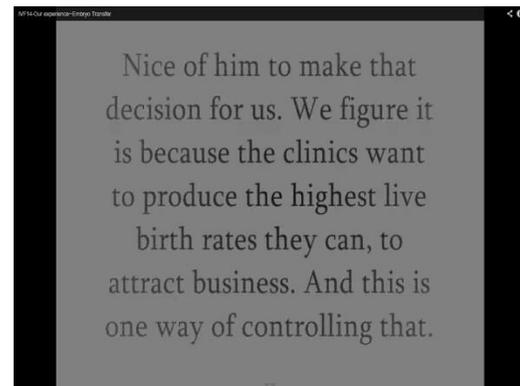
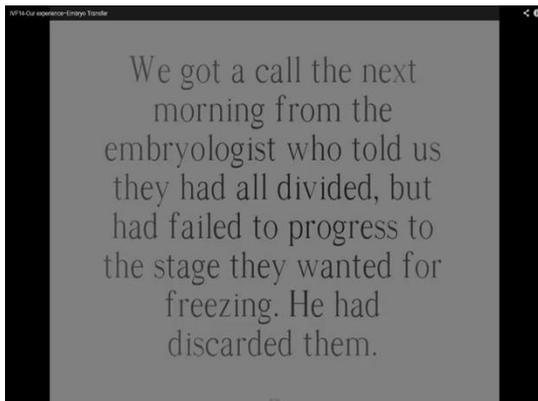
### **The vlogs of Silvia and Peter**

Opposed to *wasted* the tuned spaces; atmospheres in play in *the vlog of Silvia and Peter* seem at a first glance more informational and cognitive than aesthetic-affective (Ill.3).



Ill.3 Frame grab from Silvia and Peters vlog. IVF 14-Our Experience ~Embryo Transfer

The storyline structure of thoughts on being reproductively challenged, preliminary thoughts on hormone injections (drugs, shots, and emotional distress), examinations and scans in fertility clinics, egg retrieval procedures, embryo transfers, the two week wait, and the results of their treatments is orchestrated in order to address a belonging along the lines of Rose's (2007) argument about new bio-socialites arising. The specificity of attunement by referencing the biotechnological and biomedical perception of the body as an object which can be transformed into a series of distinct and discrete objects inform other couples struggling with the ability to conceive searching for emotional relatedness and support (Kaliarnta, Nihlén-Fahlquist, and Roeser, 2012). In vlog *IVF 14-Our Experience ~Embryo Transfer* (Ill.4&5) Silvia and Peter convey their ugly feelings of being a small subject in the system of assisted reproduction by expressing their irritation of not being understood in relation to their ontological valuation of their embryos. This discrepancy converges with Japanese debates on similar matters as noted by Kato and Sleeboom Falkner (2011).



## III.4&amp; 5: Frame grab from IVF 14-Our Experience ~Embryo Transfer

Ugly feelings in this regard play a crucial role in the orchestration of atmospheres of belonging to a specific experience community; individuals undergoing in vitro fertilization. But addressing ugly feelings also spur to a critical involvement in how they in their pursuit of fertility are subjected to the biotechnological- and medical perception of the body as an object. The aestheticization of the body in terms of optimization echo a contemporary sociocultural tendency to orchestrate life, hence the attunement is not limited to others trying to conceive but expresses a notion of a general shared life condition. Extending the experiences with IVF into vlogs on YouTube seem to underline aspects of the fertility project as a matter of self-realization, a pursuit of an individual want, need and passion for kinship. The orchestration of ugly feelings and reflection on their position in the system of assisted reproduction in this regard not only involves the viewer but also Silvia and Peter themselves reflecting their struggle with their fertility project in relation to sociocultural concerns over the ways fertility is pursued.

In *IVF 11- Our experience ~Egg retrieval* making a baby is expressed as uncomplicated, quick and smooth, as Silvia in the car outside the fertility clinic just before having an embryo transfer says: “So this film is so that we can show our kids how to make a baby. We’re going to go make a baby now.” IVF, as the new natural way of making a baby echo Francois Ewald’s notion that nature (the fertile body) no longer serves a sacred objectivity (Ewald, 1993). In *IVF 14-Our Experience ~Embryo Transfer* Silvia and Peter’s experience is expressed through complicated medical terms and a picture of petri dish showing “their babies”, exemplifying an understanding of the body and life in terms of reproduction technology. However the former statement also illustrates a reflection on the sensational experience of optimizing the body’s ability to conceive, whereby expressing an involvement in the consequences of the optimization in terms of the recognizable features the statements contains. What Silvia reveals is an awareness of the potential uncanny and unfamiliar features of optimization by way of egg retrieval procedures. Consequently it is not the optimization what is commented, but the fact that they are on their way in to make a baby - something quite familiar.

Orchestrations of the everyday life, and close visual encounters of the couple in emotional distress and pain, add gravity to the fertility project mediated countering the optimization of the infertile body letting space, time, and modality characterizing the everyday at the fore. In front of a transportable camera or webcam infertile couples talk and move around in their home, cars and clinical surroundings before, during and after the IVF treatments. In *IVF 16- Our Experience ~Beta level* (Ill. 6) a photograph from everyday life of a meatloaf sets the stage for involvement. The haptic quality of the meatloaf affectively involves the viewer in the state of Silvia's post injected butt.



Ill.6: Frame grab IVF 16- Our Experience ~Beta level

These intimate insights into the everyday life through recognizable repetitions; a cyclic temporality exemplified by a birthday, meal. Repetitions of spaces; cars, home, clinics, and the modality of rituals and routines of the everyday are intensified in order to dismantle the strangeness of the energy invested in the pursuit of fertility; the financial costs, emotional distress, physical pain, and procedures related to assisted reproduction. Everyday life as noted by Rita Felski is characterized by a concentration of emotional energy; a belonging so profound that it functions as an extension of ourselves. The experiences with IVF as Silvia notes in *IVF 14-Our Experience ~Embryo Transfer* are both fascinating and repulsive as Silvia comments on a cake resembling a butt with 31 needle marks and a syringe: “It is cute in a twisted way.” (Ill. 7)



Ill.:7 Frame grab from IVF 14-Our Experience~ Embryo Transfer

The cuteness/ harmless of the birthday cake is added a twist of unfamiliarity creating an affective disorientation allowing for an involvement in this feeling of ambiguity. The experience qualities of the polyrhythmic aspects of the atmosphere sharpen the senses. Through this sharpening a possibility arises to reflect on how our preoccupation with the concrete and particular (the body as unique) or transformation and negotiation (the modifiable body) affects the perception of everyday life as something generally shared. Rita Felski points out that everyday life often is understood as non-magical and anti-miraculous but in Silvia and Peter's vlogs the experience quality of the everyday atmosphere makes the unseen and unnoticed aspects of the fertility projects visible. Through the magical intensification of the atmosphere an attunement is facilitating an expression of Silvia and Peter's valuation of this general shared spatial-temporal modality; an intersubjective orientation.

Thus in *IVF 14-Our Experience ~Embryo Transfer* the music from the film Willy Wonka, "A world of pure imagination" performed by Gene Wilder, appeals to our imagination and shared bodily being in relation; an appeal by way of affectivity to "Take a breath, count to three. Come with me and you'll be, in a world of pure imagination, take a look and you'll see into your imagination." The aesthetic affective effects disrupt the conventional perceptions of fertility projects and vlogs with the sparest of signs and gestures; a breath. They nuance the perception of fertility projects and vlogs offering the viewer a wider range of and intensive affective- aesthetic experiences of belonging, the valuation of an ontological and emotional relatedness in a sociocultural setting predominantly focusing on commodification and cultural transformation.

### **Belonging in a biotech century**

*Silvia and Peter's vlogs* and Tomoko Mukaiyama's installation *wasted's* many facet touch on how belonging in Japanese and American sociocultural setting is transformed by the perception of the human life as molecular. Both Silvia and Peters vlogs and *Wasted* are powerful atmospheric lenses through which the formation and development of individuals as actively involved in how they in the pursuit of fertility express a detachment from the body - objectifying it in order to become fertile. But they also express an involvement in the consequences of this objectification in relation to notions of a related being in the world- the body as shared point of reference. The aesthetic-affective qualities of the *vlogs of Silvia and Peter* and the installation *wasted* in this regard function as contemporary catalysts for a conscience of a shared being in the world. The mediations nuance how issues of belonging in a biotech century not only relates to commodification of the fragmentary body, or how this fragmentation in a mediated form spurs cultural, political, and social transformation of kinship. The atmospheres of the *vlog* and *wasted* on an aesthetic affective level touch on this concern, and foreground ontological and emotional relatedness. Neither Silvia and Peter or Mukaiyama challenge nature, hybridize man, or conform to a narrow cultural ideal- the natural fertile body. On the contrary it is a valuation of the body and emotions as shared points of reference that are expressed through orchestrations of atmospheres. It is through aesthetically and affective tiny sparks and gestures the sense of how individuals perceive belonging in a biotech century is sharpened.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> In light of the private content the authors of the vlog featuring this paper are made anonymous. The vlog is part of a larger sum of video blogs that in sum represent the material of my PhD. research.

<sup>ii</sup> Gernot Böhme notes that the specific concept used in his argument for a new aesthetics ( *Neue Ästhetik*) of Atmosphere is related to Walter Benjamin's concept of Aura as discussed in his *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, 1936* and Herman Schmitz's concept of Atmosphere in *Herman Schmitz: Gefühle als Atmosphären und das affektive Betroffensein von ihnen, 1994*

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### **Vlogs**

Silvia and Peter, 2009, US, located 24. May 2013:

IVF 2- Our experience ~First Lupron Injection

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIP5UGSvsd4&feature=channel&list=UL>

IVF 11- Our experience ~ Egg retrieval

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SH6nW9yicX8&feature=channel&list=UL>

IVF 14- Our experience ~Embryo Transfer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxnHzvRKi3A&feature=relmfu>

IVF 16- Our Experience ~Beta level

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah\\_HSvfiQzw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah_HSvfiQzw)

### **Film**

Water Children a film by A film by Aliona van der Horst, Netherlands, 2011

### **Installation**

Wasted by Tomoko Mukaiyama, 2009. Located 24. May 2013 <http://tomoko.nl/index.php?id=60>

## Abstract in Danish

Denne antologiske afhandling stiller skarpt på oplevelser af ufrivillig barnløshed og assisteret reproduktionsteknologi (ART) som de præsenteres i digitale medier og installationskunst. Som en del af forskningsprojektet ”Transformations of Kinship.Travelling in Search of Relatedness” (KinTra) 2011-2014 tager projektet afsæt i, hvorledes slægtskabspraksisser, der involverer assisteret reproduktionsteknologi bevæger sig (ind) i medier og kunst, og hvordan forskellige medie- og kunstpraksisser transformerer kulturelle opfattelser af krop, slægtskab og teknologi. Bevægelserne er diskuteret i 4 artikler, der analyserer video blogs på YouTube, tv- og filmdokumentarer og kunstinstitutioner. Udover fire artikler består afhandlingen af en redegørelse, der falder i tre kapitler ((Digital) atmospheres – migratory aesthetics, Biotechnology, and Aesthetics), hvor de metodiske, empiriske, teoretiske og analytiske argumenter, overvejelser og resultater i afhandlingen præsenteres.

Afhandlingen er særligt interesseret i forbindelser mellem medie- og bioteknologi (ART) og hovedargumentet i afhandlingen er at disse forbindelser genererer atmosfærer, der strukturerer beskuers opfattelse af slægtskab, krop og teknologi. Medierepræsentationer af bioteknologi anerkendes bredt for indenfor kritisk slægtskabs- og medieforskning som et udtryk for, hvordan bioteknologi netværker sig ind i den måde vi forstår kroppen på socialt, økonomisk og politisk. Forbindelser mellem medie- og bioteknologi ansues derved ikke som neutrale, et argument som afhandlingen følger. Afhandlingen adresserer et hidtil overset men ikke desto mindre betydningsfuldt aspekt for den æstetiske dimension af medierede oplevelser med bioteknologi i digitale medier og kunst – deres stemningssættende kapacitet, eller med andre ord deres kapacitet til at strukturere følelser. Afhandlingen adresserer denne mangel og diskuterer betydningen af video blogs, tv- og filmdokumentarer og kunstinstitutioners generering / produktion af affektiv tone/stemning (”attunement”). Afhandlingen lægger sig i forlængelse af performanceteoretiker Susan Broadhurst’s (2007) perspektiver på karakteristika ved samtidens digitale medie- og kunstpraksisser som er reflekteret i afhandlingens tilgang til vlogs, tv-og filmdokumentarer og kunstinstitutioner: centraliteten af det digitale, en understregning af betydningen af det korporeale, behovet for reformulering af æstetikbegrebet og behovet for et transæstetisk teoretisk, analytisk og fortolkningsmæssigt modus.

Metodisk henter afhandlingen inspiration fra det hollandske projekt *Performing Culture*, og afhandlingen følger Mieke Bal’s (2002) perspektiver på den performative dimension af menneskelige praksisser, der inkluderer kunst og digitale mediepraksisser. Med afsæt i Bal’s perspektiver sætter afhandlingen fokus på tværæstetiske bevægelser i video blogs, tv-og filmdokumentarer og kunstinstitutioner, og digitale medie- og kunstpraksisser relateret til barnløshed og assisteret

reproduktion transkulturelt. Afhandlingen diskuterer video blogs, tv- og filmdokumentarer og kunstinstitutioner's produktion af atmosfærer som et kulturelt modus, en aktiv, men overset faktor i eksisterende diskussioner af, hvad der karakteriserer ART i medier og hvad der indgår i konstitueringen af sociokulturelle normer, værdier og idealer om krop, teknologi og slægtskab. Afhandlingens teoretiske ramme består af foucauldiansk inspireret sociologisk teori (Rose 2007, Thacker 2005, Franklin 1997, 2013) som komplementeres med kritisk fenomenologisk æstetisk teori om atmosfærer (Böhme 1993, 1995). Teorierne bidrager til en analysestrategi, der muliggør at adressere de sociokulturelle betydninger af forskellige konstellationer af personer, objekter og rum – hvordan disse strukturerer følelser, udfordrer og kritiserer dominerende opfattelser af krop, teknologi og slægtskab.

Artikel 1, "Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs: On the Aesthetic-Affective Dimension of Individual Fertility Projects on YouTube" adresserer, hvordan amerikanske video blogs på YouTube om ufrivillig barnløshed og assisteret reproduktionsteknologi strukturerer følelser. I artiklen foretages en analyse af video blogs om individuelle oplevelser med ufrivillig barnløshed og assisteret reproduktion indenfor rammen af kritisk fenomenologisk æstetisk teori formuleret filosofen Gernot Böhme som suppleres med Brian Massumi's perspektiver på affekt. Artiklen konkluderer at et æstetisk og affektivt fokus på oplevelser med ART i mediepraksisser som vlogs bidrager med væsentlige perspektiver på, hvordan sådanne praksisser strukturerer beskuerens involvering i kropslige oplevelser med bioteknologi. Artiklen peger på at hvad der umiddelbart forekommer som individuelle fertilitetsprojekter udtrykt i vlogs, indeholder en social dimension – atmosfærer som delte. Artiklen peger på relevansen af kontinuerlige overvejelser over, hvordan medieproduceret kultur påvirker vores relationer til os selv, andre og verden gennem æstetisk-affektive produktioner, hvor mindre, ambivalente og negative ("ugly") følelser tilægges afgørende betydning.

Artikel 2: "Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility" relaterer oplevelser med ART i videoblogs til medieteorier om medieformidlet forbrug (Jansson 2002). Artiklen anvender re-encodingsbegrebet (omfunktionaliseringen af oplevelser til en ny betydning i medier), men destabiliserer og nuancerer opfattelsen af re-encoding som anti-æstetisk, anti-narrativ, som et led i et image, eller som motivation til forbrug. Artiklen konkluderer at et sådant perspektiv overser forcen af oplevelsesværdien forbundet med konstellationen af personer, objekter og rum i videoerne. Den tyske filosof Gernot Böhme's æstetiske begreb om atmosfærer (1993,1995) introduceres og danner afsættet for en diskussion om, hvordan konstellationerne i videoerne via deres æstetiske dimension sætter beskueren i en bestemt stemning. Teorier på hverdagsliv der fokuserer på bevægelser, fysisk som emotionelt (Felski 2000), bidrager i artiklen til at diskutere disse aspekter af bevægelser i videoerne og konkluderer at disse er oversete æstetisk-affektive produktioner af stemthed. Artiklen viser at

forbindelserne mellem assisteret reproduktion og hverdagsliv i videoerne er ikke et udtryk for at individet underlægger sig en biomedicinsk og bioteknologisk diskurs eller at reproduktionsteknologien naturliggøres. Artiklen konkluderer derimod at konstellationerne af personer, objekter og rum genererer en tilstand af årvågenhed, hvor beskuerens sanser skærpes. Videoernes variationer i konstellationerne skaber et ustabil narrativ, der konstant tvinger beskueren til at tage stilling til oplevelserne om ufrivillig barnløshed og assisteret reproduktionsteknologi.

Artikel 3: “Relational (Trans)formations. The Matter of Kinship in *Technostorks* (2006) and *The Baby Clinic* (2012)” tager afsæt i slægtskabsstudiers diskussion af og kritiske tilgang til medie –og reproduktionsteknologiske forbindelser, der særligt relaterer sig til ART’s image i medier som mirakuløs og spektakulær (Franklin 2013; Bouquet 2002). Med udgangspunkt i en dansk tv-dokumentar (*Babyklinikken* 2012) og amerikansk filmdokumentar (*Technostorks* 2006) diskuterer artiklen, hvordan digitale mediepraksisser gør slægtskabsrelationer og materialiteter mulige at erfare gennem en række intensivering af stemninger. Artiklen trækker på medieteoretiske perspektiver interesseret i signaler mere end referentielle tegn i diskussionen af digitale medieproduktioners betydning (Thomsen 2012). Artiklen påpeger igen relevansen af Böhme’s æstetiske teori, som her dog komplementeres med medieteoretiske perspektiver på mere-end-representationelle og affektive dimensioner af digital mediekultur (Sandbye 2012; Stage 2012; Thomsen 2012; Shaviro 2010). Artiklen diskuterer hvordan dokumentarerne gør kompleksiteter og dynamikker forbundet med slægtskabspraksisser audio, visuelle og følte. Artiklen sætter fokus på mediernes afgørende rolle i konstitueringen, men også transformationen, af opfattelser af slægtskab, og det understreges at en kontinuerlig kritisk tilgang af bioteknologi i medier må inkludere den affektive strukturering af beskuerens følelser. Artiklen konkluderer at digitale mediepraksisser snarere end at simplificere relationelle kompleksiteter, understreger relationernes kompleksitet og dynamikker.

Article 4, “Atmospheres of Belonging. The Aesthetic Qualities of the Japanese Installation *wasted* on (In)fertility and American Videoblogs (vlogs) about IVF on YouTube” vender tilbage til video blogs om ufrivillig barnløshed og assisteret reproduktionsteknologi, men tilføjer nye dimensioner ved at diskutere forskelle og ligheder mellem amerikanske video blogs og den japanske kunstinstantallation *wasted* (2009). Artiklen peger på video bloggen’s og kunstinstantallationens transæstetiske og transkulturelle karakteristika: den kritiske tilgang til opfattelsen af kroppen som objekt kendetegnende for bioteknologien (Kato and Sleeboom Faulkner 2011; Rose 2007; Thacker 2005), og produktioner af atmosfærer (Böhme 1993; 1995), der skaber alternative oplevelser og opfattelser af krop, teknologi og slægtskab. Diskussionen i artiklen peger i den forbindelse på, hvordan oplevelser som strækkes til at indgå i en kunstinstantallation eller i digitale mediepraksisser genererer oplevelser, der

er processrelaterede og forudsætter beskuerens kropslige deltagelse. Hvor kunstinstitutionen er kendetegnet ved parametre såsom abstraktion og bevægelser, kendetegnes video blogs ved nærbilleder og haptiske oplevelseskvaliteter. Artiklen konkluderer at relationer i video blogs og kunstinstitutionen ikke anses i som statiske eller biologisk determinerede, men i bevægelse - de struktureres af fysisk og affektive bevægelser.

## Abstract in English

This anthological PhD dissertation takes issue with experiences of infertility and assisted reproduction technology (ART) in digital media and installation art. As part of the Danish collective research project “Transformations of Kinship. Travelling in Search of Relatedness” (KinTra) 2011-2014, the project sets out to investigate how experiences with infertility and kinship involving ART moves in(to) media and art and how digital media and art practices (trans)form cultural understandings of body, kinship and technology. These movements are discussed in four articles that analyzes video blogs on YouTube, TV and film documentaries, and installation art. In addition to the four articles the dissertation consists of a dissertation summary which is structured in three chapters ((Digital) atmospheres – migratory aesthetics, Biotechnology, and Aesthetics), that discuss the methodological, theoretical and analytical arguments, considerations, and results of the dissertation.

The dissertation is particular interested in intersections between media technology and biotechnology (ART) and the main argument of the study is that these intersections produce atmospheres that through their generative immediacy structure understandings of body, technology and kinship. Biotechnological and media technological intersections are widely acknowledged within kinship studies and media studies as ways in which biotechnology networks itself into the way we think of the body socially, economically and politically. Intersections of media and biotechnology are in this perspective not considered neutral, an argument with which this dissertation aligns. What however hitherto has been understated by these studies is the force of the aesthetic reality of mediated experiences with biotechnology in digital media and art – their affective attunements, or in other words, their capacity to structure feelings. The aim of this dissertation is to destabilize and to bring more nuances to fields of research emphasizing cultural transformation due to biotechnological intersections with media by turning attention to the aesthetic-affective dimension of such intersections. The dissertation aligns with recent considerations on the shared defining features of digital media and art practices presented by performance theorist and artist Susan Broadhurst (2007): the centrality of the digital, an emphasis on the corporeal, the implication of new aesthetics, and the requirement of a transaesthetic mode of analysis and interpretation.

Methodically, the project is greatly inspired by the Dutch project *Performing Culture* and follows Mieke Bal's perspectives (2002) that centers on the performative dimension on human practices including artistic and digital media practices. Bal's perspectives have enabled the transaesthetic focus of the dissertation on movements in the material as well as a focus on digital media and art practices that take issue with infertility and assisted reproduction as a transcultural phenomenon. By consequence the

dissertation discusses the production of atmosphere by the empirical material as a cultural mode, an active force in constituting cultural norms, ideals, and values in relation to kinship, body, and technology. Theoretically the dissertation draws on Foucauldian inspired sociological theories on what characterizes the contemporary understanding of the body, technology and kinship and their entanglements (Rose 2007; Thacker 2005, Franklin 1997, 2013). I have complemented this theoretical thread with the critical phenomenological aesthetic of atmosphere by the German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1993, 1995). The complementation enables an analytical strategy with the possibility to address the sociocultural implications of the varying constellations of people, objects and spaces in terms of how they structure feelings, question, and critically address dominant norms, ideals and values of body, technology and kinship.

Article 1: “Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs: On the Aesthetic-Affective Dimension of Individual Fertility Projects on YouTube” addresses how mediated experiences with IVF in American video blogs structure feelings. The article analyses video blogs about personal experiences with infertility and ART within a critical phenomenological aesthetic theory of atmospheres by the German philosopher Gernot Böhme and Brian Massumi’s perspectives on the concept of affect. The article concludes that an aesthetic-affective focus on experiences with ART in media practices such as vlogs contributes with significant perspectives on how such practices structure spectator’s involvement in bodily experiences with biotechnology. The article discusses how video blogs are characterized by a social dimension connecting performers to themselves and the viewer’s pointing to atmospheres as shared. The article points to the relevance of considering how the aesthetic-affective dimension of media cultural productions have ramifications for how we relate to ourselves, others, and the world where the small, mundane, ambivalent, and ugly feelings play a crucial role.

Article 2 “Atmospheric Video Blogs on Infertility” relates experiences with infertility and ART to media theories on mediated consumption (Jansson 2002). The article discusses vlogs as characterized by re-encodings, but destabilizes and nuances the understanding of re-encoding as anti-aesthetic, anti-narrative, about image production or about inspiring to consumption. The article concludes that such perspectives overlooks the force of the experiential value of constellations of people, objects, and space in the videos. The German philosopher Gernot Böhme’s aesthetics of atmosphere (1993, 1995) is introduced and used to discuss how the aesthetic-affective dimension of the constellations attunes the spectator. Theories on how everyday life is characterized by movements, physical as well as emotional (Felski 2002), contributes to the article’s discussion of movements in the vlogs and the article concludes that these movements, and their aesthetic-affective attunements is overlooked. The article addresses how the intertwining of the realm of assisted reproduction with the

mundane in the vlogs does not express subordination to the forces of biotechnological or biomedical discourse, or that ART is naturalized. On the contrary, the article argues that constellations of people, objects, and space in the vlogs generate a state of alert sharpening the senses of the spectator. The varying constellations create an unstable narrative which consistently forces the spectator to relate to the experiences with infertility and ART anew.

Article 3: “Relational (Trans)formations. The Matter of Kinship in *Technostorks* (2006) and *The Baby Clinic* (2012)” takes departure in discussions and critiques within kinship studies of intersections between media and ART, particular media’s role in the public face of IVF as miraculous and spectacular (Franklin 2013; Bouquet 2002). Through an analysis of a Danish TV documentary (*The Baby Clinic* “Babyklinikken” 2012) and an American film documentary (*Technostorks* 2006), the study takes issue with how the presence of kinship matters comes to matter in mood-altering ways. This interest reflects a media-cultural movement from referential signs to signals (Thomsen 2012), and the findings supports the results of the articles on video blogs on YouTube. The theoretical frame of the article includes media theoretical perspectives on the characteristics of digital media practices as signaletic rather than referential signs (Thomsen 2012). The article revisits the aesthetic theory of Böhme which in this study is complemented with recent media theoretical interests in the more-than-representational and affective dimension of digital media culture (Sandbye 2012; Stage 2012; Thomsen 2012; Shaviro 2010). The article addresses the constitutive yet also transformative role of media of sociocultural understandings of kinship, and the article concludes that a continually critical approach to media intersections with biotechnology must include their affective structuring of feelings. The article also concludes that digital media practices rather than being invested in translating relational complexities into visual simplicity, deconstruct the simplicity of the public face of IVF and stress complex and dynamic dimensions of kinship practices.

Article 4: “Atmospheres of Belonging. The Aesthetic Qualities of the Japanese Installation *wasted* on (In)fertility and American Video blogs (vlogs) about IVF on YouTube” returns once more to the material collection of video blogs yet complicates the findings with a discussion of convergences between experiences with infertility and ART in new media and the Japanese installation art *wasted* (2009). The article point to a transcultural and transaesthetic denominator of the works: their critical approach to the perception of the body as object characteristic of biotechnology (Kato and Sleeboom Faulkner 2011; Rose 2007; Thacker 2005), and productions of atmospheres (Böhme 1993,1995) as explorations of alternative understandings of body, technology and kinship. The study also points to how the extension of experiences into an art installation or vlog creates experiences that are process related as well as premised on the visitor’s active bodily participation. The study emphasizes

how diverse parameters such as abstractions and movements in *wasted*, and close-ups and haptic qualities in the vlogs are set to work as generators of an atmospheric attunement with the potential to transform understandings of kinship, body and technology. The article concludes that relations by the vlogs and art installation not are regarded as fixed or biological determined but move; they are structured by physical and emotional movements.