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**Reason + Enjoyment**

Kate Montague\*

## Introduction: Antinomies of the New Imaginary

Come with me and you'll be  
In a world of pure imagination  
Take a look and you'll see  
Into your imagination  
– Gene Wilder (1933 – 2016)

Gene Wilder's death this year elicited a tremendous outpouring of grief worldwide. For many, his face – that frizz of curly hair; bright blue eyes with an impish twinkle; and the grin, halfway amused, halfway smug, like he's in on a joke you're not quite privy to – is inseparable from his greatest performance: in *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. The film in which he performed that role, made in 1971 and based on the 1964 novel by Roald Dahl, is one of those formative fictions in which children of a certain age indulge outlandish flights of imagination (isn't it every child's fantasy to enter a world made entirely from chocolate?). I can remember seeing the film one Christmas when I was maybe 8 or 9, at my grandparents' house in Tasmania, that island on the southernmost tip of Australia. I was totally captivated by the world into which the protagonist, Charlie, was granted entry with his golden ticket, behind the rusted gates that heretofore remained closed to the public: the production of Wonka's sugar-coated confectionary, a mysterious secret kept from the salivating masses. While first watching the film that Christmas, crossing those gates with Charlie into the forbidden city – full of magical possibility – was the biggest thrill; it would only be years later when re-watching the film as a university student that the factory began to represent something else entirely: something less paradisiacal insofar as I could see more plainly the price of whatever enjoyment had been promised by Wonka and his factory, where satisfaction for the few is surcharged with immiseration of the many.

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\* University of New South Wales



Analogously, we might recall here one of the more dramatic manoeuvres, in this vein of demystification, from Karl Marx's magnum opus. In *Capital*, at the end of chapter six where Marx shifts critical focus from the exchange of commodities to the forces of production, we are shown precisely what is to come, the subterranean abode of industrial production:

Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'. Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare.<sup>1</sup>

It is precisely "business" that underscores Wonka's decision to grant a handful of predominantly wealthy children and their chosen guardians access to his chocolate factory; the candy-man capitalist is on the hunt for a chosen successor to continue carrying out his confectionary empire, a worthy heir to the Wonka franchise.

The thrill of the film's opening, its *Bildung*-like narrative, is Charlie's "escape" from nigh-on Dickensian poverty. His is an impoverished multi-generational family inhabiting the cramped one room (recall: two sets of grandparents head-to-toe in the same bed; the mother working all through the night as a washer-woman; and sweet Charlie, a celluloid successor to Tiny Tim, ecstatically happy when receiving for his birthday a single bar of chocolate). Although I may not have understood the various ideologies underpinning this pre-Thatcherite narrative of industrial aspiration, my sympathy was automatically aligned with Charlie and his grandfather, the underdogs in a game orchestrated by the capitalist, Wonka, in which they compete against the sons and daughters of a global ruling class for the affections of an eccentric industrialist. Of course, Charlie wins the competition – his final victory sealed by an act of company loyalty; returning the gift of a pre-sucked gobstopper – and so he and his grandfather are quite literally shot skyward into the upper echelons of wealth via a golden lift, all the while looking down upon the slums from which they came. It was one of those early encounters – up there with so many other stories by Dahl – which

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, London 1990, p. 280.

are totally engrossing not least because they capture a world of fantasy underwritten in equal measure by pleasure and fear. And while I may not have fully understood the extent of exploitation presented in the film – singing, dancing production lines of orange-skinned and unpaid labor – even at a young age you can readily sense the sinister underbelly of this magical world. And that brings us much closer to the present.

Gene Wilder’s death coincided with our beginning to edit the essays included in this collection – specifically, I was watching a televised replay of one of the most recognizable songs from the film, “Pure Imagination,” and it made me think about the essays comprised herein. The lyrics invite their listeners into a world of pure fantasy, one in which wish-fulfilment is assured, and the images accompanying those lyrics deliver up a scene oversaturated with *jouissance*: every tree, rock, blade of grass made edible and promising the most pleasurable savor; all of which is counterpoised to Wilder’s melancholic vocals and the slightly unnerving, slightly uncanny ringing of bells in the background, as if there were something more malevolent lurking just below the fantastical surface of things. This surface, furnished by a harmonizing rhyme scheme which reaches perfect euphoria in the final couplet, “Living there you’ll be free | If you truly wish to be.” That malevolence is, of course, brought into focus when the piggish Augustus Gloop is swallowed whole for his gluttony, being sucked up a chocolate tube. Indeed, Gloop’s swift dispatch via the industrial chute announces the material (and deadly) substrate of Wonka’s so-called “pure imagination.” The dream-like rapture of this song is ironized not only by Gloop’s punishment for giving way so completely to his desires; it is also sharply juxtaposed in the following scene with that unforgettably traumatic paddle-steamer ride through the bowels of the factory as Wonka himself recites an equally terrifying incantation: “Not a speck of light is showing | So the danger must be growing | Are the fires of hell a’glowing? | Is the grisly reaper mowing?” If the preceding introduction to Wonka’s factory had all the makings of paradise then this is the nightmarish underside of that fantasy: memorably, the scene is intercut with near-subliminal imagery of actual slaughter.

It would not be overreaching to suggest that imagination, in Wonka’s first song, is straddling two seemingly contradictory realms; if we take “Pure Imagination” out of the film’s broader context, then we are presented on the surface with lyrics that suggest a truly utopian social-dreaming, a world responsive to willed trans-

formation, but if we put the song back in its filmic context then we encounter a hymn to capitalist enterprise. If imagination + capitalism = paradise, then what has been presented is a paradise for the capitalists (and indeed, Charlie cannot imagine his place in this paradise until he is inaugurated into Wonka's class); or as Kafka once put it: "Plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope – but not for us."<sup>2</sup> This, we can now begin gesturing toward the essays to come, is Juliet Flower MacCannell's point exactly when she describes present-day "fantasies of egalitarianism" via the world of fashion. In her view, a visual regime "shaped by the masculine universal" trends toward "images of 'equal enjoyment' for all meaning actual misery for all except the One who alone fully enjoys." In this, the imaginary functions like that familiar topological structure from Lacan (Moebius strip, mustard pot, Klein bottle etc.,) capturing the minimal difference between fantasy and reality, the ego's ideal and its fragmented actuality.

It's not just psychoanalysts who have been preoccupied with the imagination, and with the imagination as antinomial force. While Lacan's formulation is at the forefront of editorial consciousness with the present collection, various other imaginations join it to the ends of both conceptual aid and critical challenge. It should go without saying that philosophy has always been attached to this concept, from Aristotle's *phantasia* as distinct from perception; through Kant's fissiparous consciousness; right down to speculative realism's various flights of quasi-fictional invocation, whose deeply subjective imaginings trouble their claims to a world of pure objects. Political theory, with its recently renewed emphasis on manifold utopianisms, has once again turned to that concept as a constitutive force of social dreaming, which must now as ever weigh itself against both the neoliberal consensus and the challenge of concrete political change. And, while imagination is key to aesthetics as both productive and receptive, it finds articulation with regard to specific artistic forms, perhaps most notably in the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's account of the imagination's esemplastic unity, itself the antithesis of a more ephemeral fancy.

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What might be most useful to our reading here – of the imaginary, imagination, image or otherwise – is Derrida's deconstructive mode both because imagination in its various forms and figures begins to appear as a supplement to reality

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Random House, New York 2007, p. 116.

insofar as it occupies a zone of radical ambivalence or indeterminacy, and moreover our interpretive method for reading the imaginary must itself approach this double-bind. Significantly for Derrida, and for us, there is something inherently imaginary about the supplement insofar as it is indeed an image: “the supplement has not only the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy [*procuration*] of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it.” Moreover, for Derrida, “this presence is at the same time desired and feared.”<sup>3</sup> This topological description of the supplement as image brings us very close to the manner in which Joan Copjec describes the “imaginal space” in Abbas Kiarostami’s films:

What appears in the world, without being of the same substance, is a radical elsewhere, an other scene, which turns our heads, orients or magnetizes us such that we turn away from the world. What suspends itself in the finite world is not flimsy fantasy but precisely the fully real extension of the ego through its relation to this other place. Extension in this sense characterizes not some thing (*res extensa*) but relation; ego extends beyond itself and towards what is other to it.

Each of these essays in one way or another take part in a discussion of the imaginary and offer new insights into how we might conceive of this realm and of the dual nature of fantasy in our own emergent virtual culture, saturated as it is with images and underwritten by an economy of commodified *jouissance*.

We might now begin to see why the imaginary – as a question, leitmotif, critical frame, repeated structure, or simply form – emerges as a sort of narrative unconscious from a collection of papers with their genetic commonplace in a conference whose titled thematic was “Reason + Enjoyment.” That is to say, the imaginary might be seen to function at the very nexus of these two seemingly opposed terms and that the plus sign, between the two, can be taken either as the minimal difference cutting them in two or as their combined form; here the plus sign might also be conceived in terms of an excess in the supplementary sense we have just described: “whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supple-

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1997, p. 155.

ment is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it.”<sup>4</sup>

While the authors in this volume engage variously the vicissitudes of opposition or addition – reason + enjoyment; object + subject; inside + outside; capitalism + utopia; realism + affect; space + time, idealism + actuality; aesthetic + political; melancholy + hope – what is remarkable is that so many are concerned with this question of imagination, either as an admission to the world of images, as a mediating interface, or as the symptom of utopian potentiality. And, certainly, what is striking is that there is indeed nothing “pure” at all about imagination, as Wonka’s song might suggest via the proto-deconstructive logic of its form. Imagination, and its incumbent pleasure, is indeed contaminated at every turn by the reality principle: culture, media, spectres haunting past, present and future. By locating these precise points of contamination, antinomy, demystification, we might begin, collectively, to partake in what MacCannell has aptly designated “refashioning the new imaginary.”

The lion’s share of this volume is organized, roughly, in two sections. The essays that comprise the first half take the world of images as their object of criticism and in divergent ways explore film, photography, painting, animation, literature. These essays all have something to say about how imagination comes to be mediated by an aesthetic regime and how this relation illuminates the various antinomies I have been gesturing towards. The second half includes several essays that hone in on the political valences of an imaginary ideal; how we might conceive of new realities. Partitioning these two sections, one on aesthetics the other on politics, is an essay by Henry Sussman, which operates as an interface or mediator between the two halves of the collection by offering a sort of meta-commentary on our method via an injunction to a playful and indeed plastic intelligence that, according to Henry Sussman by way of Hofstadter, has the ability “‘to make sense out of ambiguous or contradictory messages,’ and ‘to synthesize new concepts by taking old concepts and putting them together in new ways.’” We might even take a certain liberty here, substituting the imaginary for intelligence, and borrow from Sussman our stated objective: “to track the vicissitudes and transformations of [imagination] as it addresses major conundrums in a range of sciences and arts, tackles technological challenges in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

different spheres (sound-reproduction, cybernetics), and accommodates itself unprecedented media.”

## 1. Aesthetics

Joan Copjec’s essay, “The Imaginal World and Modern Oblivion,” takes the cinematic output of celebrated Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami and unveils his formal fidelity to “the imaginal world” as it is conceived at the intersection of Islamic religion and philosophy. The encyclopedic breadth of her essay spans a multitude of histories – Islamic religion and philosophy, Christianity, art, and cinema to name but a few – in order to trace the genealogy of “the imaginal world” as it evolves as a mediating relation, or “interstice,” between the human and divine; the sublunary and spiritual; the intelligible and the sensible. Copjec shows, how the “imaginal world” is not just another space or dimension but is itself the proper name given to that “material apparition” which inexists in this world and which materializes epiphanic forms out of the medium of images. In particular, the extimate surface of “the imaginal word” sediments in the cinematic materiality of Kiarostami’s films – in the repeated topologies of zig-zags, the detemporalization of scenes, and the minimal distances, created by a tension between Kiarostami’s long shots and the close up, where the “subject’s passionate attachment to her own otherness” is found. All of this is framed by Kiarostami’s “realist impulse,” insofar as Copjec argues his is a cinema that seeks to unveil an “illuminated reality.”

Carol Jacobs probes the problematic of realism, and a “fidelity to reality,” in her essay, “A Tripp to the London National Gallery,” which takes up W. G. Sebald’s relatively obscure piece from 1993, “Like Day and Night: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp.” Jacobs looks closely at Tripp’s large painting, “Déclaration de guerre,” by way of Sebald so as to reexamine the incommensurability between symbolic language and visual imagery, literary fiction and the painted canvas. Beginning with these two compositions, Sebald’s writing and Tripp’s painting, Jacobs’ narrative expands vertiginously outward, taking in a multitude of contextual citations, whilst folding inward and upon itself in a performative deconstruction that simultaneously affirms the irreducibility of each artistic medium and concedes the inseparability of media as such. Via various instances of doubling, Jacobs puts into question the material residues of a reality that in-

heres both inside and outside the artistic frame, thereby generating a chiasmus wherein reality is illuminated both from within and from outside the artwork.

The materiality of a medial surface located at the perimeters of an artwork is taken up again in “The Spectre In The Screen,” wherein Alan Cholodenko conjures forth the haunting presence of animation, as both a technical process and a cultural logic, to elaborate a new theory of spectatorship. Here the scopic field becomes the mediating place-holder for the “*tache*, stain, spot, blind spot, spectre, scotoma,” and which generates its own affective intensity, namely: mourning and melancholy. Building on a theory of the uncanny, evolved here into what Cholodenko calls “the Cryptic Complex of film animation,” this essay calls for not merely a psycho- but a “psuché-analysis” of filmic animation, namely an analysis of the specters that flitter about in and of the frame. Within this theoretical matrix, the work of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard evolve together into the metallic endoskeleton of the Terminator.

Questions of affect and genre converge in Robert Sinnerbrink’s essay, “Planet Melancholia: Romanticism, Mood, and Cinematic Ethics,” which provides a philosophical examination of Lars von Trier’s 2011 film, *Melancholia*. Sinnerbrink is attuned to the film’s dual interests in cinematic romanticism, which he sees as indebted to German romanticism more generally, and in the aesthetics of cinematic moods, which finds form in its portrait of psychical melancholia. For Sinnerbrink, the concatenation of these forms produce their own uncanny de-temporalization: “Melancholia is a mood that imbues the world with a distinctive sensibility, congealing the present, [...] as well as opening up an uncanny, ‘prophetic’ dimension of temporal experience.” This essay ultimately finds its destination in the greater question of ethics, and in how cinema can do ethics, hypothetically prompting aesthetic, moral-psychological and even cultural transformation. “Despite von Trier’s reputation as a cynical manipulator and the film’s critics describing it as a stylised exercise in nihilism,” Sinnerbrink concludes, “Melancholia reveals, on the contrary, the profoundly ethical dimensions of our aesthetic experience of cinematic moods.”

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Knox Peden’s essay, “Cube-Shaped Planet,” examines a set of recent and not-so-recent works of fiction and criticism – principally, however, Paul Bowles’s 1949 novel, *The Sheltering Sky* – in order to develop its argument about the status of intention within what has been described as an age of the Anthropocene. Us-

ing Bowles as a case study, Peden's charge "is to explore the kinds of desires involved in rethinking the world as no longer divided between spheres of causes and reasons, which is to say divided between events that are natural in the sense that they are ultimately explicable as instances of natural laws, and events that are actions, i.e. that can only be explained by appeals to some kind of agential motivation that is not beholden to predictive schemata." This division – which finds articulation throughout the history of philosophy and emphatically with Kant – is examined here precisely as a point of ambiguity, and which is articulated by a whole set of dislocations within the works examined, including diachronic and synchronic conflicts which congeal antinomy in "singular images," fraught character relations, split narrative trajectories, aesthetic forms and figures and the trouble with representing their obverse formlessness.

With "Syllable as Syntax: Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*," Justin Clemens sketches out a sequence of hypotheses regarding the foundations of Mallarmé's masterwork in a new relation forged between syllables and syntax. According to Clemens, building on a rich history of literary criticism, Mallarmé confronts ordinary language with mathematics so as to produce a new, third thing, namely the poem. "Mallarmé," argues Clemens, "accomplishes this through a syllabarization of writing, that is, by decomposing and reconstructing the minimal bond that binds letters in order that they make words and, in this reconstruction, extends this operation of binding across the surface of the page itself." Clemens thus presents the poem as an atomical structure insofar as Mallarmé's own "mission to purify verse" reveals the irreducible structure of poetry which at one and the same time constitutes its essence. In other words, what materializes at the irreducible interstice between syllables is the most chaste form of all: the pure poem.

To be sure, it is the "expanding thresholds of mathematics" that allows our own mediating interface, "Parables of Playful Intelligence," by Henry Sussman, to engage the systematic and cybernetic underpinnings of intelligence itself in the era of digital convergence. At the core of this far-reaching essay is the insistence of the primacy of media and mediation to thought and being. Beginning, then, with the question of therapeutic healing, Sussman maps the systems through which any sort of psychological amelioration must proceed. "The most visceral and indispensable virtual window or clearing for healing that I could invoke," he insists, "is movement itself, particularly over and against the stasis ensuing from



subjection to multiple gravity-sinks of rigidity, from thwarting, writ or delivered systematically.” This logic of momentum, which serves as a counter to the inertia of melancholia, and the peripatetic sentences with which it is performed generate their own feedback loops with multiple antecedes, but most resoundingly in Zen philosophy and in the computational ontologies of Douglas R. Hofstadter.

## 2. Politics

In “Refashioning *Jouissance* for the Age of the Imaginary,” Juliet Flower MacCannell adapts Lacan to and through sartorial fashion in the historical present. This essay argues that Lacan’s insight about sexual difference, that it is an effect of both psychical and bodily logics that guide the subject’s relationship to *jouissance*, ultimately derives from a reading of Freud’s group psychology. Building on these contentions, MacCannell shows that the cultural logic of late capitalism, or postmodernism, is dominated by an ultimately masculine model of *jouissance*, one bound up in managerialism, that might yet be countered by the utopianism of its feminine obverse. For MacCannell, all of this is exemplified in the world of fashion, where a specious flattening out of sexual difference – which, for Lacan, was a point of origin for capitalism – simply means eradicating the feminine. “Where,” this essay asks, “are the images of a *jouissance* that proceed from the feminine side of sexuation?”

Julian Murphet’s “Rosa Plus Emma: Political Pleasure and the Enjoyment of Reason” refashions this question of *jouissance* and its political capabilities in his examination of the apparent antinomy between reason and enjoyment, between categories of economic analysis and the culture of gleeful activism, in modern leftist thought. This essay sets out to elaborate a full semiotic square of “capitalist unreason” and “left rationalism,” and in so doing it draws into relation two of the key strategies for anti-capitalist negation: Bolshevik puritanism and Anarchist liberty. Between these two, however, Murphet finds a hero in the figure of “an antagonist of Anarchism who is further still from the centralising tendencies of Leninism, while somehow effecting in her own position the very negation of capitalist immanence itself” – namely, Rosa Luxemburg.

The following essay, “Reasoning the Disaster,” by Laurence Simmons shifts the historical focus forward into the “future anterior” by interrogating the figure

of catastrophe in order to understand how we might begin to think through the disasters confronting our historical moment. For Simmons any project that attempts to come to terms with thinking the disaster, must at first register the event's own syntax and grammar; in other words, we must first understand its singular temporality insofar as catastrophe is always, already caught in a sort of temporal feedback loop between the future and the past. Drawing predominantly on the work of Jean Pierre Dupuy, and particularly his theory of "projected time," Laurence weaves his own argument through the labyrinths of philosophy, rhetoric, deconstructive semiotics, biblical fable and back again into contemporary cultural crisis. Simmons' own presentational style consists of detours, deviations, turns, and returns to demonstrate the circuitous logic of catastrophe and its negative imprint, non-catastrophe, and proposes that: "before the disaster occurs, it can only not occur; it is in occurring that it begins to have always been necessary, and therefore, that the non-catastrophe, which was possible, begins to have always been impossible."

Jelica Šumič Riha takes Lacan's "Kant with Sade" and squares his presentation of two "incompatible couples"; on the one side Kant and Sade and on the other Sade and Epictetus. Sade, therefore, becomes a mediator between reason and enjoyment insofar as his is the proper name common to the "unheard of relationship between desire and will at the end of analysis." From here Šumič Riha explores a further coupling, or "two modalities", which are generated by the encounter between the subject and the "Other's will to desire." These modalities, Sade's and the Stoics, are examined by Šumič Riha in order to situate the conditions upon which the Other might be subtracted from the equation laid out by Lacan and thereby shifting ethics away from desire and onto an ethics of the drive. It is in this reasoning that Šumič Riha proposes we might be able to contemplate a non-perverse transgression of the pleasure principle.

Rado Riha refocuses this question of enjoyment within the locus of "pure reason," and specifically Kant's second Copernican turn. In so doing Riha shows the moment where Reason works actively on itself in order to excavate the "thing" of thought. In Riha's words, "by being concerned only with itself, reason is, paradoxically, brought to the point that it steps outside itself into the realm of objective reality, there precisely where, prior to the accomplishment of its self-critique, it could not find itself." Here Riha unfurls with meticulous precision the way in which Reason thereby enters the world of objectivity where

the “reflecting power of judgement” casts its indifferent gaze over reason and illuminates the “*material trace*, of that present absence of the thing itself.” This kernel of “the thing of thought” returns us to the drive from which the previous essay left us; and importantly, for Riha, this drive should not be conceived purely within the domain of irreducible singularity but more precisely as a “universally valid singularity,” whereby the inexistence of the thing of thought marks the empirical world as a “*world for all*.”

This demarcation of drive within the realism of collectivity foregrounds Sigi Jöttkandt’s essay, “Repetition and Inscription in Europe’s Dream-land,” which speaks thematically to the multitude of papers we have assembled here: images and imaginaries; cinema; melancholy; the social dreaming of utopic fantasy; collectivities; inexistent forms; the troubled sexuation of *jouissance*; temporal discontinuities; poetry and mathematics. Specifically, it speaks to Slavoj Žižek’s recent interventions into the refugee crisis and the intervening question, “What is Europe?” Jöttkandt places this question, and the traumas of displacement, homelessness and the crossing of territories it betokens, against the frame of inscription and so brings philosophy, aesthetics, and politics to bear on the biopolitical exigencies of the lived present. Jöttkandt redoubles Žižek’s question by asking “What if all that remains of ‘the political’ is the empty gesture of the inward *turn* - a sort of global ‘Brexiting’ of all intersubjective relations that, in mimicking the churn of the maelstrom, at best slows down our capture by the pleasure principle or, at worst, initiates an unstoppable chain reaction that cannibalizes every last limit, eviscerating all thought.” In response to this question, Jöttkandt concludes with the medium with which, with Joan Copjec we began this volume, namely cinema and the predominance of the image, both as symptom of our “vorticial streaming of experience,” and as the singular form that might capture the sorts of trauma we are dealing with today: as a medium that may open up another dream-land from which a new Europe might emerge.

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Adam Bartlett’s essay provides an epilogue to this collection by posing a question that has shadowed many of the other essays comprised herein: how to think the irreducible relation between reason and enjoyment? While this relation has been consistently characterized in the essays by reference to its non-rapport, and so marked as unknowable, untenable, unthinkable, Bartlett attempts to get at the very fact of this disjunction by interrogating knowledge’s production and reproduction within the university discourse. “Like nowhere else, universities –

the social bond as social body – serve at the pleasure of the master and do so very well [...] It creates after all, the means of the surplus the master requires: graduates, who make the correct accusations (sometimes called critique), which is to say, they correctly enjoy.” To counter this state of affairs, Bartlett introduces another “double site of non rapport” in the form of an almost pseudo-couple, Plato and Lacan, who by their powers combined unlock a way of thinking an un-colonized truth into knowledge. For Bartlett, the university is also the site of a radical exception insofar as it constitutes the exact place where knowledge confronts its own inner being. “Between truth and knowledge, or thought and opinion, the analyst and the university, happiness and satisfaction, there is a minimal difference that makes all the difference.” What is required to expose this difference is nothing less than punching a hole in knowledge so as to get to that impasse where the truth materializes as something outside of the state apparatus. In more than one way, then, this epilogue is an apposite end to a collection that seeks to stretch the bounds of knowledge, disciplinarity, and critique. But it also calls into question our own relation to truth as producers and reproducers of knowledge. Particularly at a moment when more than ever before the university discourse is threatened by economic rationalization, managerialism, and bureaucracy. In light of this, Bartlett’s essay asks how are we to submit ourselves “to the limits of knowledge,” and in that death “recommence: should something happen”?

## Conclusion

We end where we began, and thus begin where we end, historically speaking: between Gene Wilder’s 1971 rendition of Willy Wonka and his death, in 2016; between these two chronological points – arbitrary bookends to an individual’s lifetime – an entire historical cycle has occurred. Our penultimate essay speaks to the European crisis, and certainly melancholy persists as an affective energy throughout this entire collection; so I want to end by briefly gesturing towards the shared global crisis we currently inhabit, its melancholic mood and also its antinomy: the hope, or desire, that springs from a resurgent utopianism and which tends to re-emerge at these precise moments when a system of systems is faltering. The real accumulation that typified Robert Brenner’s “Long Boom” of 1948 until around 1973, born of industrial manufacture, collapsed in the force of capitalism’s signal crisis; and yet, in the following decade capitalism reemerged, restructured and reconstructed, as a newly financial operation; but, more recently, in the twenty-first century, finance itself, that autumnal phase

of an accumulative cycle, has given way to an unmistakable winter: a terminal crisis.<sup>5</sup> If, in 1971, Wilder's song voiced the melancholia of witnessing the breakdown of capitalist manufacture, his death seems to mark the endpoint of manufacture's successive phase, finance capital. And if, in 1971, images gave the lie to the abstraction of the symbolic, grounding his utopia on a field of material exploitation, now and more than ever the imaginary comes to the fore as a necessary medium for political conceptualization: in this subsequent, terminal crisis, the crisis of our very present, the mode of production might, at last, be faltering once and for all, but what remains is to properly imagine the alternatives.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945 – 2005*, London: Verso, 2006. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origin of Our Times*, Verso, London 2010.

Joan Copjec\*

## The Imaginal World and Modern Oblivion: Kiarostami's Zig-Zag<sup>1</sup>

A zigzag path carved into a hill winds from base to crest, where it is crowned by a lushly-leaved tree standing solitary and upright like a kind of hieratic bouquet: this image recurs in three films – *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987); *Life and Nothing More* (1992); and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994) – which critics refer to as “the Koker trilogy,” simply because they are all set in the same location, the village of Koker in Northern Iran. Easily mistaken for a “found” image, part of the natural geography of the films’ actual setting, the recurrence of the image would seem to raise no questions nor require explanation. And yet there can be no confusing this image with natural geography, for as we learn from interviews, the films’ director, Abbas Kiarostami, did not just stumble upon this peculiar landscape while scouting locations. He had his film crew carve the pronounced zigzag path into the hill.

An *artificial* landscape, then, inserted by Kiarostami into the natural setting, it replicates, as it turns out, a miniature found in a manuscript executed at Shiraz in southern Persia at the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In the miniature, just as in the Koker trilogy, a sinuous path curls up the side of a hill atop which sprouts a single, flowering tree. This miniature graces the cover of *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, a book on Islamic philosophy in which the book’s author, the influential Iranologist, Henry Corbin, praises the miniature as “the best illustration... which has come down to us today” of what he calls “visionary geography.”<sup>3</sup> Distinct from natural geography or physically “situated space,” which is organized according to pre-established coordinates, visionary geography is, instead, “situative.” Neither purely abstract nor purely concrete and sensible, visionary geography is a “third” or intermediary realm between the abstract and

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this text, titled “The Fate of the Image in Church History and the Modern State,” appeared in the open access journal, *Politica Comun*, 1 (2/2012).

<sup>2</sup> Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1955, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

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the sensible; it functions as a creative forecourt of sensible reality, as the origin of [actual] spatial references and [that which] determines their structure.”<sup>4</sup> In this realm the sense-perceptible is raised and pure intelligibility lowered to the same level, matter is immaterialized and spirit corporealized or, “to use a term currently in favor,” Corbin adds, “an *anamorphosis* is produced.”<sup>5</sup> In Arabic this intermediate space is called *alam-al-mithal*: Corbin translated it: *monde imaginal*, the imaginal world.

Theorized under different names by different philosophers or left unnamed, the imaginal world only became visible as a fundamental concept of Islamic philosophy thanks to Corbin’s decision to gather the disparate reflection under this one term. In the words of Christian Jambet, Corbin’s most famous follower, this felicitous translation “opened a new path” in the study of Islam and gave us “nothing less than a master signifier with which to decipher the meaning and destiny of [the] [Islamic] soul.”<sup>6</sup>

Corbin did more however than restore the concept to its central place in Islamic thought; he became its vigorous advocate and bemoaned the consequences, into the present, of its regrettable loss. In his estimation, the year 869 AD, i.e., the year of the Fourth Council of Constantinople, was a decisive turning point, for from this moment on the *mundus imaginalis* fell permanently under the penumbra of its anathematization. During the fourth century a series of Councils were convened to hammer out Church dogma in order to establish the Church as a central, unified authority. If it was specifically the Fourth Council that inspired Corbin’s lament, this is no doubt because it was at this Council that Photios I, the Great Patriarch of Constantinople, was deposed in retaliation for his condemnation of the *filioque* clause. A Latin addition to the earlier Greek creed, the *filioque* clause stated that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both God, the Father, and “from the Son.” That is, it accorded Christ equal divinity with the Father and thus “abolishe[d] once and for all the tripartite anthropology of spirit, soul, and body in favor of the simple duality of body and soul.” By deposing the most powerful critic of the *filioque*, the Council signaled its embrace of the double

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Voyage and the Messenger: Iran and Philosophy*, trans. Joseph Rowe, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley 1998, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Jambet, *The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mulla Sadra*, trans. Jeff Fort, Zone Books, New York 2006, p. 284.

procession of the Holy Spirit and from this moment on, according to Corbin's stinging denunciation, "the way was open [to] the Cartesian dualism of thought and extension. For, from this moment it became impossible to conceive of Spiritual Forms in the *plastic* sense of the term [as having a capacity for change] or of true substances that were fully real and had extension even though they were separated from the dense matter of the world."<sup>7</sup> In other words, what was at stake was a materialism that did not found itself in matter.

What was anathematized at this moment – and so thoroughly so that we have since come to associate its execration not just with the Church Council, but with the triumph of secularism – what was anathematized is the world of "subtle matter" (a matter that was neither purely spiritual nor purely material) and an organ of knowledge, the imagination, distinct from both the intellect and the senses. The impoverishment of the status of the prophetic imagination and the images formed there – which would henceforth come to be regarded as simply unreal, mere fantasy – went hand in glove with an impoverishment of reality itself, which, too, began to lose its dignity.<sup>8</sup> The dualistic thinking of Western metaphysics is, then, in Corbin's estimation, the direct issue of *the* fundamental dogma of Christianity: God's incarnation in the person of Christ.

### Ostentatio Corpus

What Corbin objected to was the Church's decision to view God's *appearance* as Christ as a unique historical occurrence located at a precise and irreversible moment of chronological time, rather than as an event that happens repeatedly at different moments in time and uniquely to each of the faithful. The latter position is the one adopted and collectively defended by the *falasifa*, ie the Islamic philosophers who took their inspiration from Avicenna and who taught that the soul expresses itself in an aspiration toward the still unrealized and not, as

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Bamford, "Introduction," *The Voyage and the Messenger*, xxi. Although he says that he is quoting Corbin directly, Bamford does not provide references to specific texts in this introduction.

<sup>8</sup> A troubling, if humorous, illustration of this demotion of the imagination is given in Barry Mazur, *Imagining Numbers*, New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2003, which quotes an editor at McGraw-Hill: "We were told [while composing high school history textbooks] to avoid using the word 'imagine' because people in Texas felt it was too close to the word 'magic' and therefore might be considered anti-Christian," p. 15.



Averroes held, in an intellectual desire to know God.<sup>9</sup> For the *falasifa*, the uncreated, the divine, had to be returned to repeatedly and ceaselessly created, for theirs was a world whose ends were not already given. It was this belief that set them in direct conflict with Church dogma, which maintained that the godhead passed over into, or became incarnated in, esoteric matter, in a single finite Being and that this fact was publicly and universally attestable.

Broadly construed, the dogma of Incarnation concerns a central paradox not just of Christianity, but of monotheism in general. Far more than a simple reduction of the polytheistic pantheon to a single God, monotheism was a “revolution of cosmic proportions” in that it introduced a new, previously unthinkable being into the world.<sup>10</sup> Instead of merely reducing the many to one, monotheism – in order to make the One-God the God of all – radically *rethought* the One, conceiving it not as identical but as always more or less than itself. One and yet plural, one only through its plurality. Christ offered a perfect illustration of this conception, for he was at once God and not identical to Him, different but inseparable from Him, the second person of God.

Still, the precise statement of the paradox entailed a protracted debate, one that lasted centuries and began even before the First Council of Nicea (326 AD), when the doctrine was first asserted. It should be noted that Corbin aims at a specific, literal conception of the dogma of Incarnation, one that tended to congeal rather than multiply the One. We can approach his argument by clarifying a possible confusion that might result from his precise dating of the theo-philosophical disaster that dispensed with the imaginal world to embrace instead the human/divine duality. The synod of 869 is notable not only for having thrown

<sup>9</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1969, p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Corbin, *Le Paradoxe du Monotheisme*, Paris, L’Herne, 1981, consists of three essays that lay out the paradoxes of Islamic monotheism, the importance of its angelology, and the main tenets of its apophatic theology. In a conversation with Fethi Benslama titled “Tranductions des monotheismes,” in *Cliniques mediterraneennes*, 73 (2006), Jean-Luc Nancy represents monotheism as a mutation of cosmology; this essay was translated by Ed Pluth as “Translation of Monotheism” and published in the on-line journal, *S*, 2 (2009), in a special issue devoted to “Islam and Psychoanalysis,” ed. Sigi Jöttkandt and Joan Copjec. See also *Imago Dei. The Byzantine Apology for Icons*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1990, where Jaroslav Pelikan discusses the conception of Christ as the creation of a “new being.”

its support on the side of the *filioque* clause, but also for reaffirming support for the iconophiles, who had battled the iconoclasts in two long and bitter wars (between 730-787 and between 813 – 842 AD) over the status of the image. (While these bloody image wars have often been viewed as a doctrinal disguise for mundane struggles for political power, it has been shown that the reverse was true. We will return to this point later.) Now, that the Church embraced both the image and the *filioque* in the same breath would seem to cast doubt on Corbin's linkage of a reductive dualism with the devaluation of the image – but only if the questions is: “Who won the wars; the detractors or defenders of images?” The real question is, “Which definition of the image prevailed?” And the answer to this is: not the one for which the iconophiles fought.

The question the iconophiles had to confront was, “How can material, man-made images be conceived as images of a limitless, immaterial God?” St. John of Damascus (676 – 749) disarmed the iconoclast of their single most powerful weapon, the prohibition against “graven images,” by arguing that God himself suspended the prohibition when he instituted a new world order by incarnating himself in Christ, who is, significantly referred to, in 2 Corinthians 4:4, as “the image of the invisible God.” Violating/fulfilling His own law, God lifted its custodianship when He moved out of Himself, as it were, becoming Christ while remaining God at the same time. This act of procession, which defines the plural unity of God, makes Him an image of Himself, leads John continuously to pose questions about the nature of images and what it means to “depict” God. An image, he explains, is “a likeness and pattern and impression of something, showing itself in what is depicted; however...the image is one thing and what is depicted is another – and certainly a difference is seen between them, since they are not identical.”<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that John did not endorse the *filioque* clause, for he did not regard “Christ the image” as consubstantial with God. Immaterial, infinite, God is by definition without image in the material, finite sense. Images thus do not give us “direct knowledge” of what they depict but instead allow us to see that “the depicted” lay hidden.<sup>12</sup> For John and other iconophiles, the primary function of the image was to bore a hole, an opening, in the visible world through which the invisible could shine through. The Fourth

<sup>11</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. and intro. Andrew Louth, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood 2003, *Treatise III*, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Council of Constantinople abandoned the terms of the original debate, however. Up to this point the debate had centered on the difficult question of *God's* image – how can there be an image of God? – but the more simple issue of *Christ's* image. Not Christ as an image of God (as He was formerly conceived), but Christ's image as a pedagogical tool. That is, in 869 a pedagogical imperative usurped the terms of the debate as it assumed the task of elevating the image to the status of the Word. Images of Christ were now revalued for their ability to depict for the skeptical illiterates who made up a large portion of the Church's membership, the historical events of Christ's life on earth, his *unique* status as the image of God. Not only did this shift dissolve the Trinitarian conception of the divine, it dissolved, too the entire tissue of relations between God and man which the image conceived as icon had opened. No longer epiphanized in the variegated likenesses of men, no longer a multiplier of images, the One-God now became congealed through His instantiation in the single image of Christ. Images began to be accepted by the Church on the grounds that they performed the function of representing the unique historical events of the life and death of Christ, as embodiment of God.

The effect of this was epoch-making; for all at once *images lost their translucency and became opaque*. Iconophiles distinguished icons from idolatrous images on the grounds that the former opened onto a dimension that would otherwise remain absolutely invisible. They valued icons for the way they allowed the light of the hidden, the withdrawn, to shine through them. What this light illuminated was our *intimate relation to the divine, not the divine itself*, whose privileged obscurity was preserved. Once images were revalued for their illustrative rather than illuminating function, they were no longer conceived as portals, passage-ways, between the invisible and the visible and came to be regarded instead as if they “were [themselves] the light that reveal[ed them] and [made them] visible.”<sup>13</sup>

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At the moment it ceased to shine through images from an invisible source, the meaning of light itself shifted. Once conceived as the phenomenon designated by the Latin *lumen*, light was at this point reconceived as *lux*.<sup>14</sup> The general

<sup>13</sup> Henry Corbin, “Theophanies and Mirrors. Idols or Icons?” *Spring*, 2 (1983), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Relevant discussions of the widely observed distinction between *lumen* and *lux* can be found in Hans Blumenberg, “Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Conception Formation,” *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. David Michael Levin, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 30 – 62; and

outline of this historical shift might be described thus: *lumen* was attributed to an invisible source; the dazzling brilliance with which it became manifest as each image-locus rendered that image unique, singular. In contrast, the point from which *lux* emanated was no longer *real* (understood here as the point of an encounter not with an ultimate but a withdrawn ground) but *abstract*.<sup>15</sup> When Corbin complains that the dogma of incarnation commits a grievous error by turning God's appearance, his image, into a publicly and universally attestable fact instantiated in an object, or in "exoteric matter," he is objecting to the way that dogma "de-luminated" the world, bathing it in an abstract source of light that shined "indiscriminately on every object."<sup>16</sup> *Lux* lights a world with no hidden dimensions, a world in which all can be revealed, for when no distance separates what is seen from the invisible source of illumination, then everything can come into the light or "become objective to itself in reflection."<sup>17</sup> Islamic philosophy is a philosophy, then, precisely of *illumination*, that is to say, of *lumen*. The locus of illumination was called "soul," the inwardness unique to each individual who maintains a relation to another dimension. These terms will lead you astray, however, if the peculiar topology of the *falasifa*, according to which what is most "internal" or "esoteric" turns out to be *external* to the subject is not taken into account. We will come back to this later.

Now if these historical alterations of the conception of images and light did take place after the Fourth Council, we should be able to provide evidence of the shift and from there demonstrate what was lost. As it happens, we do not have far to look. We find it in the very place one would expect to: in the changing iconography of Christ. Art historians have long observed that while in the early centuries, Christ was usually depicted as a *puer aeternus*, an eternally youthful boy in whose form the light of divinity seemed to shine through, in later centuries, after the concept of the incarnation had been more fully established as the centerpiece of Christian orthodoxy, the earlier manner of depicting him was abandoned in

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in Tom Cheetham, *After Prophecy. Imagination, Incarnation, and the Unity of the Prophetic Tradition*, Spring Books, New Orleans 2007, p. 90, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> William Chittick, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination. The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, SUNY Press, Albany 1989, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Cheetham, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Blumenberg, p. 50.

favor of images in which he was pictured – Corbin states the observation very discreetly – as a “mature man with signs of a differentiated virility.”<sup>18</sup>

This very point is made much less obliquely in a book-length study of representations of Christ in Renaissance art in which the art historian, Leo Steinberg, reproduces hundreds of images that persuasively show that Christ’s fully rendered genitalia were insistently placed on display in the art of the period.<sup>19</sup> It seems that it had become necessary by about 1260, the time the broad movement of the Renaissance began, to demonstrate that the Son of God was “complete in all the parts of a man.” This meant that even when the subject of a woodcut or painting was not a man, but happened instead to be the infant Jesus, it was not his glowing heart, but the unmistakable and ostentatiously displayed presence of his penis, his publicly confessed “flesh,” that greeted the spectator’s eye.

Around the 246 figures reproduced in *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Steinberg weaves a scholarly and visually astute argument that, among other things, covers much of the same ground as Corbin’s argument does. Steinberg, too, makes a point of distinguishing the Renaissance depiction of Christ from earlier Byzantine and medieval images of the Christ Child, in which Christ’s body disappears under ceremonial robes that come down to his feet and he “remains an ‘image,’ a Holy Icon, without any admixture of earthly realism.”<sup>20</sup> Like Corbin, Steinberg ascribes the distinctive gesture of these Renaissance representations – namely, the *ostentatio genitalium* – to the dogma of incarnation, which had become a dominant pictorial subject during the period. In brief, Steinberg clearly establishes that Renaissance art defined as one of its most important tasks the visualization and proof of the dogma of incarnation. The Iranologist, Corbin, and the art historian, Steinberg, both assert that the fervor behind these later representations of Christ was fueled by a need to quash a principled doubt that still threatened incarnationist theology. Here is Steinberg:

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<sup>18</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 276.

<sup>19</sup> Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, New York, Pantheon, 1983; this book was originally published as a special issue of *October* 25 (Summer 1983). *The New York Times*, March 15, 2011, praised this book as “one of the most provocative art-historical studies of the 20th century.”

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[S]ince the Incarnation draws its effectiveness from responsive faith, it would have forfeited that effectiveness, had it been open to legitimate doubt: without proof of blood, the flesh assumed by the godhead might have been thought merely simulated, phantom, deceptive. Such indeed w[as] the pestiferous doctrine advanced more than a thousand years earlier by Docetists [...], those who held Christ's assumed body to have been spiritual, not carnal, so that he only appeared to be suffering.<sup>21</sup>

Now, here precisely is where the art historian and the Iranologist part ways. For, as Corbin will tell you, the “pestiferous doctrine” against which the Quattrocento orators “discharge[d] the full spleen of their rhetoric” in order fervently to embrace the dogma that the godhead had incarnated Himself in the oozing, bleeding, suffering flesh of His son, this “pestiferous doctrine” was never anything more than a feature or tendency of a disorganized mass of Christologies that flourished before the great Church schism. Corbin, however, defends this tendency and transforms it into a resolute feature of the philosophy of illumination, which vigorously challenged the idea that the divinity made merely one appearance at one moment in time. From the Greek noun *dokhema*: a vision or fantasy, but also opinion or expectation; and the verb, *dokeo*, to appear or show itself, but also to think, imagine, credit, admit or expect, Docetism was denounced by the Church for the reasons Steinberg gives. Let us examine a passage from the *Qur'an* (4: 157), chosen by Corbin to demonstrate the “resolute docetism” that subtends it.<sup>22</sup> The passage, which unequivocally denies that the Jews killed Christ Jesus, reads like this: “They neither killed nor crucified him, though it so appeared to them. Those who disagree in the matter are only lost in doubt. They have no knowledge of it other than conjecture.”

No matter that its doctrinal status and affiliation with a school are both disputed, this docetist assertion will still strike believers as pestiferous. For, that Christ could not have been killed nor crucified because he never actually existed, that what witnesses saw was not a divine reality but a mere “phantom,” “simulated,” is a claim that seems to touch on a core Christian belief and thus risks being

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Corbin, “Comparative Spiritual Hermeneutics,” in *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, West Chester, PA, Swedenborg Foundation, Albany 1999, p. 130.

read as a religious and political insult on a grand scale.<sup>23</sup> Fully aware that this passage and his defense of it have the capacity grievously to offend, Corbin nevertheless insists that it is not the passage but the monotonous and misguided derision of docetism that is the source of the problem, for this derision manufactures a misreading of the passage's intent. The *Qur'an* does not deny the existence of Christ, his divine reality, or the reality of his suffering. What it does forcefully deny is that 1) man has the capacity to kill or eradicate the divine; and 2) the divine enters into or incarnates itself in a body or a world, as in a container or tomb. In the docetic conception, the divine does not enter into the world, but comes to its level and thus displaces the world from itself. No longer an enclosure, a container, the world is now out of line with itself, spread out indefinitely without perimeter. This is to say, the Islamic philosophers who exhibit a docetic tendency adamantly maintain that "the other world *already exists in this world*."<sup>24</sup> A far cry from the "other world" of dogmatic religion, theirs "has no beginning or end," but is, instead, "perpetually engendered in this world."<sup>25</sup> While the world is "existentiated," or comes ceaselessly into existence, there is no Creator, solitary and outside of time, who brings it into existence out of nothing. From this it is possible to see that "far from degrading 'reality' by making it an 'appearance'; [as its detractors charge, docetism] on the contrary, transform[s] reality into 'appearance,' makes [it] transparent to the transcendent ... manifested in it. Thus docetism attaches *no value to a material fact unless it is appearance, that is, unless it is apparition*."<sup>26</sup> In brief: docetism argues for the existence of a *material apparition*. This means that it argues for the appearing or becoming of appearance, as the new, out of the existing world.

We will need to say more, however, to elucidate this notion of "material apparition," of a materialism that challenges much of what goes by that name. We can begin by noting what is at issue for Steinberg stands in stark contrast to apparition: the visualization of the material fact of Christ's body, or, as he says much too precipitously, the *sexuality* of Christ. "By harnessing its theological impulse to the attestation of the utter carnality of God's humanation [Steinberg avows], Renaissance artists confronted the incarnation entire, upper and lower body to-

<sup>23</sup> For an extensive discussion of this issue, see Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, One World Press, Oxford, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

gether, not excluding even the Body's sexual component."<sup>27</sup> Is it correct to say, however, that by exposing Christ's genitalia, his "sexual parts," Renaissance artists exposed his sexuality? Did they not, rather, inadvertently bring into focus a crucial distinction between the body in its material density and the body as "material apparition," that is to say: the sexualized body? Corbin described the doctrine of incarnation as "the great sin of literalist theologians," and nothing justifies his claim better than the work of these Renaissance artists who attempted to give visual proof of the doctrine. The sin of the literalists consisted in their "assimilation of... *dissimulation* to what it *dissimulates*."<sup>28</sup>

"Dissimulation" refers to the "epiphanic form" or "apparition" or "image" through which God is manifest, but if the image dissimulates it cannot be by pretending to be what it is not. For, how can that which has no image be assimilated to its image; how can that which is withdrawn from the world be incarnated there? The error of assimilation is equivalent to that of conflating an object that appears in a mirror with the mirror's substrate. In this case the object is no longer suspended in the place of its appearance but collapsed with it. Assimilation reduces, destroys, that which it *manifests as hidden* by claiming to *unveil* it.

Again the question comes back to the meaning of "epiphanic form," "material apparition," "image." What can it mean to say that the divine appears in the world without being collapsible with it, that divine being is "suspended" in the world as image? How can something be fully real and have extension without being reducible to the dense matter of the world? What appears in the world, without being of the same substance, is a radical elsewhere, an other scene, which turns our heads, orients or magnetizes us such that we turn away from the world. What suspends itself in the finite world is not flimsy fantasy but precisely the fully real extension of the ego through its relation to this other place. Extension in this sense characterizes not some thing (*res extensa*) but *relation*; ego extends itself beyond itself and towards what is other to it. Docetism maintains that God appears in the world as our singular relation to Him. *He* is not made flesh, not incarnated in a finite body, as the literalists would have it. Rather, it is the finite bodies of individual beings that are "made flesh," though in a different sense

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<sup>27</sup> Steinberg, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Corbin, "Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismailian Gnosis," in *Cyclical Time and Ismailian Gnosis*, Routledge, New York 1983, p. 106.



now. Through their relation to the unliquidatable otherness of the Divine, they are “subtilized,” rendered capable of an infinity of real acts and irreducible to their vulnerabilities, diseases and death. Since the term, *flesh*, strikes us as too irrevocably tainted by the dogma of incarnation to take on the new meaning we want to give it, we prefer, instead, to speak not of the finite subject’s *becoming flesh*, but rather of its *sexualization*. But this will require that we continue to stress the impropriety of Steinberg’s linking sexuality to incarnation. As developed by Freud, and the discourse he founded, sexuality is, we would argue, resolutely anti-incarnationist. It is no coincidence that a docetic concept of the image survived in notions such as *imago* and *archetype* to play a role in the theorization of sexuality, even though the notions were often poorly understood.

Although we cannot fully this line of argument here, we can sketch its parameters by reflecting a bit on the response of later artists to Renaissance representations of Christ’s sexual organ. We have not yet taken account of the full title of Steinberg’s study, which goes on to take note of the subsequent consignment of the sexuality of Christ to *modern oblivion*. Post-Renaissance artists abruptly reversed course by refraining – even recoiling – from picturing the private parts of the Savior, going so far as to over-paint earlier representations of Christ’s genitalia in order to veil their indecent exposure in Renaissance paintings. Steinberg draws attention to the unique nature of the Renaissance period, which would enjoy no sequel, in stark terms: “Renaissance artists, committed for the first time since the birth of Christ to naturalistic modes of representation, were the *only* group within Christendom whose *métier* required them to plot every inch of Christ’s body.”<sup>29</sup> He attributes this explicit mapping of Christ’s body to the historically isolated synthesis of the Christological dogma of incarnation and a naturalistic mode of representation and accounts for the recoil of later artists and audiences from this pictorial fusion of nature and divinity only briefly and in a flat, historicist way. Characterizing the style of Renaissance artists as “incarnational realism,” Steinberg implies that the time would come when realist representation would divest itself of the dogma to which it sought during the Renaissance to give visual proof and would become realism simple. In a later moment the fusion of realism and religion would come to seem distasteful and realism would no longer seem an appropriate style for rendering images of Christ, whose corporality ceased to be considered a proper subject of representation.

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<sup>29</sup> Steinberg, p. 16.

In short, outside of a few scandal-provoking works by modern artists, the practice of depicting Christ's genitals was abandoned after the Renaissance because it came to be seen as *pornographic*. I state this more bluntly than Steinberg partially to insert Kiarostami into the discussion of the phenomenon of "modern oblivion." Kiarostami has several times insisted that showing too much, or giving too much information, is "pornographic." How to understand this? In Steinberg's argument the phrase, "modern oblivion," designates the effacement of any representation of Christ's genitalia not only from artistic practice but also from post-Renaissance, or modern, consciousness. We would argue, however, that rather than abandoning or betraying the doctrine of incarnation, a certain "naturalistic mode of representation" *continues in modern consciousness to instantiate the doctrine*, even though the subject of Christ's incarnated body is no longer the subject of most art. That is, it was precisely through the *effacement* of epiphanic forms, or appearance in the strong sense, and the *depiction* of Christ's genitals that a "modern oblivion" began to manifest itself; and the later recoil from this depiction was itself proof of this effacement/oblivion. That is, contra Steinberg, what we see in the reactive reluctance of post-Renaissance artists to merge Christ with the human order is evidence of their continued – if compensatory – adherence to the tenets of incarnational realism.

Recall that Corbin's attacks on the doctrine of incarnation focus on its reduction of the tripartite division of divinity in favor of a simple duality: divine versus finite being, pure spirit versus matter. The problem with simple dualities is the inevitability with which one of the terms usurps the other to produce a hierarchy. Officially the doctrine of incarnation was supposed to benefit humanity, the utter carnality of God's humanation in Christ was said to save man by elevating him above other creatures. Corbin argues that this doctrine resulted, on the contrary, in the demotion of man, and the finite world generally, to the status of opaque matter. In support of Corbin's argument we might enlist an observation of Hegel's regarding a modern form of the opposition between faith and knowledge. He claims that it was for fear of "reducing the sacred Grove to mere timber," that modern subjectivity denied itself God intellectually in order that it might still pine for Him in sighs and prayers.<sup>30</sup> Translating this into our terms, we would say that if later artists refused to render the Son of God realistically (as

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Catherine Malabou in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans., Lisabeth During, Routledge, London and New York 2005, p. 110.

fully incarnate), it was for fear of losing the real God of their faith. Hegel calls attention to the very paradox on which Corbin insists: modern consciousness ended up “build[ing] a rigid and insurmountable opposition between subjectivity in its urge toward the eternal and the eternal itself.” This rigid opposition is the result of a modern obliviousness to, or total obliteration of, all mediation between God and empirical reality, which in turn threatened empirical reality with utter “ineffectuality” and “absolute solitude and aloneness.”<sup>31</sup>

Nietzsche offers an account of the depreciation of finite existence by modern consciousness similar to that of Hegel – despite the fact that his account is mounted as an attack on the Hegel dialectic. Nietzsche complains that by replacing God with a fully incarnated man-God, Hegel reactively demoted this man-god and the terrain He inhabits. “The pitiful cry, ‘God is dead!’ Nietzsche famously claims, does not get rid of God but, on the contrary, gives Him absolute power over us. The synthesis of God with time, becoming, history, and man turns God into an object of synthetic knowledge, at which point death enters God and the ‘centre of gravity’ is thereby shifted ‘out of life into the ‘Beyond.’”<sup>32</sup> Put otherwise: that which dissimulates has here so thoroughly assimilated what it dissimulates that God disappears completely from earthly reality and emerges elsewhere, absolutely transcendent and simply apophatic, without relation to the world. This argument does not figure in the account Steinberg gives of the rejection of incarnational realism by post-Renaissance artists, yet the validity of the argument is nevertheless made plain in an observation he makes regarding the actual depiction of Christ’s genitalia in Renaissance art: “the sexual member exhibited by the Christ Child, so far from asserting aggressive virility, conceded instead God’s assumption of human weakness; it is an affirmation not of superior prowess but of... the Creator’s self-abasement to his creature’s condition. And instead of symbolizing... the generative power of nature, Christ’s sexual organ... yields... not seed, but... the first fruits of [his] growing death.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 273 This passage is quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Athlone Press, London 1983, p. 152.

<sup>33</sup> Steinberg, pp. 46-47.

Corbin says something strikingly similar: “Incarnated, [Christ] is buried in the flesh until the time comes for him to be buried in the grave.”<sup>34</sup> And in terms that echo and significantly alter Hegel’s, he warns that, “The Burning Bush is only a brushwood fire if it is merely perceived by the sensory organs. In order that Moses may perceive the Burning Bush and hear the Voice [of God] calling him,” we must suppose an organ of trans-sensory perception, the creative imagination, and credit the existence of an imaginal world.<sup>35</sup> While the sacred Grove rises up, fully transcendent and inaccessible, to offer false hope to the pining world it abandons, the Burning Bush provides radiant testimony of the incorruptibility of finite existence. The insurmountable duality, which tilts in favor of the transcendent Grove, is transformed, becomes passable, by the non-simple addition of the imaginal world, which is nothing other than the inexistent topos of relation. The imaginal topos is populated not by incarnate beings, but by bodily organs that cannot be located *within* any individual body because they are, rather, positioned alongside bodies. If these organs can be said to disincarnate or “incorporealize” the bodies, it is not by negating corporeality but by extending it. They do not tilt a corporeal-spiritual duality in favor of a superiority of the spiritual, but tilt or dislocate corporeality in the direction of surplus. The organs of *trans-sensory perception* – the “trans” marking the movement of extension of the body’s going beyond its reductive localization – *precede and direct* the merely sensory organs. These organs render the body irreducible to its morbid destiny insofar as they relieve the body of its exclusive reliance on and preoccupation with impressions received from the external, empirical world. The organs of trans-sensory perception are, rather, actively affected by the otherness of a non-existing reality, a “suspended” or “latent” reality referred to as *esoteric* because its origin is not to be found in the external world or empirical reality. This nomenclature is, however, deceptive, since esoteric reality is by virtue of its inexistence more profoundly distant or external to the subject than is empirical reality.

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The problematic nature of the genital organs represented by Renaissance artists – which even in Steinberg’s telling, display signs of Christ’s incarnate weakness and exclusive dependence on an already actualized and decaying reality – is clarified by this discussion: attesting to the full carnality of Christ, they lack any trans-sensory dimension. We are not done elaborating the logic and con-

<sup>34</sup> Corbin, “Divine Epiphany...,” p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 80.

sequences of this dimension. For the moment, however, we want to insist that when Kiarostami bemoans the pornographic impulse to show too much, he is not sanctioning a taboo of sexuality from representation but bemoaning the effacement, or burial, of sexuality in incarnate substance.

### Docetic Realism

The cinema of Kiarostami is a realist cinema often compared to that of post-war Italian neorealism or, because several of his films are (simulated or semi-simulated) documentaries, to *cinema vérité*. I will continue to propose that the realist or documentary impulse behind the work is docetic, that what Kiarostami tries to make appear or show itself in his films is an *illuminated reality*. It is a gamble, I realize, to state my thesis in esoteric terms since it runs the risk of blocking recognition of the contemporary significance of the arguments they once and still serve. Fortunately, Kiarostami has preceded us in the translation of these terms into the language of everyday, contemporary reality and we will thus rely on these translations to bring home our arguments. Adopting an unconventional itinerary we will introduce the work of Kiarostami through the only apparently slight 1983 film, *Fellow Citizen*. Set in an area of Tehran that has recently been closed to traffic, it consists entirely of a string of special pleadings, convoluted excuses, and (most likely) outright lies with which desperate motorists hope to be able to convince the traffic officer on duty to allow them to pass through the barrier. None of the motorists displays any disrespect for the officer or the law, indeed what is striking is the way a kind of respect or at least a faith in her pact with the law seems to invite the endearing ingenuity with which each attempts to skirt it. The consistency of the responses – not one fails to engage in ruse – in combination with the demeanor of the drivers leads us to understand that what we are witnessing does not go under the name of exception. None of these citizens (the title defines them as such and thus links them to the law and to state power) considers him or herself to be above or outside the law; rather, each seems to take it for granted that the law does not cover all circumstances, that there is in the law itself something that is not decided by law and that this emancipates those subject to it from rote conduct. One by one the cars pull up from the back of the screen to the foreground where the traffic official stands guard, and one by one each driver spins some simple or elaborate tale to persuade the guard to let her pass through, before being finally turned back, obliged to find another route. The fellowship of the motorists depends not on their being able

to enter an inner sanctum, but precisely in their displays of guile – and their ultimate dispersal in different directions. Is this entire film not a reinscription of Kiarostami's signature image, the solitary tree here replaced by a law that plants its sinuous root in the very real world of traffic and construction, only to send each of its subjects off on her own path?

Recall a point briefly made earlier regarding the long drawn-out Byzantine wars, fought with enormous historical consequences, over the nature of the image: the warring factions, we insisted, sought not simply to grab political power but, more fundamentally, to determine what constituted it. That is, the wars were a bloody struggle over the very definition of the symbolic function of political authority. The iconoclasts held a position known as *akribeia*, which is basically what we think of as strict constructionism; it favors exactitude, the rigorous application of the “original intent” of laws without concern for changing circumstances. The iconophiles took a different view: they held that there was an *economy* of political power, where *economy* referred to an act of dispensation, of arranging or ordering wherein divine authority disposed or distributed itself in history, in relation to the whole of creation, including the Church and its fathers. Economy concerns thus the nature of the link between spiritual and temporal power, law and everyday reality, the visible and the invisible. Among the many meanings of the term, *economy-dispensation, plan, arrangement, providence* – others just as fundamental stick out in the context of our discussion: *guile, lie, ruse*.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout his films and in several published statements, Kiarostami has insisted on the importance of the lie, which is, he claims, the only means we have of getting at the truth. But what meaning can truth have if lies are our only access to it? And what can truth mean in the (after all) realist film world of Kiarostami, which makes no reference to an “other world” in the dogmatic, hierarchical sense, no reference to a first principle or final cause to which this world would be subservient? Without these there can be no measure of truth and thus, it would seem, no truth. But if the realist principle subtending his films obliges Kiarostami to admit of no world but this finite one here, it does not

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<sup>36</sup> Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy, the Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franses, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2005, p. 13. Mondzain refers in her introduction to the economy as a “universe of guile, which should remind us of what Islamic tradition knew and developed under the name *hila*,” p. 6.

oblige him to embrace the nominalist contention that this world consists only of finite things in themselves and disqualifies absolutely notions such as infinity and truth. Kiarostami would be the first to admit that there *are* only things in themselves, *except* – he would want to clarify – there is the imaginal world, hence: truths. In this context *except* clearly does not mean to say that the imaginal world is set outside and above this one; the imaginal world names the “other world” *within this one*. But although it appears among the things of this world, it is not one of them for, simply put, the imaginal world does not exist. It is not another existing thing, but what inexists between them. It is conceived, above all, as the power of constraint and separation. Through the intervention of the imaginal world law is constrained or held back from unfolding all at once and the things of this world are separated such that they are prevented from forming a continuous block, one phenomenon becoming the cause of another which in turn causes another, inexorably. This last is the definition of determinism, law that is applied irrespective of the reality it confronts. It is also the definition of iconoclasm, which, in being a rejection of the icon, was at the same time a rejection of the *economy* of power.<sup>37</sup>

Kiarostami’s films constitute reflections on the ontological status of the image; they reintroduce us to the power of the imaginal dimension. In a world increasingly controlled by imaging techniques, where images proliferate and command a growing share of our attention, his films are remarkable for diagnosing the problem confronting the modern world as a *dearth* of images.<sup>38</sup> A glut of images distracts from the scarcity of icons. One of the main maladies of his frenetic characters is their want of an image. The extraordinary 1990 film, *Close-Up*, is the clearest illustration of the problem. In the film, Hossein Sabzian, a mostly unemployed printer and Turkish-speaking member of the *mostazafin* – the downtrodden class which the Islamic Revolution was supposed to have lifted up, but did not, the dispossessed betrayed yet again, this time by the regime that replaced the Shah – finds himself in an intolerable situation. Having fallen through all the cracks in the system into near-total obscurity, Sabzian longs to have an image, to gain some foothold in the visible world. And yet, because he seems to have a less than clear sense of how to acquire an image, he commits a crime that has no chance of succeeding: image theft. To have an image means

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

to be singular, or – as we argued earlier – to have a *unique relation* to that “elsewhere” to which we are all exposed. Sabzian does, however, seem to be clear on one point: an image is something primary. To have an image is to have a capacity, it is a fundamental corporeal and not merely abstract matter. Thus he decides to snatch not the image of some matinee *idol*, a movie star, but that of a movie or *image maker*. In an act of desperation he tries to pass himself off as Makhmalbaf, the famous Iranian filmmaker beloved for his film, *The Cyclist*, which is about a similarly dispossessed person, this time an Afghani refugee. Momentarily mistaken for Makhmalbaf by a woman sitting next to him on a bus, Sabzian slips into the role of famous director and is eventually caught trying to dupe this woman and her family, the equally film-struck Ahankhas. He has been thrown in jail and is awaiting trial when Kiarostami reads about the case in a newspaper and decides to film the trial and a reenactment of the crime in which the principle characters are all persuaded to play themselves. *Close-Up*, the film, does not spring *ex-nihilo* from the head of its director, but from reality itself; yet neither does the film attempt merely to replicate the pre-existing reality of the situation. Not content to lag behind the story reported in the newspaper, to permit reality to continue to preexist it, the film, rather, catches up with and eventually outdistances the actual situation. In the end it intervenes in and brings about an alteration of the real life circumstances: the procedure and outcome of the trial are positively affected by the very filming of Kiarostami’s film.

The primary function of the opening sequence is manifestly one of delay. This is not to suggest that the film has not yet “caught up” with reality, as I put it just now, but that it has already found its place alongside it. In this first sequence the police and reporter from the newspaper that broke the story pull up at the home of the Ahankhahs in order to arrest Sabzian. While we in the audience fully expect to enter the home along with the police and to witness the arrest, we are denied access both to the home and the scene. We remain outside with the camera in the cul-de-sac of a street in front of the home, where there is nothing to see other than the ill-equipped reporter, who has forgotten to bring a tape recorder, running around from door to door trying to borrow one from the neighbors and the taxi driver, biding his time as he waits for his fare by picking flowers out of a dump and inadvertently dislodging an aerosol that rolls down the street.

This tactic of delay has the effect of putting off the appearance of Sabzian, as if to emphasize the problem of his image *deficit*. But this is not all. It will be the



task of the film to allow him to acquire an image, not the pilfered image of a look-alike, but his own self-likeness. To accomplish this task the film will have to turn us into witnesses to his appearing, to his emergence in the visible. The first sequence partially empties the screen so that the here of what is visible to us will be able to resonate in a there that is not. To forestall misunderstanding, we must again stress that the creative work of imagination implied by the film's task does not produce "images free of all sensible restraint."<sup>39</sup> Imagination does not create something from nothing. The active imagination has, rather, first of all, a negative aspect; "it puts an end to the privation of being that holds things in their occultation."<sup>40</sup> We will have to chew carefully on this mouthful of negation if we wish to read the opening of the film as an exemplary illustration of the work of imagination. "Putting an end to" designates, of course, the negative work of limitation. But how does one put an end to "the privation of being that holds things in their occultation"? If being were all there was, we would be forever cut off from what is not; what does not exist would remain permanently occulted, unavailable to us. The law of being would in this case be a law of *necessary* being, that is to say, of "that which does not stop writing itself" over and over again and it would completely cut off access to what is *impossible*, which is to say that it would occult "that which does not stop *not* writing itself." The negative work of imagination, then, must put an end or put a stop to – what? To what is not written, to what is not. Of imagination we can thus say that it "stops *not* writing," or opens the world to contingency. Contingent being is neither (necessary) actual being or (impossible) nonbeing, but what can be or not be.<sup>41</sup>

For this reason we can say that the negative work of imagination constitutes a *positive* act. It puts an end to the expulsion of non-existence from the world, it

<sup>39</sup> Christian Jambet, *La logique des Orentaux. Henry Corbin et la science des forms*, Seuil, Paris 1983, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 186.

<sup>41</sup> I am here borrowing the formulations Lacan uses for the necessary ("that which does not stop writing itself") as opposed to the impossible ("that which does not stop not being written"). The formulation of the contingent or conditional most often attributed to him is "that which stops not writing." See, Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX*, trans. Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Norton, New York and London 1998, pp. 58–60. Compare Chittick's explanation, "According to the principles of Peripatetic philosophy, the 'impossible'...cannot come into existence, in contrast to the 'possible,' which may or may not come into existence, and the Necessary, which cannot not exist. But 'imagination' is a domain in which contraries meet and impossible things take place," p. 123.

triumphs over and conquers *for this world* the nothing from which an Almighty power supposedly created ours as a necessary one. Imagination does not create new, unfounded visions (which distinguishes it from illusion or mere fantasy); rather, it *imagines nothing* or, put differently: it “gives form to absolute non-existence, to that which, according to rational demonstration, can’t possibly have form.”<sup>42</sup> This implies that there is a difference between the absolute nothing out of which an absolute Creator fashions the world, and what we might call the “relative nothing” fashioned by imagination. Without creating illusions or fantasies, imagination puts an end to absolute non-existence by creating or giving form to non-existence. Alternatively, it is possible to say that imagination *creates the uncreated* in our finite, or sublunary, world. Creation is thus no longer the province of some primary cause outside the finite world, but takes place within the world.

In addition to being a power of limitation, the imagination is also defined as a power of linkage. But if imagination imagines or creates nothing, what can linkage link? Ordinarily we speak of linking two or more things to create some sort of composite. We are obliged in this case, however, to think linkage without being able to designate the terms linked, or without being able to designate them as things since the space of linkage is empty. It cannot therefore be filled with things, let alone densified by their fusion. Lacan somewhere describes the real as “teeming with emptiness.” This phrase suggests a way of thinking the linkage at stake in the imaginal space as an articulation of movements: as a vibration, teetering, or oscillation – as, perhaps, an empty instability. The flutter of a heart or an eyelash, a sigh or breath: do not these movements, which manifest a passion, suggest relation, articulation, linkage? In fact these sorts of movements – paramount among them – are significant concepts of Islamic philosophy; they name the “vibration of [divine Being] in [our] being.”<sup>43</sup> Passionate sites of relation, they transform what would otherwise be a negative theology, in which God remains totally unknown, into a unique, personal one, in which human being has access to divine pathos and God is relieved of the solitude of his unknowness. Imagination empties the human soul of the things of this world not in order to submit it to divine being, but to submit it to *what is not*. Not to submit it to Being but to the passionate wavering of “being-in-suspense.”

<sup>42</sup> Chittick, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 152.

With this we are brought back to *Close-Up* and Sabzian's specific, self-declared passion for cinema. While this passion places cinema at the film's center, *Close-Up* does not become a film about cinema, in the self-reflexive modern sense, but remains focused on reality. More precisely, it is a film about reality's current state of impoverishment and the role the cinematic image might play in restoring its luminous dimension. In order to accomplish this task, Kiarostami sets out to fulfill the request of Sabzian that the filmmaker make a film that shows his passion. The film has to feed the *lust of the eye*. More: *Close-Up* gives evidence of the link, posited earlier, between the icon and the economy. That Sabzian's image deficit is connected to a deficit of political economy is apparent in the film's opening, for the delay inserted by the imaginary serves a double role. It does not only prevent us from witnessing the arrest, but also gives us an opportunity to observe a malignancy of the political function. The active force of delay exposes a kind of laxity or informality that turns out to be much less benign than it might first appear. Before meeting Sabzian or hearing his complaint, we learn from the first sequence that his suffering is not isolated: it is revealed that the taxi driver is a former airplane pilot in the army who lost his job when the Iran-Iraq war ended; the police drive up not in an official van but in a taxi; and we will learn later that the sons of the well-to-do Ahankhahs are, like Sabzian and taxi driver, under-employed. These are all signs of the failed revolution and of the retreat of the state, which has abandoned its citizens, leaving them alone to improvise as best they can without the aid of formal structures of support. As we know, the laxity of the law does not mean that it is not still in force, that it has no consequences for its citizens. To say, however, that the law still maintains a relation to its citizens is to misuse the term *relation*; the retreat of the state is accomplished by *retiring* its relations to its citizens.

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The primary function of the opening delay is, however – as we began to argue – one of disoccultation. The narrative is stalled in order to give time to what would have been occulted – that is, suspended being – to appear. To understand this strategy, one need only ask oneself the following question: had Sabzian's arrest been filmed at this point, in what light would the scene have been lit? *Lumen* or *lux*? As noted earlier, *lumen* is the light that illuminates the threshold where the unique, passionate encounter between each subject and Divine otherness takes place. *Lux*, on the other hand, is associated not with passion but with abstract reason; it spreads itself homogenously over all that is known and appears not as a *threshold* but as a *medium* of vision and understanding, that is, of rational

clarity. While *lumen* reveals itself at the point of encounter with another dimension, *lux* is thought to be solely at the disposal of rational man, who reveals the truth by its means. In recent years, however, Hans Blumenberg has argued that the rationalist conception of light has undergone modification. The process of elucidation now takes place less and less in the general, public light of reason and more and more against a background of darkness into which a sharply focused, directed light is cast. Vision is less often permitted to roam freely in the clean, well-lighted space of reason and is increasingly coerced by a beam of light that picks objects out of the darkness. In short, the possibilities for the sovereign “manipulation of light” by man, originally introduced by the shift from *lumen* to *lux*, has reached a new level of violence in which, Blumenberg claims, the modern, “technological light of ‘lighting’ has imposed [on man] an ‘optics’ that goes against his will” and his very freedom.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than a space of unfreedom, however, I will argue that this new space of light is more usefully described, and especially in the context of our discussion, as *forensic*. Had the opening sequence included the scene of arrest, the first appearance of Sabzian would have been a mug shot, the shot of a suspect who had been nabbed, a fraud who had been unmasked. *Lux*, the light of scientific and juridical exactitude, by switching off the translucent light that comes to us from elsewhere, sequesters us in a totally opaque world. And yet, viewed in its own terms, *lux* is driven by a principle of transparency. According to this principle everything can and must be made visible by means of light’s penetrating rays, which are able to see through and disperse the mist of illusions, lies, and obfuscation. This principle knows no limit; it regards whatever is not or cannot be made visible as simply nonexistent. If the violence of this principle of transparency has intensified, as per Blumenberg’s claim, this is because it is now in the hands of a state that exercises its powers through retreat. What we mean when we speak of a retreat of the state is that it has defaulted on its duty to provide the protections it is called upon to grant its citizens. To protect them from what, exactly? The intrusions of an all-seeing Other, and thus the destruction of the *sens intime* necessary for subjectivity itself.<sup>45</sup> At one time the all-seeing gaze belonged to the God of dogmatic religion, but in modernity it has come into the

<sup>44</sup> Blumenberg, p. 54.

<sup>45</sup> For a superlative development of this thesis, see Gerard Wajcman, “Intimate Extorted, Intimate Exposed,” trans. Ron Estes, Jr. in *Umbr(a)* 2007, pp. 37-57.

possession of the abstract principle of *lux*, the immanent, unsleeping, 24/7, eye of *lux*, which reduces everything to the opacity of a visible object, which sees everything and eviscerates singularity. The obligations of the state are commonly viewed as the protection of the privacy, freedom, and the right to assembly of its citizens, but these notions have been so thoroughly corrupted by the principle of *lux*, which reduces its citizens to their visibility, that we now need to unearth the primary obligation, which underwrites the others: the protection of each citizen's self-intimacy, her secrecy or modesty.

In this context the matter takes on an additional layer of complexity, given that the authoritarian state of the Islamic Republic of Iran bills itself as the enforcer of the subject's modesty. The question then comes back to this: do its laws' countless prohibitions function to protect what is truly invisible, as they should, or do they sacrifice it by chaining citizens to their utter carnality? This becomes, once again, a question of sexuality, that is: of subjects' relations to the others. Kiarostami eventually interpolates into the trial proceedings at the film's center a scene in which Sabzian's arrest is reenacted; this delayed reenactment has, however, a dramatically different effect than it would have had it been filmed during the opening sequence. Rather than entering the house alongside the police and intruding on a scene already in process, the camera is this time positioned inside from the start, present before the police arrive. This will not be a scene of forensics in which the culprit is surprised and caught, exposed to the penetrating and defining gaze of an abstract authority. The image of Sabzian with which we are presented is not a frozen mug shot but a moving image in the most fundamental sense, the scene one of pathos. Sabzian plays himself once again, but this time something is visibly askew. It is not that he seems to be acting less naturally, but some displacement is visible. He appears to be out of sync with his role, which is to say: with himself. As we watch the reenactment, we are aware that Sabzian is aware that he is being filmed; he knows that he is being looked at. The "fourth wall" is not broken, however, as is in the modernist gesture of self-reflexive cinema. We are not being asked to feel that we occupy the same space as Sabzian, who does not directly acknowledge our presence; nor does his knowledge of being looked at cause him to sense that he is absorbed by vision, captured by another gaze. In fact, the opposite is true. The scene is tilted, slightly off center, as though Sabzian were listening a little less to what is being said, focused a little less on what is going on around him, distracted by an elsewhere invisible except for the magnetic pull it exerts on him. He seems

to regard himself with a kind of hesitancy, as if he were unfamiliar with his own motivations, visibly affected by himself. Rather than being turned into a passive object of vision, Sabzian is agitated as though he had become both patient and agent of his being seen.<sup>46</sup>

The postponement of the scene of arrest created a space for the trial to begin and it is this that sets the stage for that scene's ultimately iconic representation of Sabzian. To film the trial Kiarostami adopted a novel technological strategy; he used two different cameras, one a distance and the second a close-up camera. The first recorded what was admissible as evidence by the court, the second what was inadmissible, Sabzian's passion. The temptation, to be avoided at all cost, is to see the first as objective, the second as offering access to the inner core of Sabzian's being, to the solitary truth of its posturing, public façade. Kiarostami once made a general remark that is especially relevant to *Close-Up*: "We have a saying in Persian, when somebody is looking at something with real intensity: 'he had two eyes and he borrowed two more.' Those borrowed eyes are what I want to capture – the eyes that will be borrowed by the viewer to see what's outside the scene he's looking at."<sup>47</sup> What is "outside the scene" is so in a radical sense: it is invisible not merely temporarily but by virtue of *not* being, or of its being a suspension of being. This second pair of eyes is the esoteric pair; they "document" what is invisible while safeguarding its invisibility.

The Persian saying Kiarostami invokes is less quaint than it sounds; for behind it lies the distinctive economy of Islamic philosophy, the elaborate theophany by means of which it rigorously opposed every form of "unilateral monotheism."<sup>48</sup> This theophany begins with the retreat of God, which operates – as we want to show – in marked contrast to the retreat of the modern State. To begin drawing this contrast, we turn to the hadith that is perhaps the most intensely contemplated by Islamic philosophers, foremost among them, the great Ibn 'Arabi: "I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, London, Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1977, pp. 194-195.

<sup>47</sup> "Taste of Kiarostami," interview with Kiarostami by David Sterritt, [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/9/kiarostami.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/9/kiarostami.html) (accessed 12/22/2003), 5. For Ibn' Arabi on the concept of "seeing with two eyes," see Chittick, pp. 356-381.

<sup>48</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 199.

in order to be known by them.”<sup>49</sup> The subject of this yearning is God Himself, an emphatically apophatic God, as the phrase “hidden Treasure” indicates. An apophatic or negative theology posits a God who is non-delimited, indeterminate and incomprehensible, without feature or image. It is for such a theology that the problem of the image is particularly acute, for as we have seen, the stumbling block is the seeming impossibility of conceiving how there can be an image of that which is incorporeal, invisible, immaterial, without form or limit. We have seen how intensely this question was debated during the Byzantine period. What strikes one as new in this hadith, however, is how profoundly this question of the image concerns God Himself, who without one would remain hidden, forever unknown, *not least of all to Himself*. In declaring that He has an image, this theophany bears witness to the utter lack of self-enclosure of God or, stated more affirmatively, it attests to the radical relatedness of God to His creatures. Imageless, He is unable to create creatures in – or, as is said, *after* – His image. This is so even though a different hadith seems to suggest otherwise, “God created Adam according to His own Form.”<sup>50</sup> If there is a Form of God, it cannot exist prior to Adam, but must come about through him.

Islamic philosophy knows itself not as a philosophy of the multiple, but as a philosophy of the One. Its first principle is that of the Oneness of God, who is the only *necessary* being in the universe, the only one who *cannot not be*.<sup>51</sup> And yet the One could not be designated or counted as such if He were left to Himself. This will lead the Muslim mystics, and most notably Ibn ‘Arabi, “the great expositor of ‘Unity,’ [to] devote most of his attention to affirming the reality of the principle of multiplicity and explaining its relationship to the Oneness of God.[...] God in His Essence is absolutely one from every point of view. But as soon as this is said, someone has said it, so in effect the reality of the other has to be affirmed.”<sup>52</sup> More precisely, it is the multiplicity of others, their plural reality, that is affirmed by attestations of God’s oneness. This is, as we have stressed, the crux of the difference between docetism and the incarnationism: Christ cannot be *the* image of God; God cannot appear “in person,” in any universally

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>51</sup> Chittick, p. 356.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

attestable form. Rather, God manifests Himself in a multiplicity of forms, none of which can claim to be *the* image of God.

It begins to be clear from this account of the position taken by Islamic philosophers that the commonplace “Orientalist” assumption, which regards non-Western societies as having a less developed sense of the individual than societies in the West, is grounded on a gross metaphysical misunderstanding. For, far from conceiving individuation as a “secondary deviation,” as is often the case in the West, the “Iranian metaphysicians of the Avicennian tradition,” regarded individuation as the *positing of a being* and not as a mere negativity.<sup>53</sup> While Western thinkers have often opposed the individual to the universal, the *falasifa* did not conceive individuation, the profusion of the multiple, in a dialectical way, that is: as occurring in a second stage through the negation of the One, but rather as taking place initially *within the One*. Individuals proceed out of but do not exit the One and thereby attest to His oneness. Still, Ibn ‘Arabi, author of *The Book of Unity*, did not hesitate to insist: “Unity ignores and refuses you.”<sup>54</sup> Why? Because while it remains true that the One is that which is common to the multiplicity of beings, it is also true that it *eludes* each and every one of them. The One escapes capture by each of the multiplicity.

Corbin’s warnings against the “literalist sin” of assimilating the dissimulation to what it dissimulates is here graspable from another angle. The multiplicity of images that manifest God do not expose the “Hidden treasure”; on the contrary, they permit Him to remain hidden. The icon-image attests not to His presence but to His *withdrawal*, to the *retreat* of His oppressive, all-seeing presence in favor of His *relation* to us. Rather than leaving individual beings bereft, abandoned, His retreat opens a salutary separation from Him and sets a limit to His necessity. Thus, while Ibn ‘Arabi constantly emphasized the solitary nature of human existence – solitary precisely because of God’s withdrawal from us – he repeatedly linked his notion of the *solitary* with that of *proximity*.<sup>55</sup> In the wake of Divine withdrawal, we acquire a feeling of proximity – of being “alone with” a lonely, retreated God –

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Corbin, “Apoophatic Theology as Antidote to Nihilism,” trans. Roland Vegso, *Umbr(a)* 2007, pp. 64-65; this essay is a translation of an essay from Corbin, *Le Paradoxe du Monotheisme*.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn ‘Arabi, the Book and the Law*, trans. David Streight, SUNY Press, Albany 1993, p. 40.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.



far stronger than any such feeling we may have with an actual neighbor. A sense of closeness to something closer to us than our “jugular vein” follows on the heels of God’s abandonment of us.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the feeling of intimacy experienced between “two heterogeneous beings,” this feeling of proximity, of superlative intimacy, is of “*one* being encountering himself (at once one and two, a bi-unity).”<sup>57</sup> What seems to be indicated here is a separation that is not pushed all the way to a division into two. That which is brought close is not conceived as another fully present being, but rather a being that is held back, suspended: potential being. The feeling of intimacy, obtains not between two heterogeneous persons or things, therefore, but between two distinct modes of existence.

Ironically, in his otherwise useful essay on light’s historical relations to truth, Blumenberg assimilates the cinematic close-up to the penetrating light of *lux*, particularly as its logic has been transformed by modern lighting technology, which spotlights specific objects and features, picking them out of the darkness as if to indict them. The contrast between this view of the close-up and that proposed by Deleuze could not be sharper. Deleuze reads the close-up not as a technique for extracting a detail from a scene in order to enlarge and scrutinize it, as if under a microscope, but as a *luminous* technique that “*abstracts [what it shows] from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates.*” The close-up, says Deleuze quoting Bela Balzs, “opens a dimension of another order.”<sup>58</sup> We have tried to show that this other dimension corresponds to that of the imaginal world in which suspended or virtual being “resides.” This other “situative” space has no place in the “situated world” of actual being. One of the ethical questions haunting Kiarostami’s cinema concerns the “proper distance” to be taken by a filmmaker toward his subjects. In this context his fondness for long shots is often said to be the measure of that distance, to be an indication of the principled reluctance of Kiarostami to trespass the barrier of intimacy. Without disputing this reading of his long shots, I would argue that the close-up addresses this question of proper distance no less clearly. For, when it comes to intimacy, the distance fundamentally at issue is that minimal one which separates a subject from herself, the distance within which her passionate attachment to her own otherness, her

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<sup>56</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 156; the phrase is from Ibn ‘Arabi, “Love is closer to the lover than his jugular vein.”

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 96.

own “radical diversity,” lodges itself. The close-up aims at showing “what... is not there, *qua* represented,” at suspended being; or – to cite Deleuze, again, this time as he quotes Eisenstein’s views on the close-up, – the close-up aims at “the ‘pathetic’ which... is apprehended in... affect.”<sup>59</sup> Far from transgressing a barrier, the close-up exposes a threshold, an opening, through which the light of an invisible world shines. This threshold is the very abode of intimacy.

We noted earlier the simple fact that Sabzian chose to adopt as his own the image of a filmmaker rather than a film star. This fact becomes more interesting when considered in light of the early religious opposition to cinema in Iran. Among the list of reasons for this opposition is “the religious belief that any act of creation which simulates the original creation of God is blasphemous.”<sup>60</sup> Because God was supposed to be the sole maker of images, the creation of human images by man was deemed a usurpation of His divine power. But if this reason could be overcome and cinema allowed to flourish in Iran, it may be in part because this reading of God’s powers was spectacularly challenged within Islamic philosophy. This challenge is centered on an interpretation of an important Qur’anic verse that reads thus: “It is not you who killed them, but God did so. You did not throw what you threw [sand in the eyes of the enemy at Badr], but God [did]” (8: 17). At times Corbin interprets this verse by drawing a parallel to Luther’s flash of insight regarding a Psalm with a similar structure. In contrast to Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, which works *through* us to guide us toward a final cause, Luther contends that the Psalm did not define our relation to God unilaterally, as His appropriation of our will, but as a matter of mutual passion.<sup>61</sup> At other times, however, Corbin contrasts the reading of this verse offered by the *falasifa* with that offered by their philosophical contemporaries, the Ash’arites. The Ash’arites argued that the Qur’anic verse identified God as the secret agent of all our acts, which means that all the organs of our bodies are mere instruments of His will. While the *falasifa* agreed that there was a secret behind our acts, something unknowable to us, they insisted further that there was a secret of this secret. More paradoxically still, Ibn Arabi insisted that the secret of the secret was that there was no secret. We can presume that he wanted in this way

<sup>59</sup> The first quotation is from Lacan, p. 63; the second from Deleuze, p. 96.

<sup>60</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema. Past, Present, and Future*, Verso Press, London and New York 2001, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 300, fn. 25.

to forestall an infinitely regressive search for a cause of our actions, which could never be found because the secret of our acts could never be unveiled in some final instance. There was simply nothing there to be unveiled.

Thus the result of any supposed unveiling would amount to a de-mondalization of the world; what would be lost by the gesture is becoming, potentiality, contingency. Finite being would be stripped of its plasticity. The secret of the secret is that neither God in sovereign isolation from us, nor we in our self-enclosed isolation from Him (and others) is capable of any real change. God, alone, is necessary, but alone he is also without capacity, for capacity emerges only as a *bi-lateral* or *joint* affair. Latency or potentiality is *being that is suspended in the relation between divine and human existence, between one being and another; it depends on relation and is thus at the disposal of no one alone*. In opposition to the Ash'arites, then, the mystics conceived the organs of the body not as tools or instruments of God, but as bodily organs that belonged neither to God or man in isolation. The hand that throws cannot be exposed as belonging to God or man. When we thus read that “the soul gains awareness that it ‘sees’ God not *through* itself, but *through* Him;... it contemplates God in all other beings not *through* its own gaze, but because it is the same gaze by which God sees them,” we must not make the mistake of understanding this in the perverse sense, as stating that we identify with and see through the gaze of the Other.<sup>62</sup> These trans-sensory organs belong to – or are incarnated in – nobody.

Psychoanalysts have observed a phenomenon they call “hospital phenomenon,” which sometimes plagues young children who, upon experiencing even a momentary absence of their mothers, are menaced by a profound sense of destitution. Overcome by a feeling of total abandonment, these children behave as if they had been stranded on the precipice of an absolute void. It is against the background of this phenomenon that the little game of *fort-da*, famously witnessed by Freud, takes on meaning; for Freud associates the game with the avoidance by his grandson (the game’s inventor) of the debilitating experience of the void or of that “the ever-open gap,” or “ditch,” as Lacan refers to it, left by his mother’s exit.<sup>63</sup> It is noteworthy that in his discussion of the repetition constituting this *game of throwing*, Lacan tells us that we must look for the game’s

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>63</sup> Lacan, p. 62.

“*true secret*,” without however uncovering any easy answer.<sup>64</sup> He rejects the proposal that the game is one of mastery in which the boy, through his own agency, takes control of his mother’s comings and goings rather than being passively submitted to them; he also rejects the notion that the bobbin that is thrown back and forth represents the mother, for the game, he claims, *precedes* representation. The secret turns out to be nothing resembling an object or person. Rather, the secret resides in the “radical diversity” captured by the repetition, the repeated linkage, of the primitively opposed terms, *fort* and *da*. It resides in the vibrating opposition by which the one constantly conjures the other in an irresolvable instability.

We need not belabor the comparison much longer; the interpretation of the *fort/da* game corresponds quite closely to the interpretation of the Qu’ranic verse we have been examining. There is no stand-alone agent of the bobbin’s throw; capacity is located rather in a trans-sensory organ that belongs neither to the mother nor the boy, but emerges out of the incalculability, the sheer unpredictability, that results from their mutual entanglement, their relation. A later variation of the game, in which the boy leaps up to see his image reflected in a mirror, then dives below it to disappear, demonstrates that the radical diversity captured by the game concerns his own division as subject. Ernst, Freud’s young grandson, acquires as a consequence of his relation to his mother, a sense of himself we may describe as intimate inasmuch as it is not limited to any concrete or ideal image projected outward. His being is extended, or prolonged, by the *fort!*, an elsewhere that can be located nowhere – in no meaning, idea, or place – but in the “o-o-o-o” with which he expresses his exorbitant pleasure. Impenetrable by any all-seeing eye, the intimate image of self resides not in any content or form, but in the capacity of formation, which only relation enables. The game detaches from the subject “a small part” that still remains his, inalienable while alien. This “small part” or in Lacan’s vocabulary “object a” is what Corbin speaks of as a trans-sensory organ and is distinguished from organs of perception by the fact that it is a formative faculty and need not wait for representation to give it an object to apprehend.

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My purpose in turning to the *fort/da* game was not only to draw attention to the correspondences between it and the enigmatic throw at the center of the Qur’

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

anic passage we were examining, but also to begin to formulate the difference between the withdrawal of the Divine and the retreat of the modern State. At stake in Ernst's little game, Lacan argues, is the transformation of the "ditch," the "edge of his cradle" – or, as we referred to it: the "absolute void" – created by his mother's withdrawal, not into some object, but into "*not nothing*."<sup>65</sup> Again, this reading is consistent with the position of the *falasia* as outlined earlier: the Divine withdraws in order to emerge in the world not as incarnated in some actual being, but as incorporeal "being-in-suspense." The retreat of the State removes the conditions under which the absolute void is staved off by the formative capacity of trans-sensory organs. The insistence of the void prevents the uneasy relation between corporeality and meaning from taking place and disturbs as well the relation of the subject to others.

This situation will have to remain the subject of a separate inquiry, only partially because it is not a primary concern of Kiarostami's *Close-Up*. The stubborn insistence of this void does, however, leave its mark on the film, in the laxity and informality of its first sequence. A tension-annulling de-temporalization defines the opening, the film seemingly unable to get off the ground. It is only because Kiarostami's camera eventually supplies what the State, through the abrogation of its responsibilities withdraws, that we come to see what was missing from at the start: the tension and primitive temporality of being-in-suspense, the unripeness of the "not nothing" that holds the absolute nothing at bay. We identify the retreat of the State, we are tempted to say, less by its refusal to take the existence of its citizens into account than by its disavowal of their inexistence, which they maintain in abeyance.

## The Body and the Barzakh

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"This is the place to say, in imitation of Aristotle, that man thinks with his object."<sup>66</sup> Lacan drops this sentence into the middle of his reinterpretation of the

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 61, p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 62. Here, for convenience sake, is the passage: "This reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball...it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained. This is the place to say, in imitation of Aristtole, that man thinks with his object. It is with this object that the child leaps the frontiers of his domain, transformed into a well, and begins the incantation.[...] To this object we will...give the name...the *petit a*."

*fort/da* game, without further elaboration. We are thus left to figure out why. “Object” seems to refer to the small part of Ernst that detaches itself from him while remaining inalienable. More specifically, the object is the Lacanian “object a,” which functions very much like the “trans-sensory organ” theorized by the *falasifa*. With this object/organ the boy “leaps the frontiers of his domain,” (that is: the gap or absolute nothing introduced by his mother’s absence),” which is thereby “transformed into a well” (the absolute nothing now transformed into the unthinkable *source* of thought).<sup>67</sup> But where Aristotle makes such a claim, Lacan does not bother to tell us. Not to worry; a return to the discussion of the image and the imaginal world will lead us quickly to the site.

The concept of the image is indissoluble from that of the limit. But if the limit ceases to be thought as that which circumscribes or defines a perimeter, the objection of the iconoclasts to the image no longer holds weight. The iconophiles, we said, redefined the limit as that which cuts through, divides and links, rather than that which circumscribes and isolates things. We find this other limit in the following, well-known Qur’anic verses (55: 19-20): “He has set two seas in motion that flow side by side together/ With an interstice between them which they cannot cross.” The term *interstice* translates the Arabic term *barzakh*, which is not only a fundamental concept for the followers of Avicenna, but also – significantly – another name for the imaginal world. Listen first to Ibn ‘Arabi’s definition:

A *barzakh* is something that separates... two things while never going to one side..., as for example, the line that separates shadow from sunlight. [In the Qur’anic verses about the two seas] the one sea does not mix with the other. [...] Any two adjacent things are in need of a *barzakh*, which is neither the one nor the other but possesses the power of both. The *barzakh*... separates a known from an unknown, an existent from a nonexistent, a negated from an affirmed, an intelligible from a nonintelligible.”<sup>68</sup>

The *barzakh* is a limit that, rather than circumscribing an object to create a bounded whole, divides, separates, disjoins one side from the other. It is precisely because the *barzakh* does not circumscribe what it limits that Ibn ‘Arabi moves immediately from speaking of a separation between things to speaking of

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Chittick, pp. 117-118.

a separation between a known and an unknown, an existent and a nonexistent, and so on. The limit separates a thing from an indeterminate surplus, a thing from what is scarcely separable from it. This is what is meant by “never going to one side”: never producing a contradictory term. The concept of the “Supreme *Barzakh*” names the specific separation of God from Himself, the separation of the nothing He is as nondelimited from His theophanic forms. Yet the *barzakh*, or imaginal world, also separates the intelligible from the sensible in the sub-lunary world. It is the *barzakh* that raises the principled objection to the dogma of incarnation inasmuch as it denies to the flesh of Christ any toleration of admixture. Human and divine do not meet in the flesh; they do not flow or “leak” into each other to consolidate themselves in a single substance as they do in the dogmatic conception of *homoousia*. The *barzakh* is above all a membrane of division; it guarantees the separation of adjacent terms and refuses their synthesis in the figure of Christ.

This limit is not, however, an impassable fault. Far from it. As we have repeatedly insisted, the imaginal is a domain of linkage, a zone in which an encounter between the divine and man is manifest as images (or theophanies) or as trans-sensory organs. While Ibn ‘Arabi describes the relation that takes place in the imaginal as one of “com-passion,” it is clear that what is implied by this is not a morality – the prescription of a demeanor to be adopted toward an unfortunate other – but a metaphysics of *active relating toward what escapes comprehension*. *Barzakh* is the minimal separation that is the very condition and site of the passionate encounter. This encounter is distinct from contact, and corresponds rather to what Lacan refers to as a “missed encounter.” For, how could one come into contact with that which is *not* here, with what is *unknown*, *nonexistent*, to what is in each case a *negative of existence*? Simply put, the passionate encounter is a run-in with nothing but our own self-displacement.

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I inserted an ellipsis into Ibn ‘Arabi’s definition in order to reserve the elided passage for separate inspection. Here is the passage I left out: “Though sense perception might be incapable of separating the two things, the rational faculty judges that there is a barrier... between them that separates them. The intelligible barrier is the *barzakh*. If it is perceived by the senses, it is one of the two things, not the *barzakh*.”<sup>69</sup> We have seen that sense perception was generally

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

distinguished by Islamic philosophers from another kind of perception made available through trans-sensory organs. Ibn 'Arabi's distinction between the senses and the rational faculty seems to associate the latter to the trans-sensory organ insofar as it detects what sense perception cannot. This emphasis on the *imperceptibility* of the barrier catches our attention; it rings a bell. All at once it becomes clear that the concept the *barzakh* Ibn 'Arabi is articulating has an illustrious philosophical precedent – in Aristotle. In the latter's celebrated text, "On the Soul" – specifically the section devoted to the organ of touch – one finds an insistence on the imperceptible nature of the limit strikingly similar to Ibn 'Arabi's. It is surely here that Aristotle can be said to have said "man thinks with his object."

Aristotle begins axiomatically by stating that all senses sense across a medium or interval and that this interval separates a particular organ from a sensible object. For example: the organ of the eye sees a visible object across a medium of transparency. As he begins to examine the case of touch, however, the axiom comes to seem unsustainable, for no separating membrane can be detected; the membrane is imperceptible, it "escapes our notice," Aristotle says twice, as if perturbed by a dawning awareness of the inadequacy of mere sense perception. He refuses to back down however in face of this lack of evidence, insisting, rather, that with touch the membrane or medium that separates organ from object must be placed at a *lesser, more intimate, distance* than in the other senses.<sup>70</sup> In the case of touch there must be a membrane (or, translating into Arabic, why not?: a *barzakh*) that we are incapable of divining because the object it senses is too close to us (jugular-vein close) for us to take its measure. The unique closeness of its medium causes Aristotle further to distinguish the sense of touch from the other senses; for, he writes, when we see or hear, "we perceive because the medium produces a certain effect on us, whereas in the perception of objects of touch we are affected not *by* but *along with* the medium: it is as if a man were struck through his shield, where the shock is not first given to the shield and passed to the man, but the concussion of both is simultaneous."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle, *De anima*, 2:11, 423b, translated as "On the Soul" in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, The Modern Classics Library, New York 2001, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



Prior to this, Aristotle had imagined a fine mesh tightly stretched over a finger only, in the end, to deny that this thin material could figure the ultra-thin separation of organ from object at stake in the sense of touch. What then is the difference between the mesh and the shield? The mesh seems too clearly separable from the body; it seems to connote an external lining of the body, even an outlining. Aristotle is certain, however, that “the power of perceiving the tangible is seated *inside*.”<sup>72</sup> This point bears repeating: *the organ of touch is internal to the body, not on its periphery*. Aristotle’s imagined shield, unlike any actual one, behaves not like an exterior lining of the body but like an inalienable part of it. If it receives the blow along with the man, this is because it is a part of him. But this is too quick. Aristotle conceives the shield not as the organ but as the *medium* of touch; it is this medium or distance that is first posited as internal to the body. The medium is the *internal distance of the body from itself*. Aristotle nevertheless also positions the *organ* of touch within the body, “farther inward,” as if it were dependent on this very distance.<sup>73</sup> The enigmatic inner distance Aristotle attributes to touch sows havoc, as we begin to see, among the terms of his original distinction: the organ, medium, and object of the senses. When it comes to the question of touch’s proper object, he simply throws up his hands: “we are unable clearly to detect.”<sup>74</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi has shown us why; the object of touch is always a negative object, something withdrawn, suspended. For this reason, we might add, the *medium* of touch is inconceivable as transparency.

To say, in imitation of Aristotle and Lacan, that man “thinks with his object” is to say that our thoughts are not molded by impressions passively received from an actual outside, by sense perception. We think because we have access to what comes before the world, to the opening or threshold from which things of the world appear. Perhaps it is better to say that we have access to the fact that the world does not enter the frame of the existing world, but remains, rather, withdrawn from it. This last point leads us to insist that while we owe to Aristotle the idea that the sense of touch is necessary to thought, necessary even to *our very sense of being*, his concept of the Prime Mover blocked the insight of the *falasifa* that radicalized it.<sup>75</sup> It was they who conceived the inner distance that

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 2: 11, 423b, pp. 23-24; my emphasis.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2: 11, 423b, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 2: 11 423a, p. 32.

<sup>75</sup> “Without touch there can be no other sense [...for] all the other senses are necessary...not for their being, but [only for] their well-being,” *ibid.*, 3: 13, 435b,1, pp. 20-21.

was constitutive of the subject as dependent on the individual's unique relation to the One, that is, to the Other who was withdrawn from each.

In his defense of divine images, John of Damascus states that while human nature was once under a curse that enjoined us from touching bodies of the dead, lest we be reckoned unclean, "our nature has [now] been truly glorified and its very elements changed into incorruption."<sup>76</sup> Released from the custody of the law that pronounced the former curse, our bodies have been elevated to a new status of "incorruptibility." Might we not say then that our release from the taboo was the result of a new notion of touch, which became available at that historical moment when, as John claims, "divinity [was] united without confusion to our nature"? As we argued, union without confusion, without commingling or synthesis is not an idea that can be sustainable within an incarnationist frame. The *barzakh* is necessary to prevent death, time, and the outside from seeping into the body, only to expose it to rot. We touch and that which we touch eats into our bodies, corrupting it. The *barzakh*, however, *reconceives time and the outside as internal to the body and the no-long-tabooed touch renders us incorruptible*. This does not mean that the body is able to escape eventual death (we are not looking for miracles), but that it resists being taken over, infected by the outside. The rot of corruption gives way to the unripeness of potentiality.

As he attempts to explicate what is "essential and original in Freud's thought" concerning the body of the subject, Lacan proceeds by contrasting that thought with an age-old dream lyrically recomposed by Walt Whitman. This is the dream of "total, complete, epidermic contact between one's body and a world that [is] itself open and quivering."<sup>77</sup> What is clear is that this dream relies on the superseded sense of touch as a phenomenon of the periphery, of touch as contact along an epidermic surface. The "electric" body Whitman "sings" expresses a pastoral optimism: that the "perpetual, insinuating presence of the oppressive feeling of some original curse" will finally, somehow, disappear.<sup>78</sup> If Whitman's wistful dream of dispelling the curse is doomed, it is because it is premised on

<sup>76</sup> John of Damascus, p. 91.

<sup>77</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Tavistock/Routledge, London and New York 1992, p. 93.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

the very idea that elicits the curse in the first place: that the body has a periphery and that it thus constitutes a whole.

Now, I bring up this old dream for a variety of reasons, the least significant being the fact that *some* of the work now being written on the subject of touch demonstrates that the dream is still alive. A giddy sense of universal relatedness, of being in touch with the world in its entirety characterized this work, which never thinks to question the wholeness of the body. Why should it be questioned; what raises the question? We have said over and over every body defined as whole, is encased; every frame serves as a coffin. Fully incarnate, it awaits only death. For psychoanalysis the question was raised by clinical observation. From the first, the bodies that walked through Freud's door arrived in pieces; they seemed to be cut up, to be missing parts. Sometimes the hysterics could not move an arm or leg, or could not control them as they flailed about, because they had no idea of them. It was by trying to figure out why this was so that Freud was led (to cut a long story very short) to his theories of sexuality and the drive. In contrast to Whitman, Freud was led to "emphasize [that the] point[s] of insertion" of the subject into the world were "limit point[s]... at the level of what we might call the *Triebe*." The subject is inserted not along the periphery but at any of an infinite number of limit points; thresholds through which the light of another, suspended, dimension shines. *Triebe*, drive, is like *barzakh*, both a limit and a zone of linkage. And here – as I have been broadly hinting – the analogy does not end. This is not the place, however, to take the analogy further and so I will merely point out that Freud's disdain for the idea that we possess an "oceanic feeling" of oneness with the world acknowledges the fact that the passion which invests these points of insertion is always singular. The singularity of that passion is degraded by the proposal that it is extendable to all. *Jouissance* founds dissensus.

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That Kiarostami undertakes a reinstatement of the imaginal world – along with its attendant phenomena: the image, touch, the *barzakh* – within a cinema still affected by the taboo against touch, specifically between unrelated men and women, is a point that hovers in the background. This taboo reposes on the idea that sex is a surface phenomenon that places men at risk of corruption by women. One might speculate that Kiarostami's intention is to lift once again the curse of corruptibility from which Islamic philosophy released us long ago.

Carol Jacobs\*

## A Tripp to the London National Gallery

Not long after he had made his way to the other side, two years after he had passed over the border, as Sebald himself might have put it,<sup>1</sup> a volume entitled *Unerzählt* was published under the names of W. G. Sebald and Jan Peter Tripp. It is arranged with facing pages of Tripp's images of pairs of eyes and Sebald's laconic lines and implicitly contemplates the issues of perception, reality, and citation.

There had also been another, earlier encounter between Sebald's writing and Tripp's images in *Logis in einem Landhaus*.<sup>2</sup> How shall we pose the question of that relation? At the close of the preliminary remarks to that volume, we read:

And beforehand as a reader I therefore pay my tribute in what follows to the colleagues who went before in the form of several extended marginalia which otherwise make no particular claim. That at the end there is an essay about a painter – that is quite in order [Ordnung], not only because Jan Peter Tripp and I went to the same school in Oberstdorf for a rather long time and because Keller and Walser are equally meaningful to both of us, but also because I learned from his pictures that one has to look into the depths, that art does not get on without handwork and that one has to take many difficulties into account in enumerating things.

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<sup>1</sup> “In order to call on death the painter had to pass over the border. On the way to the other side.” (“Um [den Tod] aufzusuchen, mußte der Maler über die Grenze. Auf dem Weg nach der anderen Seite” “Like Day and Night,” 86E, 180G). W. G. Sebald, “Like Day and Night: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp” (published under the translated title “As Day and Night, Chalk and Cheese: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp”), in W. G. Sebald and Jan Peter Tripp, *Unrecounted*, trans. Michael Hamburger, Penguin Books, New York and London 2004, pp. 78-94 and “Wie Tag und Nacht – Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps,” in *Logis in einem Landhaus*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2002, pp. 169-188.

<sup>2</sup> *Logis in einem Landhaus* first appeared in 1998 but “Wie Tag und Nacht” was first published in 1993 in Jan Peter Tripp, *Die Aufzählung der Schwierigkeiten: Arbeiten von 1985-92* / Max Bense, Manfred Esser, Wendelin Niedlich, Peter Renz, W. G. Sebald, Kurt Weidemann, Kurt Zein, Reiff Schwarzwaldverlag, Offenburg 1993.

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Und vorab als Leser entrichte ich darum im Folgenden meinen Tribut an die vorangegangenen Kollegen in Form einiger ausgedehnter und sonst keinen besonderen Anspruch erhebenden Marginalien. Daß am Ende ein Aufsatz steht über einen Maler, das hat auch seine Ordnung, nicht nur weil Jan Peter Tripp und ich eine ziemliche Zeitlang in Oberstdorf in dieselbe Schule gegangen sind und weil Keller und Walser uns beiden gleichviel bedeuten, sondern auch weil ich an seinen Bildern gelernt habe, daß man weit in die Tiefe hineinschauen muß, daß die Kunst ohne das Handwerk nicht auskommt und daß man mit vielen Schwierigkeiten zu rechnen hat beim Aufzählen der Dinge. (*Logis in einem Landhaus* 7G)<sup>3</sup>

The tribute to previous colleagues takes the form of “marginalia.”<sup>4</sup> What would it mean to write marginalia, to write on the margins of another’s work, just outside its frame? Is it the same as what the narrator of *Austerlitz* speaks of as vision at the edge of the field of sight (“am Rand des Gesichtsfeldes” *Austerlitz*, 51G)<sup>5</sup>? Would this account as well for Sebald’s essay on the painter? Or does Sebald’s attempt here to read Tripp’s work, particularly at the close of that essay, go off in a different direction? What does it mean to look into the depths (“in die Tiefe hinein[zu]schauen”)? Moreover, the essay on Tripp has its own order and is bound up with the difficulties of listing, enumeration, accounting for things.

As I account for this accounting (“[das] Aufzählen der Dinge”) I want, if at all possible, to set out on the right foot. And so I begin with a citation and with a citation within a citation, from the works of Jan Peter Tripp that I take from “Like Day and Night: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp” (“Wie Tag und Nacht – Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps”).<sup>6</sup> I wish to speak of what remains untold in the story

<sup>3</sup> *Logis in einem Landhaus*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

<sup>4</sup> It was Thomas Fries, who, in a superb paper given in Zurich in spring of 2008, made me aware of the strangeness of this phrase, the modesty of Sebald speaking of his own commentary as “marginalia” combined with claiming himself the colleague of such pivotal figures in world literature.

<sup>5</sup> W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell, Random House, New York 2001, and, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich and Vienna 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hamburger translates Sebald’s title as “Like Day and Night, Chalk and Cheese: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp” because, as he explains in his translator’s note, as chalk and cheese is the British idiom which would best render the German “wie Tag und Nacht.” The American usage “as different as night and day” is much closer to the German. (Hamburger, “Translator’s Note,” pp. 6-7)

of two paintings and to do so by way of Sebald's essay which in its closing pages purports to do just that, and yet still leaves a thing or two unrecounted.

Remembrance is basically nothing but a citation, ("Das Andenken ist ja im Grunde nichts anderes als ein Zitat" "Like Day and Night" 90E, 184G), Sebald tells us. Echoing Umberto Eco, he goes on to write:

And the citation incorporated in a text (or image) by montage compels us ... to probe [literally: to the looking through of] our knowledge of other texts and pictures and our knowledge of the world. This, in turn, takes time. By spending it, we enter into narrated time and into the time of culture. ("Like Day and Night" 90-91E)

Und das in einen Text (oder in ein Bild) einmontierte Zitat zwingt uns ... zur Durchsicht<sup>7</sup> unserer Kenntnisse anderer Texte und Bilder und unserer Kenntnisse der Welt. Das wiederum erfordert Zeit. Indem wir sie aufwenden, treten wir ein in die erzählte Zeit und in die Zeit der Kultur. ("Wie Tag und Nacht" 184G)

Already we are out of time, or compelled at least to spend it, by entering into another time, "narrated time" and "the time of culture," in which our own "knowledge" (*Erkenntnisse*) is put to the test. What does it mean to step into the frames of time recounted or the time of culture? What can we know of other texts and other images? What can we know of time that has been narrated, given over, thus, to story telling? What can we know of the world?

Sebald proposes to "show" the necessity of all this by citing: that is, by the *Einmontierung*, the incorporation by montage, of Jan Peter Tripp's "Déclaration de guerre" into his text. Despite its apparent lack of ambiguity<sup>8</sup> something is immediately amiss. There is indeed a war raging, as the title of the painting insists, though perhaps not openly declared, and certainly not explained (*erklärt*)<sup>9</sup>: in the juxtaposition of the two patterns.

<sup>7</sup> Which is not at all the same as the "Durchschauen" of the closing line.

<sup>8</sup> A counterpart in this, no doubt, to Van Gogh's "Peasant Shoes."

<sup>9</sup> Throughout the essay Sebald plays on Erklären and Erklärung (explain and explanation or declaration). The most obvious instance is the German of "Déclaration de guerre," Kriegserklärung (186G).



Jan Peter Tripp, *Déclaration de guerre*.  
Copyright © Jan Peter Tripp. Reprinted by  
permission of the artist (in "As Day and Night  
91E, 185G).

Let us finally try to show that in the picture "La déclaration de guerre" measuring 370 by 220 centimeters and in which an elegant pair of ladies' shoes are to be seen on a tiled floor. The pale blue-natural white ornament of the tiles, the gray lines of the joints, the lozenge-net from a leaden glass window cast by sunlight onto the picture's middle section, in which the black shoes stand between two shadow areas, all this makes a geometric pattern of a complexity not to be described in words. ("Like Day and Night" 91E)

Versuchen wir das zuletzt zu zeigen an dem 370 x 220 cm messenden Bild "La déclaration de guerre," auf welchem ein feines Paar Damenschuhe zu sehen ist, das auf einem gekachelten Fußboden steht. Das blaßblau-naturweiße Ornament der Kacheln, die grauen Linien der Verfugung, das Rautennetz der Bleiverglasung eines Fensters, das vom Sonnenlicht über den mittleren Teil des Bildes gebreitet wird, in welchem die schwarzen Schuhe zwischen zwei Schattenbereichen stehen, all das ergibt zusammen ein geometrisches Muster von einer mit Worten nicht zu beschreibenden Komplexität. ("Wie Tag und Nacht" 184-85G)

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A challenge is made to the pattern of the ornamental tile on which the shoes stand, a challenge made by the rhomboid net, a second pattern, cast as shadow by the sunlight passing through the leaden glass window we are compelled to imagine at the right ("Like Day and Night" 91E, 184-85G).<sup>10</sup> The right shoe is

<sup>10</sup> We might think this as well of the struggle between a positive presence of an object (the tile, the shoes) and the absence of an object (the window frames). Those frames leave their mark as shadow, the light they refuse to let pass.

aligned with the grid of the shadow; the left shoe with that of the grouted tile joints. A war is played out as well between the visual complexity all this produces and the descriptive word that is bound to fail: a complexity that is not to be described in language. If there is some sort of *declaration of war*, it jumps to the eye, then, as a question of form and it announces as well the limits of representation. This takes place with respect to an object that, nevertheless, apparently claims to communicate as a “mediating object of [the] representation” (“vermittelnder Gegenstand der Darstellung” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 186G)

Still, suddenly thereafter, we enter a realm in which description proves to be no challenge whatsoever.

A picture puzzle arises out of this pattern illustrating the degree of difficulty of the different relationships, connections and interweavings and the mysterious pair of black shoes – a *picture puzzle* which the *observer* who does not know the *pre-history* will hardly be able to solve. To which woman do the shoes belong? Where did she go? Did the shoes pass over into the possession of another person? (“Like Day and Night” 93E, my emphasis)

Aus diesem, den Schwierigkeitsgrad der verschiedenen Verhältnisse, Verbindungen und Verstrickungen illustrierenden Muster und dem mysteriösen Paar schwarzer Schuhe entsteht eine Art *Bilderrätsel*, das der *Betrachter*, der die *Vorgeschichte* nicht kennt, kaum wird auflösen können. *Welcher* Frau haben die Schuhe gehört? *Wohin* ist sie gekommen? Sind die Schuhe übergegangen in den *Besitz eines anderen*? (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 185G, emphasis mine)<sup>11</sup>

The narrator shifts the stakes abruptly from the clashing formal relations among texts and images into a realm we might call “narrated time,” a “time of culture,” or even “knowledge of the world” (“Like Day and Night” 93E, 184G). The essay turns from the war of patterns within the image to finding a woman from without. It passes as well from the incommensurability of image and text to assuming that the enigma of the picture might be solvable. It poses the frame-jumping

<sup>11</sup> To be sure, there is the throw away answer that follows: “Or, ultimately, are they nothing more than the paradigm of that fetish which the painter is forced to make out of everything he produces?” (“Oder sind sie am Ende nichts als das Paradigma für den Fetisch, den der Maler aus allem, was er malt, zu machen gezwungen ist?” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G) But this formal explanation, held onto for a moment, completely disappears.



question: “To whom did the shoes belong?” and will venture to show us what has happened to her. This will take place by way of Tripp’s second painting. The two shoes of the “Declaration” do not declare and do not explain. They do not give away their secret (“geben ihr Geheimnis nicht preis” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G), at least not before they are mounted into a subsequent work of the artist. What Sebald himself creates is a picture puzzle (*Bilderrätsel*).

What sort of solution (*Auflösung*) will that second citation make possible? Can it bring about the shift from image to language that we expect in a rebus? The pages solving the puzzle begin with the description of what we observe and end with us as the object of observation. This solution stands, admittedly, in place of the formal conundrum in which words were seen as incapable of either describing or explaining the *Déclaration*. That shift is made possible as he gives up description and becomes instead a storyteller, displacing the endlessly complex formal aspects of art – its relationships, connections and interweavings – for a story-line of human events. We find tales of people and dogs, of time and space, of paintings and their painters, and the artist as creator, observer and witness; stories of fidelity and of secrets revealed, of knowledge and perspicacity, of domestication and wildness, and, above all, of the inexplicable losses and gains implicit in citation’s relation to realism.



Jan Peter Tripp, *Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall* (*Déjà vu or the Incident*).

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Two years later, to be sure, the painter shifts his puzzle-image at least a bit further into the public sphere. In a work of a significantly smaller format (100 x 145 cm) the larger painting reappears, not only as a quotation but as a mediating object of representation. Filling the upper two-thirds of the canvas, it now evidently hangs in its place; and in front of it, in front of the “Déclaration de guerre,” turning away from the viewer, sideways on a white-upholstered mahogany chair, sits a flamingly red-haired woman. She is elegantly dressed, but somehow is someone tired by evening of the day’s burdens. She has taken off one of her shoes – and they are the same that she contemplates on the large picture. (“Like Day and Night” 92E)

Zwei Jahre später allerdings rückt der Maler sein Rätselbild ein Stückchen weiter wenigstens in die Öffentlichkeit. In einem Werk von bedeutend kleinerem Format (100 x 145 cm) taucht das große Bild noch einmal auf, nicht bloß als Zitat, sondern als vermittelnder Gegenstand der Darstellung. Es hängt, die oberen zwei Drittel der Leinwand ausfüllend, offenbar jetzt an seinem Platz, und vor ihm, vor der ‚Déclaration de guerre‘ sitzt, vom Betrachter abgewandt, seitwärts auf einem weißgepolsterten Mahagonisessel eine flammend rothaarige Frau. Elegant ist sie gekleidet, aber doch jemand, der müd ist am Abend von des Tages Last. Sie hat einen ihrer Schuhe – und es sind dieselben, die sie betrachtet auf dem großen Bild – ausgezogen. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 185-186G)

Just as the smaller painting, has, in the act of citation, shrunk the scale of the much larger one reproduced therein, the name of the larger will also soon be shortened and domesticated into the German *Kriegserklärung*. The woman in white contemplates the image of the two shoes. Turned away from us, the observers, she sits in for us as well, domesticating not only the foreignness of its title but also of its representation. The formerly unreadable “Declaration” can now be pondered, not as a formal jumble of lines and patterns, but as a circumscribable object read for the plot. For she appears as an answer to the questions it first posed, (To which woman do the shoes belong? Where did she go?) and she poses in turn, in a compelling manner, the third and most puzzling of the narrator’s queries: “Did the shoes pass over into the possession of another person?” (“Sind die Schuhe übergegangen in den Besitz eines anderen?” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G). For only here, as we observe the second painting, just as we seem to account for the initial pair in “La déclaration de guerre,” just as we seem to have found the woman to whom the shoes belonged, one of her pair goes missing.

Thus we must recognize “that one has to take many difficulties into account in enumerating things” (“daß man mit vielen Schwierigkeiten zu rechnen hat beim Aufzählen der Dinge” *Logis* 7G) and that art is no simple doubling of this world into an aesthetic realm: it cannot be accounted for by the “obliteration of the visible world in interminable series of reproductions” (“Auslöschung der sichtbaren Welt in endlosen Serien der Reproduktion” “Like Day and Night” 84E, 178G). In this regard, art distinguishes itself from photography, as Sebald chooses to understand it.

The photographic image turns reality into tautology... Roland Barthes saw in the by now omnipresent man with a camera an agent of death, and in photographs something like the residue of a life perpetually perishing. (“Like Day and Night” 84E)

Das photographische Bild verwandelt die Wirklichkeit in eine Tautologie... Roland Barthes sah in dem inzwischen omnipräsenten Mann mit der Kamera einen Agenten des Todes und in den Photographien so etwas wie Relikte des fortwährend absterbenden Lebens. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 178G)

In photography, life dies into and becomes the image. But, Sebald insists, art is in need of “the transcendence of that which according to an incontrovertible sentence is the case” (“der Transzendierung dessen, was nach einem unumstößlichen Satz der Fall ist” “Like Day and Night” 84E, 178G). Thus Tripp’s second painting only half-heartedly suggests that the shoes in the work of art result from reality being ferried over into a nether world by an agent of death. Were that inexorably the case, how to explain the anomaly that, while both shoes appear in “La déclaration de guerre,” the left shoe remains on the woman’s foot?<sup>12</sup>

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What citation generates, just as the narrator had forewarned, requires turning to yet other texts and other images, to the time of culture and narrated time. For what Sebald now invents to explain the puzzle is a series of stories about what happened over time, to the woman and to the dog, speaking of them, so caught up in their realism is he, as if they had lives independent of Tripp’s crea-

<sup>12</sup> All this assumes, of course, that the woman’s shoes were the source for Tripp’s first painting, its pre-history (*Vorgeschichte*). Ultimately, can one say that this is the case? The painting of the two shoes, after all, pre-existed the painting that incorporates it. Both are paintings. Perhaps the woman is the result of the pair of shoes, that is, she is their pretext.

tion. Thus it is evening and the woman, “wearied from the burdens of the day” (“Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G), has removed one of her shoes, which is now no longer to be seen – shoes that are (but are also not) the *same* as those in the puzzling “Déclaration de guerre.” She ponders an inexplicable loss (“unerklärlichen Verlust” “Like Day and Night” 93E, 188G).

As surely as we regard her from outside the frame of art, she too, from within, regards the painting hanging before her.

Originally, so I was told, she held this shoe taken off in her left hand, then it lay on the floor on the right, next to the chair, and finally it had wholly vanished. (“Like Day and Night“ 92E)

Ursprünglich, so habe ich mir sagen lassen, hat sie diesen ausgezogenen Schuh in der linken Hand gehalten, dann war er rechts neben dem Sessel am Boden gelegen, und schließlich war er ganz verschwunden. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 186G)

How are we to understand this slide from left to right and ultimately to nowhere? If the elegant woman held the shoe to one side, was it she who, taking on a life of her own, then shifted it and laid it on the floor to the right? What to make, moreover, of the utter lack of agency in its ultimate disappearance: “and finally it had totally vanished” (“Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G). Or are we to understand, pairing this passage with the one to come, that what the narrator has heard told, what has taken form in “narrated time,” is, rather, three versions of the painting, the first with the shoe in her left hand, then with it laid on the floor at her right, and finally out of sight? For not only the shoe, but the dog as well, has done some moving around.

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The woman with the one shoe, alone with herself and the enigmatic declaration of war, alone except for the faithful dog at her side, who, to be sure, is not interested in the painted shoes, but looks straight ahead out of the picture and into our eyes. (“Like Day and Night” 92E)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The dog is not true to the painted shoes – in the “Déclaration de guerre.” True to what, then? Not her. It is us he looks at. Nor is there any obvious sign of marriage (whose fidelity the dog might be a symbol of) as in van Eyck’s painting of Arnolfini and his Giovanna Cenami.

Die Frau mit dem einen Schuh, mit sich und der rätselhaften Kriegserklärung allein, allein bis auf den treuen Hund an ihrer Seite, der sich freilich nicht interessiert für die gemalten Schuhe, sondern gerade herauschaut aus dem Bild und uns in die Augen. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 186G)

The woman and dog are a couple, but are, then again, like night and day: she aligned with the right shoe, the dog with the left in “Déclaration de guerre”; the one with her back to us seems caught up in the painting, the other, indifferent to that which is painted, casts his eyes outside the frame and confronts us head on. The woman makes us the observer of the observer. With the dog we become the observed. Still, since “an X-ray would show that earlier on he had once stood at the center of the picture” (“Eine Röntgenaufnahme würde erweisen, daß [der Hund] zuvor schon einmal in der Bildmitte gestanden hat” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G), it might tell us, then, as well, that the dog who gives such evidence of a conscious, intentional gaze, is himself merely paint and was once painted over.

And yet, we go on to read, between finding his original place in the middle (as the materiality of the artist’s medium) and shifting his stand to the left (where he appears as mimetic representation), he takes on a mysteriously kinetic and embodied presence (as though *real*): a fanciful story redelivers the dog to narrated time and the time of culture:

*Meanwhile* he has been *underway* and has brought in a sort of wooden sandal, from the fifteenth century or more specifically from the wedding picture hanging in the London National Gallery which Jan van Eyck painted in 1434... (“Like Day and Night” 92-93E, emphasis mine)

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*Inzwischen* ist er *unterwegs* gewesen und hat eine Art Holzsandale herbeigebracht, aus dem 15. Jahrhundert beziehungsweise aus dem in der Londoner Nationalgalerie hängenden Hochzeitsbild, das Jan van Eyck 1434... gemalt hat (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 186-87G, emphasis mine)

More is left hanging than the pictures: of marriage and war, of union and conflict. The dog makes something of a trip between the paintings of the two Jans. And doesn’t this explain the title of the painting which Sebald has chosen to obliterate: “Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall”? What we contemplate is the citation of “La déclaration de guerre” (this is the *déjà vu*) *or* the announcement

of a small and almost unnoticed incident (Zwischenfall), perhaps the breaking out of a conflict of another kind, as the dog moves between (*zwischen*) one version of the painting and the next: “Meanwhile he has been underway.” (“Inzwischen ist er unterwegs gewesen...” “Like Day and Night” 92-93E, 186-87G). What marked the middle of Tripp’s picture (the dog) now finds its place at the left. The narrator tells of what happened in between (“inzwischen”) –between middle and left, between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries *or* between continental Europe and London. In this story, the canine – which was formally conceived in minute strokes of color – takes form as in the machinations of a trick film, and comes, like one of its living, furry counterparts, to occupy and pass through time and space. It brings back a sandal, we read, either by returning to the concrete, three-dimensional world of an historically earlier time or by jumping the space of the Channel to the formal, two-dimensional realm of van Eyck’s painting in the London National Gallery. At the same time it figures as a creature for whom space and time are no object. The dog runs “with ease over the abysses of time, because for him there is no difference between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries” (“mit Leichtigkeit über die Abgründe der Zeit läuft, weil es für ihn keinen Unterschied gibt zwischen dem 15. und dem 20. Jahrhundert” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 188G).

While the woman in white, something of a bride without a bridegroom after all, “ponders the history of her shoes and an inexplicable loss, [she] never guesses that the disclosure of her secret lies behind her – in the shape of an analogous object from a world long past” (“nachsinn über die Geschichte ihrer Schuhe und einen unerklärlichen Verlust, ahnt nicht, daß die Offenbarung des Geheimnisses hinter ihr liegt – in Form eines analogen Gegenstands aus einer längst vergangenen Welt” “Like Day and Night” 93-94E, 187-88G). The dog, having left its place in the middle of the canvas, and, having turned its back on the enigmatic image and image-puzzle (“Rätselbild” and “Bilderrätsel” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 185G) cited therein, has in the meantime become the bearer of a secret (“Geheimnisträger,” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 188G). But is the revelation of the secret, even to us, a certainty? Is the “inexplicable loss” (“Like Day and Night” 93E, 188G) of her shoe explained? Do we discover thereby whether or not her shoe has gone over into the possession of another (“in den Besitz eines anderen,” “Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G)? Doesn’t the dog remain, rather, as the text reads, simply the bearer of the secret rather than the agent of its revela-

tion? Isn't it this that contemplating the painting of van Eyck (and reading the narrator's ostentatiously faulty description of it) tells us?



Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*.  
Copyright © The National Gallery, London.

[The dog] brought in a sort of wooden sandal, from the fifteenth century or more specifically from the wedding picture hanging in the London National Gallery which Jan van Eyck painted in 1434 for Giovanni Arnolfini and the Giovanna Cenami affianced to him in a morganatic marriage “of the left hand,” as a token of his witness. “*Johannes de Eyck hic fuit*,” one is told, on the frame of the round mirror in which the scene, reduced to miniature format, can once more be seen, from behind. In the foreground, near the left lower edge of the picture lies that wooden sandal, this curious piece of evidence, beside a little dog that probably entered the picture as a symbol of marital fidelity. (“Like Day and Night” 93E)

[Der Hund] hat eine Art Holzsandale herbeigebracht, aus dem 15. Jahrhundert beziehungsweise aus dem in der Londoner Nationalgalerie hängenden Hochzeitsbild, das Jan van Eyck 1434 für Giovanni Arnolfini und die ihm in morganatischer Ehe ‚zur linken Hand‘ angetraute Gionvanna Cenami gemalt hat zum Zeichen seiner Zeugenschaft. *Johannes de Eyck hic fuit* heißt es auf dem Rahmen des Rundspiegels, in dem die Szene auf Miniaturformat reduziert von rückwärts noch einmal zu sehen ist. Im Vordergrund, nahe dem linken unteren Bildrand, liegt die hölzerne Sandale, dieses seltsame Beweisstück, neben einem kleinen Hündchen, das in die Komposition hineingeraten ist wahrscheinlich als ein Symbol ehelicher Treue. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 187G)

Spending some time with the painting one sees that here it is not a question of a complexity which cannot be described in words (“von einer mit Worten nicht zu beschreibenden Komplexität,” “Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G). It is, on the contrary, a work that both calls for and performs the act of description. The convex mirror that inevitably draws the eye (while functioning as one) reduces the scene to a miniature format, as Sebald tells us. In this it plays the same role as Tripp’s second painting, considerably reducing the larger, initial image and introducing the figure of the observer. In Van Eyck’s painting, although Sebald neglects to remind us of it, the mirror not only lets us see the initial scene again, this time from behind, it also adds what is presumably the image of van Eyck, as a sign of his having been witness to the event (“zum Zeichen seiner Zeugenschaft”) and adds as well alongside the painter, another observer at his side. Whereas Sebald speaks of one sandal, in van Eyck’s painting there are, of course, two. Whereas van Eyck has signed *Johannes de Eyck fuit hic*, Sebald inverts the word order to *hic fuit* – putting in question precisely the hereness of the “was,” in a statement that is said to fix it in place: *Johannes de Eyck was here*. Sebald tells us that the declaration is to be found “on the frame of the round mirror” when it is, in fact, outside that frame, prominently and elegantly displayed on the wall.<sup>14</sup>

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If the photographic image turns reality into tautology, this is not the case as the narrator describes van Eyck’s painting. Let us just say in passing, in place of a more thorough reading of Sebald’s gloss which shifts things around so ob-

<sup>14</sup> Could this be a case of those divergences and differences which distinguish art from photography of which Sebald spoke earlier in the essay (“Like Day and Night” 84-85E, 178-179G)?



viously, that the more subtle lesson to be learned here is less that of the narrator's divergences and differences from the wedding picture as the object of his description than the nature of the union that van Eyck actually celebrates. One wonders how it could be anything but intentional that what we witness van Eyck witnessing (or creating) is "a morganatic marriage 'of the left hand'" ("Like Day and Night" 93E, 187G). This was a marriage with the provision that the passing on of the husband's property or title was, from the beginning, out of the question. It is a relation in which all inheritance, even that of a wooden sandal, simply could not take place. The ritual sign of this declared impossibility was the offering of the left hand instead of the right: it is echoed in Tripp's second painting by the substitution of the left, not quite "analogous," sandal from van Eyck for the missing, right leather shoe. Were the weary lady to slip on its replacement, she would hobble unevenly, at best. It disturbs the desire to create a couple, to form a pair.

What the dog carries over both challenges and testifies to the prohibition against such activities, against delivering it "into the possession of another." The sandal's anomalous appearance definitively explains the van Eyck as the source of Tripp's citation. The figure of the dog in Tripp's painting is a witty stand-in for the conventional rhetoric of art history, which would explain the appearance of Arnolfini's left sandal as a citation or allusion to the 15<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece and as a testament to Tripp's stunning skills of mimicry.<sup>15</sup> But the story of the dog in Sebald's essay "Like Day and Night" is, after all, not an answer to the questions apparently posed by the "real life" setting of the painting, or, rather, by Sebald's fabula – not an answer, for example, to the query: "Did the shoes pass into the possession of another person?" Nor does it explain the "inexplicable

<sup>15</sup> In an interview of 1993, the same year that the essay on Tripp was first published, Sebald made the following remark which suggests that the citation of van Eyck by Tripp is also metaphorical for his own work.

Moreover, in the case of painters, for example, to my mind, it is a long cultivated virtue that they refer to one another in their works, that they take over themes from a colleague in their own work as a gesture, so to speak, of reverence. And that is something that I also enjoy doing as a writer.

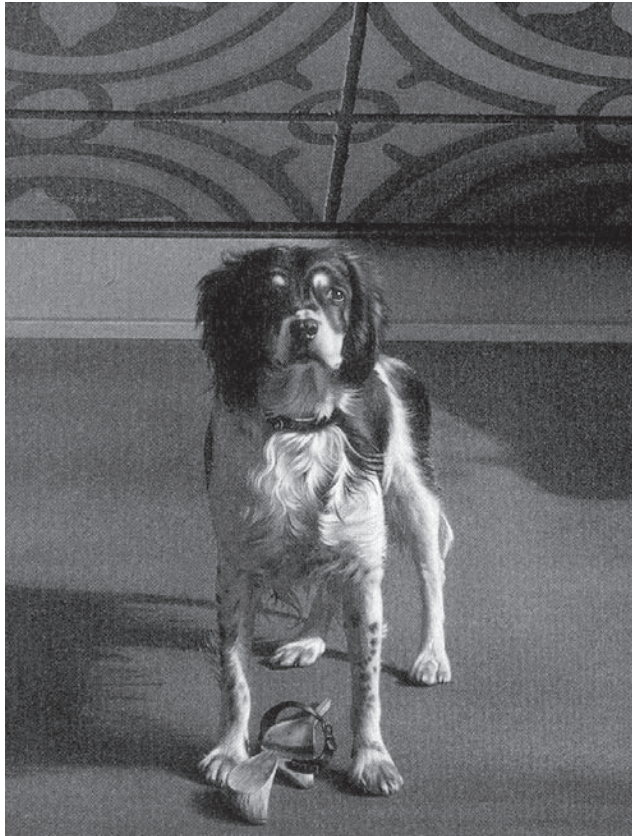
Außerdem ist es bei den Malern zum Beispiel eine seit langem gepflogene Tugend, meines Erachtens, daß sie sich in ihren Werken aufeinander beziehen, daß sie Motive aus dem einen Werk eines Kollegen in das eigene Werk übernehmen, sozusagen als Geste der Ehrerbietung. Und das ist etwas, was ich also auch sehr gerne mache als Schreibender. ("*Auf ungeheuer dünnem Eis*" pp. 97-98).

loss” which, we read, the red-haired woman ponders. The “secret” of that loss is nowhere revealed.

Still, the dog is the locus of knowledge: he knows a great deal more precisely than we do (“[er] weiß manches genauer als wir” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 188G). What he knows, like his movement, is marked as an abyss between left and right and is evidenced in a strange double-gaze. Sebald’s last image, a cropped citation of the second, smaller painting places the dog once again in the middle of the frame.

Attentively his left (domesticated) eye is fixed on us; the right (wild) one has a trace less light, strikes us as averted and alien. And yet it is precisely by this over-shadowed eye that we feel ourselves seen through. (“Like Day and Night” 94E)

Detail of Jan Peter Tripp, *Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall (Déjà vu or the Incident)*.  
Copyright © Jan Peter Tripp. Reprinted by permission of the artist (in “As Day and Night,” 94E).



Aufmerksam ist sein linkes (domestiziertes) Auge auf uns gerichtet; das rechte (wilde) hat um eine Spur weniger Licht, wirkt abseitig und fremd. Und doch fühlen wir uns gerade von diesem überschatteten Auge durchschaut. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 188G)

In the essay we find a previous history of this state of affairs, which, while not solving the riddle of the dog might help us to frame that cropped image of it from another perspective. Under the aegis of *Hinterlassenschaft*, of what might be left behind, it is again a question of an inheritance of sorts, and of painting and the observer in relation, this time, to the *nature morte*. Citing Merleau-Ponty, Sebald writes:

The *nature morte*, for Tripp ... is the paradigm of the estate we leave behind. In it we encounter what Maurice Merleau-Ponty ... called the *regard préhumain*, for in such paintings the roles of the observer and the observed objects are reversed. Looking, the painter relinquishes our all too facile knowing; fixedly/unrelatedly,<sup>16</sup> things look across to us. “Action et passion si peu discernable ... qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu, qui peint et qui est peint.” (“Action and passion so little separable ... that one no longer knows who is looking and who is being looked at, who is painting and who is being painted.”) (“Like Day and Night” 80E)

Die *nature morte* ist bei Tripp ... das Paradigma unserer Hinterlassenschaft. An ihr geht uns auf, was Maurice Merleau-Ponty ... den “regard préhumain” genannt hat, denn umgekehrt sind in solcher Malerei die Rollen des Betrachters und des betrachteten Gegenstands. Schauend gibt der Maler unser allzu leichtfertiges Wissen auf; unverwandt blicken die Dinge zu uns herüber. “Action et passion si peu discernable ... qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu, qui peint et qui est peint.” (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 174G)

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Our *knowing* is ill-considered, frivolous, and must be relinquished (unlike that of the dog). Perhaps this is because, as observers, (and isn’t this what the dog sees through?) we foolishly presume to know what Tripp (and art) are about. Sebald, too. For is not much of the essay “Like Day and Night” a series of ever shifting takes on Tripp’s work, perspectives that are implicitly cited, if not precisely kept in view, and ironically undone by the closing passage?

<sup>16</sup> The English translation has the odd but interesting choice of “unrelatedly” here.

In thinking of Tripp, this is what Sebald tells us all along: we cannot avoid the question of realism and of fidelity to reality: *Wirklichkeitstreue*.

What seems to me worth considering in it is only the assumption ... according to which the inherent quality of a picture by Tripp, just in view of what one might believe to be its purely objective and affirmative nature, probably cannot be attributed to that identity with reality which all its viewers admire without fail – or to its photographic reproduction – but to the far less apparent points of divergence and difference. (“Like Day and Night” 84E)<sup>17</sup>

Bedenkenswert daran scheint mir einzig ... die ... Vermutung, wonach die inhärente Qualität eines Bildes von Tripp, gerade in Anbetracht seiner, wie man meinen könnte, rein objektiven und affirmativen Beschaffenheit, sich wahrscheinlich nicht bestimmen läßt in der von allen Betrachtern unfehlbar bewunderten Identität mit der Wirklichkeit (oder ihrem photographischen Abzug), sondern in den weit weniger offensichtlichen Punkten der Abweichung und Differenz. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 178G)

If the narrator dismisses such fidelity to reality in Tripp’s art as completely off the mark, for most of the essay, nevertheless, it remains his point of departure. Thus art may call for ambiguity and polyvalence and for the transcendence of that which seems to be the case, but Tripp’s art is repeatedly viewed, less as a radical departure from, than as modification of, the faithful replicating material of the photograph: with additions, interventions, divergences and differences (“Hinzufügungen,” “Eingriffe,” “Abweichungen und Differenzen” “Like Day and Night” 84-85E, 179G). His claims notwithstanding, the narrator, nevertheless, fundamentally maintains the assumption of this art’s almost-fidelity to and even identity with reality (“Wirklichkeitstreue” and “Identität mit der Wirklichkeit” “Like Day and Night” 80E, 174G and 84E, 178G) with which Tripp’s work inevitably lures every observer: for what Sebald writes, at least early in the essay, is that just a small shift needs to take place: “Something is shifted to another place” (“Etwas wird an eine andere Stelle gerückt” “Like Day and Night” 84E, 179G).

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<sup>17</sup> The almost identical phrase, but in the plural, divergences and differences (“Abweichungen und Differenzen”) appears a page later.

Still, towards the end of the essay there is a shifting sense of shifting (*Rücken*) that gets quite out of hand. The “Déclaration de guerre,” we read, closes itself off in a private realm, but, when cited in a second work: “the painter *shifts* his puzzle-image at least a bit further into the public sphere” (“*rückt* der Maler sein Rätselbild ein Stückchen weiter wenigstens in die Öffentlichkeit” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 185G, emphasis mine). This shift in the name of openness and revelation is immediately followed by the shift of the shoe in the hand of the woman in white, the shift of the dog from the middle to the left, the shift of the dog in and out of the frame, and the shift of van Eyck’s sandal into Tripp’s picture – shifts that cannot simply be grounded in a fidelity to reality. The outlandish tale that Sebald finally creates responds to his essay’s initial naiveté. So does the title of Tripp’s second painting, which Sebald keeps secret: “Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall” (“Déjà vu or the Incident”). The title gives us a choice – or perhaps rather insists on our seeing double. The second painting presents art as “Déjà vu.” The painting of the two shoes, “Déclaration de guerre” which we see imaged in this second work, previously had a place in a more immediate realm. “Déjà vu or the Incident,” because it contains a replica of the first painting, announces its fidelity to a reality outside its canvas (“Déclaration de guerre”) that is passed from this world over the threshold to that of art. It is the passage to death (*nature morte*) of which we have already read – passing over the border on the way to the other side (“über die Grenze. Auf dem Weg nach der anderen Seite” “Like Day and Night” 86E, 180G).

Moreover, one can think of the shoe on the woman’s foot (or the missing shoe for that matter) as one of the original pair in the “La déclaration de guerre”: they are the same as those she contemplates on the large picture (“es sind die selben, die sie betrachtet auf dem großen Bild,” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G). In this sense, once again, not only what we see, but also what she sees in the “Déclaration de guerre” is: “Déjà vu.” The painting is a matter of *Wirklichkeitstreue* as a replica of objects of the world, the painting, the woman’s shoe(s).

“Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall” (“Déjà vu or the Incident”): what the canvas and Sebald’s storytelling also makes of this incident (*Zwischenfall*) is the *inzwischen*, the intervening time, the time that falls between, of the outrageously elaborated adventure of the dog underway (*unterwegs*) through time and space. In this little story of a little trip Sebald thereby claims to present as explanation for the woman’s loss that which is both beside the point and impossible.

Mimetic language had already met its match when confronted with the “Déclaration de guerre,” as an image of such complexity, we were told, that it cannot be described in words. Shifting that image into Tripp’s second painting seemed a move toward bringing it into a more public sphere. The scene of the woman contemplating the “Déclaration de guerre” pretends to speak of, or even partially explain, the relation between what is inside and what is outside of art. It hints at but fails to fully account for a conventional economy of art. The narration of the essay, however, then takes an entirely different tack with regard to “Déjà vu or the Incident” in the totally far-fetched story of the dog which violates all norms of time and space. The story conjures “reality” (but then who is to say that the dog really *is*?) out of the material and materiality of “art,” rather than the other way around. This purely paint-of-a-dog, shifting in and out of the frame of the picture, moves miraculously and indifferently through the no longer meaningful parameters of time and space, or so the narrator was informed (“so habe ich mir sagen lassen” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G). And, through no act of imitation, he does what no “real” dog could do; he brings van Eyck’s sandal into Tripp’s frame, carrying it both like a secret (*Geheimnis*) and a real thing. This is at once a testimony to (Tripp’s) exemplary mimetic, artistic accomplishment and/or a writerly tale of a painter forced to give up his own all too frivolous knowing (“allzu leichtfertiges Wissen,” “Like Day and Night” 80E, 174G).

And yet, the paintings are cited, to begin with, in order to explain that “Remembrance is basically nothing but a citation” (“Das Andenken ist ja im Grunde nichts anderes als ein Zitat” “Like Day and Night” 90E, 184G): and that citation sends us scurrying out of our present context into storied time and the time of culture. It is a test of all that we know: texts, images, the world. Sebald’s tale both mirrors life, and creates it: it is both *déjà vu* and that which comes to invent the no man’s land of an incident, a *Zwischenfall* that falls in between. It tells us that between the dog’s obliterated, painted-over place in the middle of the canvas and his final place at the left as representation, the illusory creature created in colors entered into lived, (three-dimensional) space or back in time, or, more outrageously, into another work of art to rob it of an object/image.

“Like Day and Night” poses at first as a critical commentary on the work of Jan Peter Tripp: with its description of individual works,<sup>18</sup> the ritual invocation of well-recognized theoretical voices (Ernst Gombrich, Merleau-Ponty, Eco), and the historical account of the development of the artist’s oeuvre. Still the reader senses all along that something else is at play. The essay puts forth some of the most outrageous fictional moments in Sebald’s work and some of the most interesting metacritical thought-as-practice. “Like Day and Night” performs. It frolics about, though not frivolously, among different modes of discourse – criticism, theory, fiction; among different takes on the object of its observation – as works of art, the materiality of those works, their formal qualities, or the doings of living individuals portrayed in them. It jumps about as well between opposing accounts of its own position – as observer and observed. Thus all the frames that mark off art from reality are both perfectly intact and utterly blasted. This is no less true for the imaginary plane which (as with all paintings) separates “Déjà vu” from the locus of its observer. What might it mean that across that divide the alien eye of that same dog seems to see right through us? With the dog’s domesticated eye directed at us, we become the object of the painting’s gaze, and feel thereby, perhaps, assured of our reality and existence. With the gaze of his wild right eye, the eye that sees right through us, we are made to feel that the revelation of any secrets will, if anywhere, inevitably take place behind our backs. Or is it that we, precisely in our search for such revelation, by way of a too facile knowing, are inevitably seen through, at best irrelevant, or, perhaps, not even there?

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<sup>18</sup> There are elements of literary criticism in many of Sebald’s works. Sebald says this himself with respect to the sections on Stendhal and Kafka in *Vertigo*. But we also find descriptions of literary and art works in *After Nature*, in *Vertigo*, in “Air War and Literature,” in *Rings of Saturn* as the narrator speaks of Rembrandt’s famous painting, of Browne’s *Garden of Cyrus*, and of Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus* and various post-war writers.

Alan Cholodenko\*

## The Spectre in the Screen<sup>1</sup>

Theories of spectatorship and cinema are nothing new. In fact, they abound. On the other hand, theories of spectatorship and animation are still rare. Rarer still are theories that implicate animation and cinema, including in the area of spectatorship.

For us, beyond as well as between theories of cinema spectatorship that attribute a pure passivity to the spectator and those that grant him a pure mastery, and beyond as well as between those that present themselves as purely text based and those that present themselves as purely context based, lies something, something missing from consideration that calls for acknowledgement, something integral to cinema spectatorship as it is to cinema “as such,” as it is to film spectatorship and to film “as such” – animation, film and media studies’ “blind spot.”

In accord with my larger project to bring to the fore the crucial nature of animation for the thinking of not only all forms but all aspects of cinema, of film, of film “as such,” this paper seeks to elaborate a theory of spectatorship “proper to” animation, to film “as such” as a form of animation.

Not that I have not broached such a theory already.

This paper is ghosted, like all papers.

Ghosted especially by my “The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema” (Cholodenko, 2004). At its end, I call for the rethinking of *all* aspects of cinema as form of animation as form of the animatic through the spectre, through what I

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the SCREENSCAPES PAST PRESENT FUTURE conference at The University of Sydney, 29 November-1 December, 2007. It was originally published in *Animation Studies*, 3 (2008).

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there elaborate as the Cryptic Complex, composed of *the uncanny, the return of death as spectre, endless mourning and melancholia and cryptic incorporation*. I propose that the elements of the Cryptic Complex offer a way of conceptualizing film rich in implication, including for the thinking of the sense(s) of cinema and for the rethinking of received theories of cinema, including those of ideology, the imaginary, fetishism, narrative, spectatorship, identification, etc. From this point of view, that of the necrospective, that of the vanishing point of view, every film and every analysis is a tale from – and of – the crypt, making it necessary to conceive of cinema, of film, as *spectrography* (the writing of the spectre – ghost writing), as *cryptography* (the writing of the crypt), as *thanatography* (the writing of death). To conceive of spectatorship, as of analysis, as *spectreship*, as haunting and being haunted, as encrypting, as mourning and melancholia in perpetuity, no matter what other affects might be generated to cover them over. From this point of view, there is always a spectre and a speculator in the spectator-analyst, always a corpse and a crypt. In fact, the spectres are always in the plural; and they are never laid to rest, never resolved, never reconciled. So, too, the analysis of the crypt, itself “the crypt of an analysis,” as Jacques Derrida declares (Derrida, 1986: p. xxiv).

80 Ghosted too by my more recent “(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix” (Cholodenko, 2007),<sup>2</sup> a text following on from “The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema.” In this text I elaborate that spectre not simply as psyche but as *psuché*. *Psuché* is the Homeric simulacral figure, the spectre, that leaves the body of the dead one to wander as flitting shade in Hades, which is, not insignificantly for us, Maxim Gorky’s Kingdom of Shadows, his (for us) Kingdom of Cinema, of Animation. No matter that Plato “turned” *psuché* the spectre into psyche the soul, he for us was never able to master the spectre – who could?! – a failure reanimated in every attempt by all his avatars to be master of the games played by the world and its objects, including master of cinema, of film animation – be it maker, analyst, theorist, spectator.

Plato’s reversal and ontologizing of the Homeric *psuché* as soul is inherited in the Latin *anima* (air, breath, soul, spirit, mind) and in the soul of Christianity. And in animation thought as ontological, that is, of the order of presence, es-

<sup>2</sup> Part II of the paper is in *Animation Studies*, 2, 2007, on the Society for Animation Studies website. Part I joined it there in 2009.

sence, the Platonic psyche, the Latin *anima*, the soul of Christianity. Which is to say that *psuché*, for me what Derrida calls the hauntological, spectres psyche, the ontological – pure soul, spirit, mind – as it does all rooted in psyche and the ontological, making them the special case, the reduced, conditional form, of *psuché*, of the hauntological.

Spectring the mind, *psuché* makes of thoughts ghosts.

And I would add: as “in-between,” to use a term of animation, *psuché in like manner* spectres the body and all associated with it, with materiality.

Lying at the “origin” of both cinema and mind, animation as *psuché* cryptically incorporates cinema in and as mind and mind in and as cinema, as *psuché* (and/ as *animus*) likewise lies at the “origin” of both cinema and body, of cinema in and as body and body in and as cinema. And *psuché* as knot, as we see in the hair of Madeleine/Judy and Carlotta Valdez in *Vertigo* – that spiral/twist called a “Psyche Knot” – inextricably knots (such) binary oppositions, creating knotty problems, problems incapable of resolution, definitiveness, finality, even as the always already doubled nature of the spectre makes definition impossible, including of animation “itself.”

Animation – as what we call the *animatic* (the very singularity of animation, anterior and superior to animation, the condition of possibility and at the same time impossibility of animation, at once the inanimation in and of animation and animation in and of inanimation, that nonessence at once enabling and disabling animation as essence, at once the life of death and death of life) – is of the order of the hauntological, of *psuché*, the Homeric *eidolon* – of at once this world and “an inaccessible elsewhere” (Vernant, 1991: p.187).

In “(The) Death (of) the Animator” I declare that cinema as form of animation as form of the animatic calls not simply for a psychoanalysis but a “*psuché*-analysis,” an analysis by definition impossible of resolution, for *psuché*, even as it enables such a possibility, at the same time spells its death, as it does that of a science of the psyche, that is, psycho-logy, which would be an impossible science of the double, of spectres, *psuché* turning that “science” into a séance. I would add: even as it makes a science of cinema and of animation impossible. Such a “*psuché*-analysis” encrypts the analyst and spectator within it, at once

turning analyst into spectator and spectator into analyst, making it impossible to say which is which, commingling them inextricably, turning spectator and analyst into what they were never not – speculators, theorists (from the Greek *theoria*, meaning a looking at, contemplation, speculation, from *theoros*, spectator).

Irretrievably speculative, not only ghosted by but ghosting them in turn, this paper draws forth from these texts and their calls, in this case to extend in particular the theory of spectatorship already broached in those texts, considering the spectator and the screen.

In so doing, it is immediately confronted with the question: is my call for a *psuché*-analysis of cinema, of film – of film as a form of animation – one not already responded to to a significant degree in the application to film since the 1990s of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytics of vision in the work of Joan Copjec, Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan – work serving as a corrective to the 1970s French and English Marxist film theorizations that brought Lacan’s article “The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I” to the theorizing of the cinematic apparatus (even while those theorisations at times misunderstood and misrepresented it)? Such theorisations were at best partial applications, ignoring, or in the case of Christian Metz undervaluing, Lacan’s complex elaboration of the scopic field in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, an ignoring that included Lacan’s focus there on the term that became increasingly significant for him – the Real.

Here I turn to Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*.

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Lacan makes it the centrepiece of his model of vision (Lacan, 1979: p. 91 and p. 106), the overlapping triangles diagramming the irreducible split, the antinomy, between the eye and the gaze of the irreconcilably split subject for him – the subject seeing the object as image and the object gazing at the subject as *screen*, turning the subject thereby into the object of the object, into, Lacan says, a “picture,” a “*photo-graph*” (Lacan, 1979: p. 106), that is, a drawing/writing with light<sup>3</sup> – what is the determination of the subject in the field of the other

<sup>3</sup> On the relation of drawing and animation, see my “*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, or the Framing of Animation,” “The Illusion of the Beginning: A Theory of Drawing and Animation,” “Still Photography?” and “The Animation of Cinema.”

Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*



by the gaze, which is *objet petit a* (in English little object a, a for *autre*, other) in the scopic field.

For Lacan, the scopic field is one where the subject seeing is always already given-to-be-seen by what is for Lacan privileged – the object – the object *petit a*, object-cause of desire. Its effect is not only to keep desire desire by keeping it unfulfilled, but also to undermine the Imaginary illusion of the mastery of the subject over all he surveys, as well as to introduce constitutive lack into the field of signification known as the Symbolic – *objet petit a* the void, emptiness, abyss, around which the symbolic order is structured (Žižek, 1989: p. 170). Object *petit a* stands in for Lacan for and as the Real, his third term in the trio Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. The Real is what is excluded from reality, including the Imaginary and the Symbolic, for reality to be reality. It is a hole in reality, an ungraspable, undeterminable, non-signifying traumatic kernel of non-sense at the heart of reality, at the heart of the subject, at once their very condition of possibility and impossibility.

Obviously, it cannot be totally excluded from reality, rather it is traced within it, it even erupts within it, even constitutively so, Joan Copjec tells us (Copjec, 2002: p. 184), which makes it for me like Derrida's repressed but irrepressible trace of the radically other operating within, and at once enabling and disabling, the structure of difference that is the sign. Indeed, Lacan declares that the trace of the Real as stain of the gaze is marked "at every stage of the constitution of the world, in the scopic field" (Lacan 1979, p. 74), as the trace is likewise for Derrida, who, calling the spectre "perhaps the hidden figure of all figures" (Derrida, 1994: p. 120), turns the trace into a form of the spectre.

The Holbein, a *vanitas* painting, a *memento mori* (a reminder of death), exemplifies Lacan's animated, indeed animatic, modeling of vision. He declares:

... the secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. It is a use, therefore, of the geometral dimension of vision in order to capture the subject, an obvious relation with desire which, nevertheless, remains enigmatic. (Lacan, 1979: p. 92)



Detail of Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*

Lacan identifies the anamorphic skull in the foreground as *la tache*, which means *stain, spot* – a stain, spot, that is not only, he states, “the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost,” of the Symbolic but that which is superior to it, exemplifying the very function of vision as trap for the subject of desire: “the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function” (Lacan, 1979: p. 89). What would be second spectre – Žižek calls it Lacan’s “fantasmatic spectre” (Žižek, 2005, 2006: p. 239) of the Real – that of *objet petit a*, the “primordially” lost object, seen only by looking awry, that oblique look marking the thing that forever eludes the grasp of the subject, that look that turns, that is, metamorphoses, anamorphoses – reanimates – the signifier of lack of the Symbolic order into the lack of the signifier of the Real.

So Lacan had found the spectres traced in the Holbein long before I had,<sup>4</sup> the *psuché* and the *psuché* of the *psuché*, the *psuché* “as such.” His psychoanalysis is *psuché*-“analysis.”

Now, another word Lacan uses for the stain, the spot, is the *screen*, stating: “...if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot” (Lacan, 1979: p. 97).

So the stain, spot, spectre, is the screen, the screen of the gaze of *objet petit a*. It is the point of vanishing being of the subject. The dead point, the point where the picture “looks back,” telling the subject it is always already accounted for, inscribed within, enframed and determined by, it.

The screen is, we would say, the crypt of the subject, the place of cryptic incorporation, where the subject is encrypted as its own impossibility. It is the “place” where the subject is always already turned into a spectre, into spectres.

Indeed, one day, looking awry at the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word *screen*, I saw these words: “The form has probably been influenced by confusion with *screne* = *SCRINE*, chest, coffer.”

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<sup>4</sup> See “(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix,” Part II: “A Difficulty in the Path of Animation Studies,” *Animation Studies*, 2 (2007), p. 10, note 3.

A check then disclosed that the words *chest*, *coffer*, are etymologically and semantically related to the word coffin!

The screen as coffin.

Crucially, Todd McGowan, treating of the Holbein, says, “Even when a manifestation of the gaze does not make death evident directly like this, it nonetheless carries the association insofar as the gaze itself marks the point in the image at which the subject is completely subjected to it” (McGowan, 2007: p. 7), to the gaze.

And the stain, spot, spectre, screen is *scotoma*, another term Lacan uses, which means a dimming of sight accompanied by dizziness, vertigo, and is term for the blind spot in our normal field of vision. For Lacan, the consciousness of the subject is scotoma, a blind spot blind to its lack of mastery, including of the visual field, dependent as that field is on the gaze, itself blind, indeed indifferent to, but nonetheless animating of, the subject, the subject blind to the blind spot “as such” that is the *objet petit a*, blind to “that point of vanishing being” of itself (Lacan, 1979: p. 83), except when that spot is “looked at awry.” It is a spot that is at once traumatizing, wounding, pricking and eluding, a *punctum* (*petite tache* for Roland Barthes, as Margaret Iversen tells us<sup>5</sup>) and darkness that can never be brought to the light of understanding, of grasping, and that at once organizes and disorganizes the visual field.

In other words, the *tache* (spot) is blind spot (*tache aveugle*) is screen – at once barrier and passage, at once the barrier of the passage and the passage of the barrier – like Derrida’s notion of hymen.<sup>6</sup> It is that entity that is at once unseen,

<sup>5</sup> Not only does Margaret Iversen point out how Roland Barthes’ thinking of the punctum takes up Lacan’s *tache*, Barthes even using the term *petite tache* to characterise punctum (Iversen, 1994: p. 457), she indicates the relevance to both Lacan’s and Barthes’ *tache* of Georges Bataille’s notion of *la tache aveugle*, the blind spot (Iversen, 1994: p. 463, note 29). See my treatment of Baudrillard’s photograph, *Punto Final*, in terms of the punctum in “Still Photography?”

<sup>6</sup> As I treat of it in “*Who Framed Roger Rabbit...*” Hymen is one of Derrida’s many undecidable, deconstructing figures, in this case meaning both virgin and consummated, neither simply virgin nor simply consummated, at the same time (along with such likewise deconstructed oppositions as confusion/distinction, identity/difference, veil/unveiling, inside/outside, etc.) In that essay, I link the figure of the hymen to that of the eye of the spectator,

in fact is never seen “as such,” but that allows one to see, is the very condition of possibility of “sight” – the blindness that make sight at once possible and impossible.<sup>7</sup>

The *tache*, stain, spot, blind spot, spectre, scotoma marks the point of the turn, where the *image* turns on itself, uncannily turning into *screen*, turning the subject from illusory mastery to nothingness, an effect of not only metamorphosis but anamorphosis, not only an animation- but an animatic-effect. Ana-, as in anamorphosis, meaning *back, again*, reminds us of the turn, the return, including of death, including of Freud’s death drive, for which all uncanny returns are stand-ins, the return of death to the subject and the subject to it, which the subject had never left nor death it. And of the phantasm, the spectre, of immortality beyond the cycle of life and death that the death drive urges upon the subject. It reminds us too of the deformation in every reformation, and vice versa, of the difference in every repetition, and vice versa, and of the destitution in every restitution, and vice versa. Mourning and melancholia are its affects.

So the blind spot of the gaze, equivalent to the blind spot of the mind – the psyche – is for me *psuché* – *the spectre not only in but as the screen and the screen not only in but as the spectre*, the screen “as such,” the spectre “as such.” In spectring the subject, the gaze turns the subject into spectre(s).

Copjec writes: the field of vision is “haunted by what remains invisible in it, by the impossible to see” (Copjec, 2002: p. 94). This is the effect on Lacan of the *fantasmatic*, that is, *spectral*, object he calls *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, the object that, like that famous floating sardine can, “looks back” at him, an object therefore with *a life of its own, lifedeath*, animate(d) and animating, indeed animatic, an object that not merely attracts but *seduces* him, as I discovered when I caught Alan Sheridan badly mistranslating seduces as attracts! (Lacan, 1979: p. 112).

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to the self, to the cinema screen and to film “as such,” “the hymen of the eye/ ‘I’... disseminating the unity of meaning, of presence and self-presence as identity” (p. 233), including the identity of film “as such,” not only penetrated but never penetrated at the same time.

<sup>7</sup> Parenthetically, Derrida’s treatment of the parergon, the tain, the supplement, is relevant to the degree that the screen is and has been regarded as supporting act to the star, the image. The screen as repressed but irrepressible trace of the other would never not be returning to the image as what at once enables and disenables it.



Here Lacan crosses paths with Jean Baudrillard, with whom he has in my articulation already met, without my having the space to divulge it to you, but let us at least note their common assertion of the superior life of the object and its games over the subject and his desires, the quantum object even, “horizon of the subject’s disappearance” (Baudrillard, 2000: pp. 76-77), object which seduces the subject, plays with the subject, who for Lacan can return the favor and play with the object as a mask (to its mask, I would add), who for Baudrillard can return the challenge. And they seem to share the simulacrum hiding (the) nothing – the nothing which haunts reality – the question: why is there nothing rather than something?, and the secret.

Here let me simply propose: Lacan’s Real is to reality as Baudrillard’s Seduction is to his second order of simulacra, that of production and simulation, which order he too calls “reality,” making reality the special case, the reduced conditional form, of both Lacan’s Real and Baudrillard’s Seduction.<sup>8</sup> Which is to say that the *objet petit a* as gaze lures, *seduces*, the subject, leads it astray, annihilates it and the putative mastery that the Imaginary, that production, reproduction and simulation, installed in the psyche.

I call *objet petit a* *objet petit animatique*, at once animating and deanimating reality and the subject.

I call it *psuché*.

The animating, indeed animatic, spectre of Death the animator, Death which, as formless form, as Lacan’s *informe*, gives all form, but is “itself” never given as such, just like Eisenstein’s plasmaticness, which for him is essence of animation and for me non-essence of animation as the animatic. Like the Thing in John Carpenter’s *The Thing from Another World*, which is for me the very figure of Freud’s death drive as “organic elasticity” of protozoa (Freud, 1984: p. 309).

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<sup>8</sup> And as Derrida’s *différance* is to presence, making presence the special case, the reduced conditional form, of *différance*. I must note here: the thinkers whose work I privilege, Baudrillard, Derrida, Lacan et al., are not only thinkers of animation and the animatic but animatic thinkers of it. Please consult my Introduction to *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation* for an elaboration of this point.

Indeed, insofar as Lacan's *tuché*, "the encounter with the real" (Lacan, 1979: p. 53), is for me an *animating* encounter with his amoeba-like, for me plas-matic, lamella (Lacan, 1979: pp. 197-199), it is an encounter with the Thing in the Carpenter film. Žižek in fact links the alien Thing in the Carpenter film to Lacan's lamella, marking its uncanny, morphing, infinitely plastic, simulacral, undead nature, declaring "the alien is libido as pure life, indestructible and immortal" (Žižek, 2006: p. 63), and describing it as standing "for the Real in its most terrifying imaginary dimension, as the primordial abyss that swallows everything, dissolving all identities..." (Žižek, 2006: p. 64). An encounter with Lacan's lamella, with his Thing, is therefore for me an encounter with *psuché*, *the animatic*.

The Thing's capacity to seduce by simulating, making whatever it simulates enter its realm of metamorphosis, even despite itself, turning it from its destination to its destiny, cannot but recall for me the way in which Baudrillard turns Freud's death drive on Freud, making Freud enter Baudrillard's realm of metamorphosis, turning death into reversion, reversal, the very turn of Seduction, the turn that for Baudrillard is Seduction – the reversibility of anything and everything – and into challenge. In such a light, *psuché*, the animatic, is not only fatal to reconciliation "as such," it is never not fatal to itself.

But here we must ask: Is all this not Maxim Gor'ky's experience of cinema as form of animation as form of the animatic as he relates it in his for me account of the unaccountable, of what will not, can never, compute? And as I treat of it in "The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema" and "(The) Death (of) the Animator..."?

Can we not read Gor'ky's response through Lacan, through his seductive, animatic model of vision as he exemplifies it with Holbein's *The Ambassadors* and as we have elaborated it? In Lacanian terms, would it not be fair to say that Gor'ky was traumatized, wounded, by his encounter with the gaze as *objet petit a*? Gor'ky "saw" the stain, the spot, the scotoma, the blind spot – the screen as apparition, his own apparition as spectre – and the blind spot of the blind spot – death, his own death, his own lifedeath, his condition as "undead," (his)

reality put on the spot by the Real, by *psuché*, the spectre that screens – that is, at once installs, “reveals,” conceals (re-veils), and retracts – (the) nothing.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Gorky’s description of his experience of cinema makes of the image as well as what it images spectres, to which he adds more spectres with his famous declaration: “Suddenly a strange flicker passes through the screen and the picture stirs to life,” metamorphosing from still photographic image to mobile cinematographic image, passing from virtual animation to actual animation.

He saw the spectre that is this uncannily animating flicker stirring the image and what it images to life, turning still image into mobile image, and turning that mobile image (back) on itself, turning image into screen, at once drawing that “life,” or rather lifedeath, forward and withdrawing it, indeed drawing it forward in withdrawing it and withdrawing it in drawing it forward at the same time.

And he adds another spectre yet: the spectator. Cinema spectres the spectator even as the spectator spectres it, each having the other as its spectre, its haunted house, its corpse and its crypt.

And more yet: the maker and the analyst-theorist.

And all are in the plural.

These spectres, screens, haunted houses and crypts not only multiply but concatenate, at once spectring, screening, housing and encrypting and in turn being spectred, screened, housed and encrypted in and by each other.

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The Cryptic Complex.

Animation as the animatic turns the spectator into what it always already was, a spectre, a spectre of the other, ghosted by and ghosting it, including ghosted by and ghosting the cinema and the cinematic apparatus, its characters and its author/maker, even as the cinema and its apparatus are ghosted by animation and its apparatus, as all these are ghosted by and ghosting the animatic appa-

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<sup>9</sup> I would add: Gorky experienced Barthes’ punctum, he experienced Bataille’s blind spot.

ratus. As well, the animatic (and its apparatus) ghosts all models theorizing the spectator as simply a fully living human being (as form of presence, soul, spirit), including those models figuring that spectator as either merely passive or merely active.

The “life” of cinema, of film, as form of animation is *psuché*, the animatic, life-death, making the subject’s sight and the image the special case, the reduced conditional form, of the gaze and the screen, making the subject the special case, the reduced conditional form, of the object, *objet petit a*, making life for me, as Nietzsche put it, the special case of death.

As for the hyperreality, the virtual reality, of today’s world, let me repeat this thought of Baudrillard, a thought marking the passage *from* the mirror stage of “reality,” where the self was accompanied by a shadow which paradoxically *made* the self a self, a self as constitutively always divided from itself, always spectred by its shadow even as it spectred its shadow, *to* the screen stage of hyperreality, the stage of the clone, the revenge of the mirror people who break the mirror and enter into “reality.”

As Baudrillard says, “He who has no shadow is merely the shadow of himself” (Baudrillard, 2004: p. 103).

Or as we would say: “He who has no *psuché* is merely the *psuché* of ‘himself.’”

The crypt of “him”-“self.”

“His” “own” coffin.

“His” “own” Kingdom of Shadows, not the old Hades, the old spectre, of the *Other* but the Hell, the spectre, of the *Same*.

“He” is the man of but screens.

He is only screen.

He is Total Screen.

Denis Nedry of *Jurassic Park*, not only surrounded by but surrounding and indistinguishable from screens.

He is Baudrillard's Telematic Man, his Tele-Computer Man.

And he is Paul Virilio's Man of the Three Bombs (atomic bomb, cyber/information bomb and genetic bomb), after Einstein, and as well figure of Virilio's Total Accident of science (Virilio and Lotringer, 2002: pp. 135-137, 142, 153-155), as testified to by Nedry's computer, with the fascinating images attached to it – a photo of J. Robert Oppenheimer, “father” of the atomic bomb, with two papers stuck on top of it: a drawing with a mushroom-shaped cloud of the atomic bomb imaged within and doubling a thought balloon; and the words “Beginning of Baby Boom” on the paper next to it.<sup>10</sup>

He is Baudrillard's and Virilio's Man the extension, the prosthesis, of his machines, his vision machines, as exemplified by Deckard, with his Voight-Kampff machine, testing Rachael, in *Blade Runner*.

He is Terminal Man, too, exemplified by Miles Dyson of the Cyberdyne Corporation and Major General Robert Brewster, USAF, who arguably *have* put Skynet online...as “them”-“selves.” “They” are “it” and “it” is “they.”

He that is all these Men is for me avatar of that shadow, that crypt of “him”-“self,” that is Dr Strangelove.

He is hyperanimated, hyperanimatic, *hyperlifedeath*: at once a life more death than death, more dead than dead, and a death more life than life, more alive than alive.

He is Baudrillard's ecstatic, Lacan's Real, in their metastatic, viral, fractal, clonal expression: *hyper-psuché*, figured for me most compellingly in the skull of the Terminator.

He is hyperspectre.

<sup>10</sup> On those attachments to Nedry's computer, see my “The Nutty Universe of Animation, the ‘Discipline’ of All ‘Disciplines’, And That's Not All, Folks!.”

The Death of Death.

The end... of the end...

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## Planet *Melancholia*: Romanticism, Mood, and Cinematic Ethics

Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* is not only a remarkable study of depression, it offers a fascinating exploration of cinematic romanticism and the aesthetics of cinematic moods. With its peculiar fusion of Dogme-style melodrama and apocalyptic disaster movie, Schopenhauerian pessimism and German romanticism, Bergmanesque psychodrama and art cinema experimentation, *Melancholia* projects an enchanted cinematic world dedicated to the disenchanting idea of world-destruction. It presents a devastating portrait of melancholia, dramatizing the main character Justine's [Kirsten Dunst's] experience of a catastrophic "loss of world" that finds its objective correlative in a sublime cinematic fantasy of world-annihilation. In what follows, I analyse some of the aesthetic and philosophical strands of *Melancholia*, exploring its use of romanticism and of cinematic mood, and showing how different readings of the film – from cognitivist analyses to ecoaesthetic interpretations – are responding to its arresting evocation of mood. Von Trier explores not only the aesthetics of melancholia but its ethical dimensions, creating an art disaster movie whose sublime depiction of world-destruction has the paradoxical effect of revealing the fragility and finitude of life on Earth.

### Romanticism

*Melancholia*'s remarkable Overture consists of sixteen colour slow-motion shots, slowed to near stasis, creating an uncanny *tableaux vivant* effect, accompanied by the Wagner's *Vorspiel to Tristan and Isolde* (1859). The opening image is a close shot of a woman's face [Kirsten Dunst], her head slightly to the left of mid-screen, opening her eyes and gazing directly at the camera, her face pale, tired, blank. A moment later dead birds fall from the sky behind her, an apocalyptic sign in many mythologies of God's disapproval of the conduct of humankind. The second image depicts a symmetrically arranged front lawn, flanked by rows of trees, with a large sundial magnified in the foreground (reminiscent of Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1966)). In the background a tiny figure can be seen swinging a

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child around, like a tiny clock movement. Also striking are the dual shadows that the trees and other objects cast on the ground, anticipating the revelation of the planet Melancholia, its soft blue light rivalling the sun and the moon.

The third shot is of a painting, Pieter Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565), showing a weary band of hunters and their dogs, cresting a hill and about to trudge home to their village, dormant in a small valley under a grey winter sky. Ashes appear in the front of the image, falling gently like snow, or like the dead birds, as the image slowly turns to flame. Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* also features prominently in Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and in *Mirror* (1975). Von Trier's homage is thus twofold: to Brueghel's early modern depiction of the mood of melancholia and the spiritual vacuity of crass materialism (later we see Justine's advertising image of sprawling models, modelled on another Brueghel painting, *The Land of Cockaigne* (1567)); and to Tarkovsky's art cinema of the 1970s, to moving images now sacrificed, reduced to ash, a cinematic world consumed in the transition to post-classical digital imagery. The Prelude cuts to a cosmic image of an enormous blue planet slowly wending its way around a red or orange star. This image (and a later one) rhymes with the opening shot of Justine's head and face, thus drawing the visual parallel between the melancholic Justine and the planet Melancholia, a cosmic pre-figuration of the mood of impending doom and disaster.

The next shot is an oneiric portrait of Justine's sister, Claire [Charlotte Gainsbourg], clutching her son, and trying to make her way across the golf course, her boots sinking into the grassy ground. The image features a suspicious flag, the nineteenth hole, which refers, von Trier remarks, to limbo.<sup>1</sup> This is followed by an image of a black horse, Justine's beloved Abraham (recalling the many horses in Tarkovsky's films but also reversing Muybridge's classic study of animal motion), falling to the ground beneath a night sky glowing with northern lights. This is followed by an image of Justine standing in the golf course, arms outstretched like Christ, as moths dance around her (perhaps a biblical reference to a passage in Isaiah, referring to moths and mortality in the face of God's infinite power).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The golf course at which the wedding reception is to be held having only eighteen holes (as we will be told twice in the film).

<sup>2</sup> As Manohla Darghis remarks, the image could be a reference to Isaiah 51:8: "For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation." Manohla

A striking tableau vivant follows, one of the signature shots in the film. We see the gloomy castle at twilight, with the bride Justine, young Leo, and Claire, arrayed symmetrically on the lawn, barely moving, flanked by rows of trees. Twin sources of nocturnal light, Melancholia's *blaue Licht*, and the moon's eerie glow, lend the scene a strongly romantic cast, reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich. This cuts to another image of the planets in their *danse macabre*, the planet Melancholia, dwarfing the Earth, performing its teasing fly-by, followed by a shot of Justine, her hands slowly rising, electricity sparking from her fingertips and from the light poles behind her. The interaction between the planets, their mutual attraction, transfigures both nature and culture, transforming the manicured golf course into an elemental cauldron of energy, and Justine into a lightning rod for the catastrophic collision to come.

The images in this Prelude, however, are not chronologically arrayed, tracking the movement of the narrative to come. They cross back and forth, rather, between different temporal frameworks of the film, from the narrative time of Justine's disastrous wedding reception, the psychological or subjective time of the characters' anxious wait for the impending catastrophe, to the cosmic time that frames the final collision between the earth and Melancholia. An image evoking the first part of the film appears, one that captures the oppressive feeling of time slowing and one's physical energy ebbing; a nightmarish but beautiful vision of Justine in her wedding dress, striding against skeins of black, weed-like strands, wrapped around her limbs and holding her back, but also unfurling from the trees, as though nature itself were refusing to let her go. Another shot of the planets Earth and Melancholia appears, looming larger this time, the parallel now explicit between Justine's psychological state, her physical distress, a generalized *Weltschmerz*, and the cosmic cataclysm to come. A shot from inside one of the melancholy rooms in the castle, a Baronial style interior framed by archways and intricate window-frames, reveals a burning bush in the garden outside, another image combining a biblical reference with an elemental, Tarkovsky-like evocation of fire. We then cut to a romantic image of the drowning bride clutching her wedding bouquet, half-immersed in a watery pond, slowly

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Darghis, "This is How the End Begins," *The New York Times*, Dec 30, 2011. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/movies/awardsseason/manohla-dargis-looks-at-the-overture-to-melancholia.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/movies/awardsseason/manohla-dargis-looks-at-the-overture-to-melancholia.html?_r=2)

sinking amidst the lily pads and wavering weeds, reminiscent of John Everett Millais's pre-Raphaelite homage, *Ophelia* (1852).

The oneiric vision flashes forward to Justine and Leo in the forest, Justine approaching from a distance, Leo whittling a stick he will offer for Justine's "magic cave" that the surviving trio will build for their final moments together. What becomes clearer with hindsight is that these are prophetic images of events still to come (Justine, seated on a stone wall will watch Claire return carrying her son during a hailstorm; Justine's horse Abraham that will fall to the ground rather than cross the bridge to the village; Leo whittling sticks in the forest in preparation for the final collision between Melancholia and the Earth). This vision of world-destruction weighs heavily upon Justine and is perhaps the deeper reason for her profound melancholia, the lost object here being not only her own life (her marriage, career, and family) but sheer attachment to the world itself. Leo looks up from whittling wood and gazes off into the distance, just as the image cuts to a long shot of Melancholia approaching the earth; the Prelude now swelling to its climax, the image suggests a perverse cosmic embrace as Melancholia pulls the earth into itself, a *Liebestod* to end all others. As the image fades to black the Prelude ends with a primordial rumbling that persists beyond the void, accompanying the painted screen title: "Lars von Trier *Melancholia*."

### A Cognitivist Interlude

What are we to make of this remarkable neo-romanticist vision of sublime world-destruction? Although there are a number of available interpretations of the film, Danish cognitivist film theorist Torben Grodal has published one of the few unabashedly theoretical analyses of *Melancholia*.<sup>3</sup> According to Grodal, art cinema films, such as those of von Trier, generate their aesthetic effects by blocking the ordinary processes of cognition, what he calls the "PECMA flow": the circuit linking perception, emotion, cognition, and motor action. Interestingly, Grodal's cognitivist approach parallels, in striking fashion, Gilles Deleuze's analyses of the breakdown of the sensory-motor action schema that defines the post-

<sup>3</sup> Torben Grodal, "Frozen Style and Strong Emotions of Panic and Separation: Trier's Prologues to *Antichrist* and *Melancholia*," *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*, 2 (1/2012), pp. 47-53.

war emergence of time-image cinema.<sup>4</sup> According to both Grodal and Deleuze, most narrative film follows a conventional “sensory-motor” circuit: perception elicits affective/emotional responses linked with cognition that are typically expressed in actions (in non-spectatorial contexts). Classical narrative film emulates the PECMA flow via the devices of continuity editing, character-driven action, and narrative closure (what Deleuze calls the “sensory-motor schema” defining classical “movement-image” cinema).<sup>5</sup> Art cinema, by contrast, blocks or impedes the PECMA flow: motor action is interrupted or dissipated, which generates dissociated perception, “saturated” affects or emotions, and open-ended reflection oriented towards “higher order” meanings. This account accords well with Deleuze’s analysis of the effects of the breakdown of the sensory-motor action schema, which, in like fashion, interrupts the circuit between perception and action, thus realising varieties of affect, thought, and temporal experience (expressed in time-images) ordinarily subordinated in “movement-image” cinema. Deleuze’s concern, however, is not with the affective-cognitive processes involved in our response to art cinema with its emphatic use of time-images; rather, it is to articulate an alternative semiotic typology of image-signs corresponding to different modalities of cinematic expression. In any event, Von Trier’s films are replete with such time-images, which open up aesthetic experiences – of affect, memory, and time – that resist explicit discursive articulation, and thus chime well with the tradition of romanticist theories of art indebted to Kant’s account of aesthetic ideas – indeterminate but aesthetically rich ideas that invite infinite interpretation – as elaborated in the *Critique of Judgment*.<sup>6</sup>

Grodal analyses the “prologues” to von Trier’s *Antichrist* (2009) and *Melancholia* (2011) from a cognitivist point of view that, nonetheless, resonates with aspects of Deleuze’s account of the “pure optical and sound situations” defining time-image cinema.<sup>7</sup> Both films commence with super slow-motion sequences using arresting visual imagery (black-and-white and colour respectively) and

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1986, pp. 197-215.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155-159.

<sup>6</sup> For Kant, an aesthetic idea is “an intuition of the imagination” that resists determinate conceptualisation, “so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it.” See *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett, Indiana 1987, pp. 215-217.

<sup>7</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galatea, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1989, pp. 13-24.

affectively charged music (the Handel's "Lascia ch'io pianga" and Wagner's Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*). They both block action, principally through ultra slow-motion imagery, suggesting but also thwarting narrative and symbolic meaning, thus evoking saturated affect, "global" (rather than personalised) emotions, and what Grodal calls the quest for "higher-order meanings." In both Preludes, moreover, the play between movement and stasis both stimulates and checks strong emotions such as panic and anxiety, emotions that Grodal attributes to von Trier as creative but tormented cinematic auteur who uses these aesthetic strategies in the service of his cinematic art.<sup>8</sup>

The forward thrust and affective charge of the romantic music, Grodal notes, is checked by the arresting of movement in the images, resulting in a simultaneous intensification of perception, affect, and reflection.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, for Grodal, the Preludes reflect four general strategies evident in von Trier's films for coping with strong or destructive emotions, particularly anxiety and panic: aesthetic stylisation and containment (or what we might otherwise call sublimation) through beauty or poeticism; sublime submission to a powerful force or higher order of meaning; manipulating the reality status of the image; and obsessive control of the image's aesthetic elements.<sup>10</sup> Shifting between the film's aesthetic style, and von Trier's own famously troubled psychology, Grodal concludes that the Overture of *Melancholia*, like that of *Antichrist*, is a way of controlling the disturbing emotions of panic and separation anxiety, solicited and managed within a highly controlled aesthetic construction. The pointed use and display of romanticist imagery, for example, both by von Trier in the Wagnerian Overture and by Justine in her angry outburst in the library, serves to express then allay anxiety and panic by way of aesthetic containment: using beautiful imagery to defuse anxiety, to sublimate panic, and to solicit reflection in the service of an ambiguous "submission" to higher orders of meaning. As Grodal remarks,

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<sup>8</sup> Grodal, "Frozen Style and Strong Emotions of Panic and Separation: Trier's Prologues to *Antichrist* and *Melancholia*," pp. 49 ff.

<sup>9</sup> The arresting of movement via striking but static imagery coupled with the use of evocative, expressive music in von Trier's Prelude, as Grodal remarks, has the effect of both arresting and stimulating affective and emotional responsiveness: it "presses the accelerator and touches the brake at the same time." *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Trier's use of romantic imagery is an effort to produce humility and also a way of inscribing the prologues in an art film tradition that often caters to a quasi-religious submission to higher meanings.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the strategy of submission to sublime meaning, the images not only arrest movement but drain colour from the image, and stylise the composition of the frame through arresting, unusual, or striking elements disrupting balance, symmetry, formal expectations, and visual conventions. The result is a manipulation of the reality status of these images, which occupy an ambiguous position somewhere between dream, fantasy, and reverie. Even the otherwise terrifying images of the Earth being dwarfed by the planet *Melancholia* are rendered as arresting and beautiful, accompanied by the romantic Wagner Overture, defusing the sense of panic or anxiety such images might otherwise induce and replacing these with a "derealised" aestheticized image suggesting sublimity or other symbolic meanings. The entire sequence, moreover, amply displays von Trier's own "obsessive control" over the aesthetic elements of image, with its self-consciously stylised composition, pictorial and cinematic allusions, complex aesthetic problem-solving, ambiguous reality status and indeterminate connotative meanings spanning narrative, poetic, and symbolic dimensions.

Indeed, like other von Trier films, *Melancholia* works with self-imposed rules generating a complex series of artistic experiments grounded in the imposition of rules and elaboration of games expressing what a number of theorists have described as "creativity under constraint."<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging but also subverting a European tradition of art cinema and pictorial representation, von Trier's aesthetic game-playing involves a complex series of aesthetic strategies designed to both intensify and dissipate the emotions of anxiety and panic, providing an aesthetic transformation of these emotions in a manner that sublimates their negative affective valency towards poetic experience and symbolic meaning. Taken together, Grodal's cognitivist analysis offers an enlightening "naturalis-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> For a variety of discussions of von Trier's game-playing as an exemplary case of cinematic "creativity under constraint" see the essays in Mette Hjort (ed.), *On The Five Obstructions. Dekalog 1*, London/New York, Wallflower Press 2008. Thomas Elsaesser has recently discussed the film in relation to the idea of the mind-game film: See Elsaesser, "Black Suns and a Bright Planet: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* as Thought Experiment." *Theory and Event* 18.2 (2015) [https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v018/18.2.elsaesser.html](https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v018/18.2.elsaesser.html).

tic” account of the underlying perceptual-affective-cognitive processes at play – and artfully manipulated – by von Trier’s distinctive audio-visual sequences in films like *Melancholia* and *Antichrist*.

Interestingly, Grodal’s analysis not only accounts for some of the underlying affective and cognitive processes involved in our aesthetic response to the von Trier Overtures; it also recalls, ironically, earlier psychoanalytic film theories that applied a similar diagnostic to the analysis of cinematic images (sublimation, fetishism, fantasy projection) and to film auteurs (Hitchcock’s alleged voyeurism, perversity, and misogyny, for example). Grodal too tends towards a “pathologization” of von Trier’s aesthetic of romantic sublimity, suggesting that the film evinces von Trier’s own obsessive-compulsive tendencies, using art as a way of coping with his much-publicised depression.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, however, Grodal’s cognitivist-auteurist analysis says almost nothing about the very mood, aesthetic sensibility, or emotional condition one would expect to be addressed in analysing such a film: *melancholia*. How do these aesthetic strategies, and more particularly the evocation of a specific mood, express and evoke a state of melancholia that carries subjective, aesthetic, and metaphysical connotations? What is specific about the evocation and exploration of melancholia as both affective-psychological and aesthetic-metaphysical state? Grodal’s analysis also refrains from addressing the film’s broader cultural and ideological significance: its allegorization of Justine’s experience of melancholia to capture the apocalyptic cultural-historical mood of the present; to critique the vacuity of a naïve rationalist optimism in the face of the contemporary “crisis of world”; and to explore the putative “end of film” within a neo-romantic aesthetic of cinematic sublimity. In what follows will address these questions with respect to the concept of cinematic moods, and explore both psychological-aesthetic and ethico-cultural dimensions of the film’s presentation and exploration of melancholia.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. “the danger in *Melancholia* – from a strange and difficult to detect planet that may possibly destroy the earth –fits perfectly into such a system of obsessive–compulsive anxiety. The anxiety is linked to severe panic by fundamental threats to bonding that will be clear in the rest of the film (as OCD may reflect an insecure bonding in the past or in the present).” Grodal, p. 51.

## Melancholia

There is no doubt that one of the most impressive features of the film is its remarkable presentation of the experience of melancholia. For all the brilliance of Kirsten Dunst's performance, however, it would be a misleading to interpret the film solely a psychological study of depression. Rather, melancholia is evoked in the film as a mood, an aesthetic sensibility, a way of experiencing time; a visionary condition and aesthetic experience of revelatory temporality that contemporary cinema has all but forgotten. Chiming with Kristeva's remarkable meditation on depression and melancholia, *Black Sun*,<sup>14</sup> von Trier attempts to reclaim the romantic association of melancholia with prophetic vision and artistic genius (hence the references to Brueghel, Wagner, and Tarkovsky). It not only explores the subjective experience of this distinctive mood or state of mind, it evokes melancholia as an aesthetic, historically resonant mood expressing contemporary cultural-historical anxieties, while also commenting on the corruption and possible redemption of cinema in the digital age.

That Justine is both a melancholic and an advertiser, for example, should give us pause. She has a refined aesthetic sensibility, "knows things," but cannot cope with the everyday world of work, refusing to give her boorish boss, Jack [Stellan Skarsgård], the "tagline" he so desires (on her wedding night no less, a signal that commerce really controls art). Still, Justine eventually gives him an acerbic (and rather Heideggerian) tagline – "*Nothing*, just Nothing" – one that best describes what Jack stands for (the nihilistic corruption of art through advertising). Jack is the embodiment of a relentless drive to work, universal commodification, an expression of the new spirit of capitalism, a destructive force bent on annihilating anything that stands in the way of business. It is this world that Justine sacrifices, renouncing her promotion (as "artistic director"), insulting her boss, losing her job, thus negating the entire sphere of her social and professional identity, everything binding her to the empty world of wealth, work, and advertising with its nihilistic corruption of aesthetic experience.

One way of reading this episode is to treat it as von Trier declaring his conflicted persona as director: Justine, melancholic artist/advertiser ("artistic director");

<sup>14</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York 1989.



Claire, caring sister and anxious organiser trying to oversee the event (the wedding ritual or wedding movie *cum* metaphysical disaster movie). If Justine and Claire are contrasting aspects of von Trier's directorial persona, we could take the film's presentation of melancholia as an allegory of the corruption of cinema as art; a self-critique of von Trier's own ambivalent role as melancholic artist, anxious controller, and cynical manipulator of images – a loss resulting in a melancholic act of (cinematic) world-destruction.

At the same time, *Melancholia* reinvents the possibilities of art cinema in a commercial-digital age by channelling modernist cinematic masters, while fusing genre cinema with hybrid forms (domestic melodrama meets metaphysical disaster movie). In an important scene, Justine, having withdrawn from her own wedding celebration, reacts violently to the pictures of modernist art in the books on display in the library, replacing them with pre-modern and romantic images (Brueghel, Millais, and so on); as though her melancholia were itself as symptom of the decadence of modernist optimism, its corruption into contemporary advertising design. There is something rotten, for Justine, at the heart of modernism and its degeneration into consumer culture, just as there is something rotten in the humanist myth of progress, our rationalist faith in redemption from catastrophe through science and technology. Indeed, Justine's gesture of refusal and negation signals that these ideas – the corruption of modernist art by advertising, and the need to retrieve romanticism as an antidote to the myth of progress – prefigures the destruction of the image-world that is soon to come (recalling the image of Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* being consumed by flame and turning to ash).

What is it that defines Justine's – and indeed the film's – melancholia? According to Freud, melancholia is a pathological condition resulting from the inability to “work through” the loss of a loved object through the normal processes of mourning that would allow the subject to detach herself from it.<sup>15</sup> In mourning, the subject's basic capacity for affective engagement with the world remains intact. In melancholia, the loss is so catastrophic that the subject negates its

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<sup>15</sup> See Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, Hogarth, London 1959, pp. 237-258.

own self and withdraws herself from the world. It involves a negation of the self so radical that it leads to a complete negation of social reality as such. In *Melancholia* (the film), Justine's negation of self and failure to participate in the rituals of everyday life – like her own wedding reception – leaves her bereft of the capacity for affective engagement and meaningful social agency. She strives to play the smiling bride, but like the oversize limousine that gets stuck on the way to her wedding reception, she no longer fits the social milieu in which she now exists – the social rituals strike her as empty, trivial, and absurd. In the course of the evening, she withdraws from the wedding reception, withdraws from her husband, rejects the demands of her boss, loses her career, seduces an underling and prompts her husband to leave her, is abandoned by her family, and falls into a deep depression that leaves her unable to speak or to move. The next day she can barely make it out of bed and into a taxi, let alone walk or talk. She spends the days sleeping. When finally roused out of bed by the promise of her favourite dish – meatloaf – and half-carried to the table by her sister and professional assistant “Little Father,” Justine can barely swallow a mouthful of the meal before beginning to weep, declaring that her food “tastes like ashes.”

This melancholia, however, is not only confined to Justine's crippling depression but pervades the entire world of the film. Melancholia is a mood that imbues the world with a distinctive sensibility, congealing the present, negating the comportment defining everyday activity, thus revealing the emptiness of our everyday busy-ness (not to mention business) as well as opening up an uncanny, “prophetic” dimension of temporal experience. Justine's self-negation extends from her family and work to her investment in the world itself. It is thus with a sense of relief that she learns of the impending collision of Melancholia with the earth. Her sister Claire becomes increasingly anxious and frightened about what is to come, while her husband, initially reassuring, clings to his faith in science, only to fall into despair once he realises that the collision is inevitable, that his faith in scientific mastery and rational control was misplaced, committing suicide rather than face his family and the humiliating certainty of their deaths. Shattering our myths of progress, von Trier seems to suggest, could well lead to a cultural nihilism, a collective depression, if not societal self-destruction. Justine, by contrast, slowly emerges from her depression, gains a quiet strength, and becomes almost calm and contemplative. Seduced by the presence of the vast planet, she bathes nude in its eerie blue light, beguiled by its growing presence as it hurtles towards the earth, pulling our planet into its fatal embrace.

Justine's melancholia takes on cosmic dimensions, her negation of self and world enveloping the world itself. Her melancholia thus achieves its end, just as the planet Melancholia destroys the earth, along with Justine, Claire, and Leo in their "magic cave," and just as the film *Melancholia* annihilates the image-world it had so beautifully composed for us.

### **Melancholy Moods: *Melancholia's* Cinematic Ethics**

It is clear already from its Overture that *Melancholia* is a film concerned with the evocation of mood. Although it deals with the psychological aspect of mood (melancholia), it is also concerned with its aesthetic aspect, taken as an expression of aesthetic sensibility, a way of disclosing or revealing the world and time – an aesthetic experience of movies that is typically overlooked in favour of movement and action. As distinct from the clinical notion of depression, the film explores, in an evocative fashion, the kinship between melancholia and artistic creativity, the kind of aesthetic mood regarded as conducive to aesthetically mediated ways of knowing ("I know things," as Justine says, alluding not only to her capacity for intuitive knowledge linked to her melancholic disposition but to her acknowledgment of the inevitability of the planet Melancholia's destruction of the Earth). One of the most striking aspects of *Melancholia's* aesthetics of mood concerns the manner in which it also evokes an ethical sensibility or acknowledgement of the fragility, vulnerability, and value of life on our planet. How are these aesthetic and ethical aspects of mood related in the film?

One obvious way is via *Melancholia's* powerful evocation of the mood of melancholy, both as communicating Justine's own experience of profound depression and as an expressive aesthetic feature of the film's cinematic world. Here it is important to distinguish between moods attributed to a character perspective and moods expressed by the work of art itself. Indeed, a common conflation that occurs in discussions of mood concerns the difference between a subjectively experienced mood elicited by a work, and the aesthetic mood expressed by the work. Carl Plantinga has usefully elaborated this distinction between human moods (experienced by a subject) and art moods (the pervasive affective tone, atmosphere, or attunement conveyed by a work), what I have elsewhere discussed, drawing on early film theorists, as the *Stimmung* of a cin-

ematic work.<sup>16</sup> The mood of a work is distinct from the mood of the spectator, even though the work's mood – expressing, for example, the perspective of the film's narration, of a narrator, or a character – usually aims to elicit certain moods from its audience.<sup>17</sup> I can recognise the mood of gloomy dread or acute anxiety expressed by a horror film without actually experiencing that mood myself while watching the film; or I can be experiencing a certain mood that does not necessarily correspond with that expressed or communicated by the film (a nostalgic mood while watching an old slapstick comedy, for example). In sum, mood primes or orients us emotionally (and cognitively) towards perceiving or attending to certain elements, emphases, or aspects of a film-world, preparing us for an appropriate engagement with the emotional modulations and dynamics that unfold in the course of the narrative.

The two parts of *Melancholia*, for example, are explicitly designed to express and evoke different moods: the warmly lit, animated hand-held camera of Part I (Justine), conveying the conviviality and attempted merriment of the wedding (which soon starts to turn sour as familial tensions surface, Justine's Boss harasses her for his "tagline," and Justine herself slips into depression) versus the "cooler," darker, more subdued lighting of Part II (Claire), with colour-coded costuming, less animated camera work, and subdued lighting (more naturalistic, outdoor light, but also with increasingly blue-filtered light pervading each scene, reflecting not only the planet Melancholia's ominous presence but Justine's own state of mind) all of which gives the second half of the film a darker, ominous, melancholy atmosphere. The final part of the film, which centres on the inevitability of the devastating destruction of the Earth by the planet Melancholia, is striking for collapsing the distinction between the mood of melancholia attributable to Justine and the mood of melancholia expressed by the film. By the film's extraordinary final sequence, Justine's mood has itself alleviated, as she becomes more Stoically calm, focused and resolute in the face of impending disaster, while her "subjective" state of melancholia now pervades the film's cinematic world (the blue light bathing each scene, the rumbling sound of the approaching planet, and the recurrence of the Tristan and Isolde overture lend-

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<sup>16</sup> Carl Plantinga, "Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema," *New Literary History* 43:3 (2012), pp. 455-475 and Robert Sinnerbrink, "Stimmung: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood," *Screen* 53:2 (2012), pp. 148-163.

<sup>17</sup> Plantinga, "Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema."

ing the final sequence a tragic-romantic atmosphere of life and death entwined, and so on).

Mood, however, is not only an aesthetic dimension of cinematic worlds and the experience of spectator involvement in such worlds. It plays a significant role in what we might call “cinematic ethics”: cinema’s potential as a medium of ethical experience. By this I mean films that use the aesthetic power of cinema to elicit ethical experience, or to draw our attention towards phenomena and perspectives that we might otherwise ignore, overlook, or undervalue, inviting affective-cognitive forms of engagement directed towards opening up new forms of perception, the exercise of moral imagination, or exploring alternative ways of thinking. Cinematic ethics, from this point of view, expresses cinema’s power to evoke an ethical experience that can prompt aesthetic, moral-psychological, even cultural transformation; the aesthetic “conversion” of our feelings and perceptions, attitudes and orientations – the transformation of our ways of apprehending the world.<sup>18</sup>

There are three primary but related ways in which mood can evoke ethical experience in film.<sup>19</sup> The first is the “subjective-phenomenological” aspect of mood (showing what something is like, how it feels to experience X, presenting a distinctive experiential perspective on Y), which typically unfolds as part of a dramatic narrative scenario expressing either the perspective of a character or the worldview articulated by a film. The second is the “moral-psychological” aspect of mood (how it affects our moral sympathies and antipathies again towards characters, situations, ideas, or worldviews, how it affects or orients moral judgments, how it exercises or stymies moral imagination, potentially shifts ethical attitudes and moral convictions, even alters our disposition towards action). The third is the “ontological-aesthetic” dimension of mood (how it contributes to the composition of a meaningful cinematic world, draws our attention to certain features of the world, makes things salient, affectively charged, or matter to us). This third dimension of mood generally remains at a remove from narrative representation since it pertains to the expression or disclosure of a cinematic world rather than to the elaboration of its narrative content.

<sup>18</sup> I discuss this idea further in Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience through Film*, Routledge, London/New York 2016.

<sup>19</sup> See Plantinga, “Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema.”

To say a few words about the first aspect, mood not only orients us within a cinematic world, it can open up a space (and time) of engagement in which we can experience phenomenologically the subjective (or “what is it like”) dimension of a certain experience, say of grief, loss, or depression. Here mood works most closely with the elicitation of emotion, operating in ways that provide an affectively rich means of orienting us towards certain kinds of cognitive or emotional responses. As many commentators have noted, one virtue of *Melancholia* is its impressively authentic depiction of depression, rendering powerfully and vividly the “what it is like” aspect of this subjectively debilitating form of experience.<sup>20</sup> Justine’s attempts to maintain a facade of cheerful involvement, her increasing inability to see the relevance or significance of the rituals she is performing, her inexorable slide into a state of detached indifference, followed by bodily inertia and utter affective disengagement – all of these aspects of her experience are rendered in detail, not least thanks to Kirsten Dunst’s remarkable performance. The scenes showing Justine’s inability to catch a taxi despite her sister’s encouragements, her complete lack of energy and inability to enter the bathtub, and her failed attempt to enjoy a family meal, rejecting the food she is offered as tasting like ashes, all highlight the experiential difficulties of suffering depression. As remarked, the mood of the transitional sequences between the end of Part I and beginning of Part II also underline the subjective sense of a world that has lost its colour, texture, flavour, and vitality. The lighting and colour scheme retreat to dark and drab tones, gloomy interior and exterior shots, with the increasingly pervasive blue of the planet Melancholia paralleling Justine’s affective, bodily, and “existential” sense of melancholia.

The second aspect (the moral-psychological dimension of mood) is the primary focus of discussions of the role of mood, affect, and emotion (e.g. empathy and sympathy) in rhetorically “moving” viewers towards changes in their moral attitudes, the exercise of moral imagination, or the slanting of our stances towards ideological worldviews. This is the aspect of mood most relevant to recent discussions of affective engagement with cinema, notably the focus on affect, empathy or sympathy, and the manner in which emotional alignment and mor-

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Rupert Read, “An Allegory of a ‘Therapeutic’ Reading of a Film: of MELANCHOLIA,” *Sequence* 12 (2014) <http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/sequence1/1-2-an-allegory-of-a-therapeutic-reading/>

al allegiance are generated through cinematic means.<sup>21</sup> This is also the aspect that Carl Plantinga foregrounds as having significant potential to understand and explain the moral rhetoric of cinema and how it can persuade us towards certain social attitudes or ideological convictions.<sup>22</sup> Here again, *Melancholia*'s sympathetic presentation of the manner in which Justine's melancholy character develops more strength and resoluteness as the fatal planetary collision becomes inevitable, comforting her sister Claire who becomes more terrified and panicked, is a powerful example of how mood can elicit sympathy or empathy in affective terms. As (in part) a familial/domestic melodrama, focusing on the complex relationship between the two sisters, *Melancholia* takes great care to present the sisters in a sympathetic manner. The film focalises the narrative, in Part I, around Justine's failed attempts to successfully engage in her own wedding celebrations, and in Part II, and shifts focus towards Claire's well-meaning but failed attempts to care for her sister during a depressive bout, while becoming more frightened and anxious once the inevitability of the collision between *Melancholia* and the Earth becomes apparent. Claire's husband John [Kiefer Sutherland], a bourgeois proprietor (owner of the manor house establishment with its eighteen-hole golf course) as well as a rationalist optimist, is shown as having a rationalistic faith in science that proves hollow, choosing suicide rather than face the reality of destruction. Justine's calm acceptance of their fate, and her blunt rejection of Claire's misguided attempts to mask the reality of the catastrophe as though it were a pleasant dinner to be enjoyed over a glass of wine, culminate in the film's concluding sequence – Justine reminding young Leo about the “magic cave” they need to build that will keep them from harm, a fragile make-believe construction (like a tent or tepee) that allows Justine to comfort the distraught Claire and frightened Leo during their final moments on Earth together.

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There is also a third ethical dimension of mood – more aesthetic, ontological, and existential – that contributes to how a cinematic world is composed and communicated, how it is presented with particular elements foregrounded as affectively charged or emotionally salient: moods that can reveal a world and dispose the viewer to notice, attend to, or be moved by the sheer existence of

<sup>21</sup> I discuss this further in Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics*.

<sup>22</sup> See Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2009.

a world. The manner in which Terrence Malick's films, for example, compose a cinematic world presenting the majestic indifference of nature, the contingency of human identity, the presence of transcendent beauty and revelatory moments of moral grace, the metaphysical-ethical as well as romantic-sensual experience of love, are all dependent on the expression of mood as a constitutive element of the composition and aesthetic disclosure of a cinematic world. Making something beautiful, arresting, or memorable makes it meaningful, shaping how much we care about and thus how we habitually respond to the world. Mood can make the world – including salient elements and aspects of it – matter to us in ways that might ordinarily remain “backgrounded” in favour of more cognitively-driven instrumental relationships with things and others. The selection of elements and manner of composition of a cinematic world thus takes on implicit ethical significance as shaping and orienting our responses to narrative film.

This aspect of the mood of *Melancholia* is, I suggest, what prompted a number of critics to interpret the film as having an ethical dimension pertaining to the threat of ecological and environment destruction figured through the “unthinkable” scenario of world destruction. We might consider here Rupert Read's therapeutic, personal-philosophical interpretation of the film as an existential experiment in traversing mortality in order to affirm existence in an immanent manner.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on Wittgenstein's conception of a therapeutic philosophy, Read elaborates his reading of the film as inducting viewers upon an experientially rich learning arc that traverses Justine's path from melancholy depression to authentic life-affirmation in the face of mortality, finitude, and the threat of world-annihilation. Read emphasises, moreover, the profoundly rich depiction of melancholia (or depression), emphasising both its realism and plausibility; but he also acknowledges and passionately defends the ethical-allegorical dimension of the film as depicting the cultural-societal state of denial that many Western societies display in the face of catastrophic, world-threatening, environmental danger (catastrophic climate change that threatens future generations).

This stands in sharp contrast to Steven Shaviro's reading of the romanticist elements of *Melancholia* as evoking an anti-capitalist critique of the “closed” world of Western wealth, power, and privilege (emphasising the viewer's supposed pleasure in seeing the film's presentation of the affluent but isolated world of

<sup>23</sup> Read, “An Allegory of a ‘Therapeutic’ Reading of a Film: of MELANCHOLIA.”



the “One Percent” being utterly destroyed).<sup>24</sup> Shaviro’s claim seems to be based on the idea of a parallel between apocalyptic “end of the world” scenarios and the “end of capitalism” as something that remains beyond our cognitive-imaginative frameworks. Such a catastrophic “loss of world” can only be evoked indirectly, or allegorically, as evident, for example, in apocalyptic disaster movies such as *Melancholia* (and presumably numerous others), signalling that the “One Percent’s” refusal to forego their wealth and conspicuous consumption can only end in the utter destruction of our world.<sup>25</sup>

While sympathetic to Shaviro’s claims concerning the film’s critical stance towards the “One Percent,” Read examines more closely the relationship between Justine’s depression, Claire’s well-meaning but ineffectual attempts to respond to the imminent catastrophe, and the ethical dimension of the film as enacting an experiential shift in viewers that traverses depression, evokes the thought of world-destruction, but also guides us towards an ethos of life-affirmation. Indeed, for Read, the film’s ethical significance ought to be recognised more widely: its exploration of how an acceptance of finitude opens up an existential authenticity, an implicit demand to take responsibility for our collective future (or otherwise) on this fragile, threatened planet. In this respect, Read offers a persuasive interpretation of *Melancholia*, one that captures important aesthetic and dramatic elements on the film, not only as a study in melancholia and existential authenticity, but as an exercise in environmental ethics and eco-aesthetics with a subtle political orientation – the fragile possibility of a “community to come” (Agamben) figured in the film’s devastating final image of Justine, Claire, and young Leo, comforting one another in their makeshift tepee, as the planet *Melancholia* hurtles into the earth, annihilating everything in its path. What is striking in this “ecological” reading of the film, moreover, is the manner in which the cinematic mood of existential care for a world under threat of extinction imbues this metaphysical disaster movie cum domestic melodrama with an ethical urgency and moral power. The sublime images of a carefully ordered world under threat, the romantic-melancholy evocation of nature and the fragil-

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<sup>24</sup> Steven Shaviro, “MELANCHOLIA, or, The Romantic Anti-Sublime,” *Sequence*, 1.1, 2012. (eBook)

<sup>25</sup> The rather dubious “argument” seems to be that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism; ergo, films depicting the end of the world are really allegories of the end of capitalism! A suggestive parallel, however, is quite different from a relationship of implication.

ity of human life, and the psychologically and affectively moving depiction of the two sisters striving to cope with the threat of world-destruction all contribute to a profound sense of concern over the finitude of life on this planet, threatened by destruction thanks to forces beyond our control. It is in this sense that Slavoj Žižek described *Melancholia* as staging the thought of “world-sacrifice” as an aesthetic spectacle, one that “traverses the fantasy” of world-destruction but without the reassuring narrative perspective of a vantage point from which we might contemplate our own demise.<sup>26</sup>

All three ethical dimensions of mood work throughout von Trier’s *Melancholia*: the subjective phenomenological experience of “what it is like” to experience depression; the moral-psychological aspect of soliciting sympathy/empathy for Justine’s perspective and experience as a melancholic (also that of her sister, Claire, a “normal” individual shown trying to cope with the reality of imminent death); but it also highlights the third existential-ontological dimension of mood as showing what matters to us, how life itself on the planet is fragile, flawed, and finite. Despite von Trier’s reputation as a cynical manipulator and the film’s critics describing it as a stylised exercise in nihilism, *Melancholia* reveals, on the contrary, the profoundly ethical dimensions of our aesthetic experience of cinematic moods.

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<sup>26</sup> Slavoj Žižek discusses the fantasy situation of being in a position to contemplate our own death or absence from the earth. Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, Verso Books, London 2012, p. 273 ff.



Knox Peden\*

## Cube-Shaped Planet

This essay looks at a set of recent and not-so-recent works of fiction and criticism in order to develop some claims about the status of intention, and more specifically how one goes about representing and interpreting a phenomenon like intention, in the age of the so-called Anthropocene. “So-called” here is not meant to signal cynicism, and certainly not climate-change skepticism. My concern is to explore the kinds of desires involved in rethinking the world as no longer divided between spheres of causes and reasons, which is to say divided between events that are natural in the sense that they are ultimately explicable as instances of natural laws, and events that are actions, i.e. that can only be explained by appeals to some kind of agential motivation that is not beholden to predictive schemata. One of the most striking aspects of the Anthropocene’s function in humanities scholarship today is the equivocation over its implications for thinking through this division. In other words, there is no clarity, much less agreement, on whether our behaviour is finally becoming thoroughly naturalized, amenable to the same kind of scientific investigation as physical phenomena, or instead whether nature is being reenchanting with a kind of purposiveness that is continuous with, rather than contrastable to, the kind of purposiveness that is an explanatory element in human action.

The treatment of this division as a problem has been central to philosophy from Kant to Davidson, which makes the present confusion all the more glaring. Yet sometimes when our ideas are incoherent it takes a certain figural representation of that incoherence to make it discernible. Such at any rate is the motivating idea behind what follows.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was conceived during John Attridge’s visit to the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University in the southern winter of 2016 and it bears the stamp of my conversations with him. Other intellectual debts are clear from the authors cited and discussed. A final debt must be repaid to Sigi Jöttkandt for her invitation to contribute to this journal issue and to participate in the RPE2 conference that she hosted in Sydney in 2015, which provided the backdrop for much of my thinking here.

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## Rips That Can't Occur

About midway through the middle section of Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), Kit Moresby realizes that her husband Port is likely going to die very soon. The scene takes place on a bus rumbling through the Sahara at night. The story to this point has shuttled between existential voyage and domestic melodrama. Kit and Port have each had their indiscretions, Port in an arranged encounter with an unknown woman in the desert night, Kit on an overnight train with their travelling companion and fellow American, George Tunner. With death now on the agenda, the natural world begins to insist in a new and peculiar way. Port's teeth chatter as he slips into delirious sleep. Kit becomes pensive in the narrator's account:

She looked out at the windswept darkness. The new moon had slipped behind the earth's sharp edge. Here in the desert, even more than in the sea, she had the impression that she was on top of a great table, that the horizon was the brink of space. She imagined a cube-shaped planet somewhere above the earth, between it and the moon, to which somehow they had been transported. The light would be hard and unreal as it was here, the air would be of the same taut dryness, the contours of the landscape would lack the comforting terrestrial curves, just as they did all through this vast region. And the silence would be of the ultimate degree, leaving room only for the sound of the air as it moved past (143).

Walter Benjamin writes somewhere that the future world dreamed of in the nineteenth century will be exactly the same as this one, except different. For Kit Moresby, the dream threatens to become nightmare. Everything on the cube-shaped planet is exactly as it is here on this planet. The only difference is the shape of the planet itself. But the puzzle of this passage is that the cubic shape is what's discerned here in the real world (of the book, that is). The passage begins as description of Kit's impressions of what she sees before her. It then shifts to the conditional: "the light would be hard," the air would be dry, "the landscape would lack the comforting terrestrial curves." But here's the concern: the landscape *does* lack the comforting terrestrial curves. It's that actual vision of the brink – the sharp edge – that sets her on this reverie. The world as it appears geometrically is not the world as it is actually. But which one is real? What is the world that Kit lives in? This turns out to be one of the central questions of the book.

The counterintuitive idea that reality is ephemeral despite the solidity of appearance is figured in the title of the novel, an image that is deployed as well when Port finally succumbs to the typhoid fever that has overtaken him: “A black star appears, a point of darkness in the night sky’s clarity. Point of darkness and gateway to repose. Reach out, pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose” (188). The figure evokes an earlier moment in the book when Kit remembers being told that the sky hides the night, that it shelters a person from horror. The other side is a “giant maw.” Fixing the “solid emptiness” before her provokes anguish. “At any moment the rip can occur.”

But it can’t, of course, because there’s nothing to rip. In this instance, what is figured as real cannot actually be real. To be sure, the sky does shelter us from the inhospitable nature of outer space. Atmosphere is a kind of container. It nevertheless dissipates on approach. There is nothing to rip, nothing to pierce. One would say that the sky itself evaporates were it not the case that the sky is the milieu in which evaporation takes place.

The psychological themes of the book are all perfectly recognizable: fear of dissolution, unstable identity, death as transformation. Bowles’s novel bridges the genres of colonial adventurism and existentialism, not unlike André Malraux’s work in the interwar years.<sup>2</sup> It is redolent of romantic ennui filtered through a modernist conception of prose, and thus of a piece with much mid-twentieth century fiction. Though celebrated, *The Sheltering Sky* has also been presented as a thoroughly middlebrow work of art, a specimen of avant-gardism marketed to masses seeking to ingratiate themselves in the upper cultural echelons of post-war boom times.<sup>3</sup> The genre elements of Bowles’s novel are emblematic. But they are less interesting than the series of figures that orient its governing metaphor, the one expressed in the title. Appearance appears solid – dependable, a shelter. Reality is unreal, unreliable. The important point is that the reality of appearance is not to be confused with the reality of what appears. The idea that the earth is a cube is an idea that can only be represented in fiction, which is to say *as* fiction. This is the case because the earth is not a cube. Yet the

<sup>2</sup> Compare Leslie Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 2014, chapters 1 & 2.

<sup>3</sup> Evan Brier, “Constructing the Postwar Art Novel: Paul Bowles, James Laughlin, and the Making of *The Sheltering Sky*,” *PMLA*, 21 (1/2006), pp. 186-199.

representation of the earth as cubic exercises a kind of grip on the imagination because it accords precisely with the phenomenological experience of the world as flat, as fundamentally divided between earth and sky. Why should it be hard to believe the world is flat? After all, it looks flat.

The figure of division is spatialized in myriad ways in Bowles's novel. But it is equally temporal in the conflict that runs through the book between a cyclical conception of time and a linear one. Cyclical time is infinite within a bound loop; linear time is a kind of "bad infinity," inexorable in its form. Bowles concentrates this duality into singular images. "The limpid, burning sky each morning when she looked out the window from where she lay, repeated identically day after day, was part of an apparatus functioning without any relationship to her, a power that had gone on, leaving her behind" (227). The characters of the novel are constantly confronting and negotiating such divisions. "Whichever way she looked, the night's landscape suggested one thing to her: negation of movement, suspension of continuity" (181). That's two things, actually: space (movement) and time (continuity). But they're presented as one, oriented around division. One divides into two, as Mao used to say.

Divided loyalties structure the characters' sexual lives; like all of us, they are subjects of their own visions, objects in others." The concluding section of the novel – "The Sky" – opens with an epigraph from Kafka: "From a certain point onward there is no turning back. This is the point that must be reached." Kit exhausts herself in the end as a kind of pure object. She becomes, literally, an object of sexual pleasure exchanged among a band of Arab traders, with Belqassim at the helm. She herself comes to see others as interchangeable. Leaving Belqassim's home once he has lost interest in her – it hardly seems like escaping – "she realized that any creature even remotely resembling Belqassim would please her quite as much as Belqassim himself" (237). She opens herself to all that pleases her and a dissolution of identity is the predictable result. Ceasing to puzzle over omens, she embraces the fact that she has become one. No longer fearful of the inscrutable, she has become inscrutable – a cipher of feminine sexuality scripted nearly thirty years before Lacan's formalization of the same. The novel ends with her unresponsive to her name and indifferent to directions to reunite with Tunner, who waits for her in a Mediterranean hotel.

Kit dies a psychic death, Port an actual one. The author of the work lived for another fifty years, dying in 1999, and acquired a mystique as an expat living in Morocco for most of his life. Such biographical facts are especially salient in the case of *The Sheltering Sky*, given the similarities between the character Port and the “character” who is Paul Bowles. Both are New York literati types. Both are partners in marriages that deeply affect their sense of self and accomplishment. (Bowles, a failed poet and accomplished composer under the tutelage of Aaron Copeland, was apparently partly motivated to write *The Sheltering Sky* out of envy for the novelistic success of his wife, Jane.) But there is a fundamental sense in which Port and Paul are different, and not just because one is fictional. Port departs from his desire to write in a quest for transformative experience. Clues of his fate beyond the atmosphere are sketched from the opening scene, when he awakes at twilight in a North African hotel, “paralysed in the airless room.” The parable of “Tea in the Sahara,” which would later find a wider audience through Sting’s lyrics for The Police’s album *Synchronicity* (see above, re: middlebrow), also signals Port’s fate. In their quest to have tea in the Sahara, the three women die of thirst, their glasses full of sand.

Port turns away from craft and care. He wills himself passive, in a way that will find a curious echo in Kit’s decisions in the final act. He neglects to get immunized before his trip. The result is as ineluctable as the signalling is clear, especially in light of Kit’s obsession with omens recounted in the book’s first part. In this, his behaviour is the opposite of Bowles’s. Bowles received an advance for his novel from Doubleday and travelled to North Africa with Jane to research and write the book.<sup>4</sup> Once he arrived, regardless of whatever adventures occurred, he succeeded in concentrating his energy to produce a supremely controlled literary work. In other words, the tendency toward disunity that is the most fundamental subject of *The Sheltering Sky* stands in marked contrast to the unified work that the book actually is. The subject of the work is not a stand-in for the work, just as Port, whatever else he is, is not a stand-in for Bowles. The work is constituted in a contrastive division between its form and its content. One can imagine an inversion of Bowles’s work in a blathering sprawl of prose devoted to shoring up the identity of its protagonist. For an actual encounter with such work, log in to Twitter, or pick up any of the innumerable memoirs

<sup>4</sup> Doubleday rejected the manuscript he submitted, failing to recognize it as a novel. The book was eventually published with New Directions. See the discussion in *Ibid.*



and attempts at creative auto-fiction that have taken over the publishing industry in the twenty-first century.

### Implacable Forms

The middle chapter of Walter Benn Michaels's *The Beauty of Social Problem* (2015) is titled "The Experience of Meaning." The main work treated in the chapter is Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder*, first published in 2005. The book tells the story of a man who survives a traumatic head injury and receives a lucrative settlement as a result. His sense of experience impoverished, he sets to recreating his memories of his life before the accident in as exacting a detail as his skill and funds can allow. He enlists employees to build sets; memories give way to imaginings, which serve as plans for new enactments. The novel culminates in a "staged" bank robbery in which the distinction between life and art, presentation and representation, breaks down as actual bullets result in actual deaths. On the lam, the narrator escapes by hijacking a plane, which comes to occupy a holding pattern in the sky – an infinite loop. The novel ends.

In his commentary, Michaels points to the significance of this ending. The book is narrated in the first person. Nothing in the narrator's behaviour suggests he'll change his mind and let the pilot land the plane. We know the plane can't circle forever, so presumably it has to run out of fuel at some point and fall to the ground. But then how does the story get told? Who survives to tell it? How does the book get written? In Michaels's interpretation, this narrative feature is an index of the distinction between the content of the work, its subject matter, and the work itself as a formed unity. It's a reminder that *Remainder* is a representation, "but one of the distinguishing features of a representation is that you can *mean* what you can't do" (73). In this case you can mean for a plane to fly forever. This formal feature of art is inscribed in the representation itself, however. *Remainder*'s narrator is obsessed with perfection, getting everything "just right." "To want the perfect in the real," Michaels writes, "is to want the frame or the form in the world [...]; what [the re-enactor] ends up wanting is to turn his world into a place where everything counts as intended" (97-8). Art can be perfect in a way that the world can never be, which is why it is subject to criticism in a way the world can never be. You can regret the weather, but it makes no sense to criticize it. "Only in a world that's 'meant to be' one way can it count as a mistake if things turn out another way" (102).

The desire for form – to impose form on the formless, to generate something perfect from the merely given – is what distinguishes the active creation of art from the passive experience of the world as an assemblage of objects and physical causes. For Michaels, this desire stands in polar contrast to the aesthetic imperative to let matter matter that has dominated theory and artistic practice in a neoliberal age. The experience of art, however, is structured by a strange duality, as the very expression implies – because there is no way to interpret an artwork without some experience of it. You can't look at or behold a painting without seeing it. You cannot read a book without looking at it, notwithstanding Silicon Valley's efforts to develop an apparatus that sequentially flashes words before your eyes at optimal speed. The idea is that it is not up to you the spectator to impose a form (though you invariably will) but to appreciate that there is a form that has not been imposed by you and that did not spontaneously emerge from the world at large, that is not, in any uncontroversial sense of the term, natural. Whatever form there is in the artwork that distinguishes it from the world is a form that is ontologically dependent upon the actions of the artist – even if the action the artist undertook was a kind of willed passivity, an abjuration of form.

This last qualification is important because it helps us understand the ambivalence of Michaels's perspective on authors and artists like Roland Barthes and John Cage. Such individuals radicalize the desire to let matter matter but in ways that serve ultimately to accentuate the implacability of form. Barthes's *punctum* is a function of the spectator's gaze, a radically individuated form that makes a single photograph the ground for a plurality of irreducibly unique experiences. Cage radicalized the autonomy of form in modernism by taking the irreducible form of music – sound – and making it the content of the work 4'33." As with Barthes's *punctum*, each individual will experience the performance of this work differently, not just because of variations in "performances," but right down to the spatial coordinates your ears happen to occupy when a performance is underway.

Michaels's perspective is ambivalent because on the one hand such works are exemplary of bad, variously postmodern or neoliberal tendencies that suture meaning to individuated experience. But on the other hand, they do crucial theoretical work in foregrounding the issue of form. In the case of Barthes, Michaels is explicit about this. He demurs from Michael Fried's description of

Barthes's project as absorptive,<sup>5</sup> but he recognizes the dialectical centrality of Barthes work to any theorization of absorption and theatricality or any historical consideration of how that dialectic is playing itself out. In Cage's case, the inferences aren't fully cashed out by Michaels himself. If his composition is the ultimate refusal of form – the sonic equivalent of Tony Smith's unfinished New Jersey Turnpike at night – there is another way in which form insists in an overwhelming, determinant way. Wherever it is performed, whenever a recording is played, 4'33" is always the same duration. It takes precisely four minutes and thirty-three seconds. One second more or less, and it isn't Cage's work. It wasn't his design. If form is intimately related to convention – and, in the sense Michaels relies on it in recent work, it decidedly is<sup>6</sup> – then Cage foregrounds the convention of time as a matter of minutes and seconds, agreed-upon units that coordinate social interaction in the modern age. Another way to consider this is to try to imagine what 4'33" sounds like on fast-forward – chipmunk ambient?<sup>7</sup> The point is that the form of the work is ultimately inescapable, its single defining feature, the only thing that distinguishes it from mere sound, which is to say the only thing that distinguishes it from the world.

Seconds, minutes, and hours are conventional units, forms for enclosing and forging temporally discrete unities. But is time itself? It seems unlikely. Irrespective of the shape and size of cosmic entities and the gravitational forces they exert, it seems that something like duration is a metaphysical property of the universe we happen to live in. The division between earth and sky is not. It is in no metaphysically necessary way "meant to be." It is just how matter happens to be in this corner of the multiverse.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2008, chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> In this and other respects, the attention Michaels pays to form in his recent work revises or at least modifies the positions on conventionalism in the "Against Theory" articles he co-authored with Steven Knapp. See W.J.T. Mitchell, ed. *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Yet another way to make the point: The Magnetic Fields include a cover of Cage's 4'33" on their dual album *The Wayward Bus/Distant Plastic Trees*, and they've also been known to play it live as an encore. A final way: set your iPhone timer (or any timer) for 4:33 and press play. You may have just listened to John Cage's 4'33". If you didn't mean to listen to it, that is, if you didn't undertake actions with the aim of listening to Cage's composition, then you haven't listened to Cage's composition.

## Denaturation and Truth

The ingenuity of Bowles's work in *The Sheltering Sky* is to take our phenomenological experience of the world and to accentuate its representational quality by denaturalizing it. It's important to understand why this aesthetic effort is significant. Central to phenomenological philosophy from Husserl onwards has been the tendency to ask us to suspend the natural attitude, which objectifies the world, and to attend instead to the modes of appearance that our perceptual being more fundamentally comprises. But the endgame of phenomenology is to invert the premises. It turns out, of course, that the natural attitude is not natural at all, but a product of years of cultural accretion, conventions and ways of seeing that have accrued for contingent reasons and that now shape our vision of the world in a fundamental way. The more natural attitude – the one closer to nature, to being itself – is one that prioritizes the phenomenon, the appearance. This is why Merleau-Ponty finds more authenticity in a vision of the Sun as nearby, rather than an object of astronomical measurement.<sup>8</sup> We still say sunrise and sunset even though we know the terms are wrong. We don't say earthturn 1 and earthturn 2.

When Kit attends to the world she feels drawn to the Earth's sharp edge. Her and Port's efforts toward relieving themselves of responsibility, of purposefully disavowing their capacity for purposiveness, do not result in encounters with a more primordial or authentic nature. Port thinks he's going to have a transformative experience in the desert. Instead, it's a typical tourist shakedown. He's led into the night, into a tent, by a pimp he's met in town, who assures him repeatedly that he's not being set up for a scene in which cash payment will be expected. A nameless woman tells him a beguiling tale. Congress ensues. In the morning, his wallet has been stolen and the woman is gone. The struggles with the mother and son team known as the Lyles give the book its only real semblance of plot. This plot is a comedy of mistaken identities and hotel antics. The Lyles are con artists. They steal Port's passport. Bowles's humour insists. Loss of identity isn't about the limits of embodied experience; it's about being unable to authenticate yourself before colonial authorities. It's about being able to justify – or not – just what the hell you are doing here.

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. James M. Edie, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL 1964, pp. 12-27.

Throughout their descents, Kit and Port cling to their representations, their perceptual needs, foregrounding nature not as it is but as they imagine it to be. At every turn, whenever they break through – piercing, rupture, such figures abound – they don't encounter unformed nature. They encounter capitalism. We know they are in Africa because Europe is marred by recent conflict; the war is too present still. They need to get further afield if there's any chance of escaping modern trappings and conventions. But the drive toward nature only serves to accentuate the primacy of conventions, forms of relation that are indifferent to the natures of the relata. There is nothing to know; there is no there there, to ape Gertrude Stein. There is no untouched nature, no beyond. There is finitude and exchange. Port loses his passport and dies. Kit still has hers – she remains passed from one to another – but is unresponsive to her name. Death or capitalism. These are the options faced by the protagonists of Bowles's work. It is yet another fundamental division figured in its pages.

In "The Freudian Thing," Lacan writes:

A truth, it must be said, is not easy to recognize once it has been received. Not that there aren't any established truths, but they are so easily confused with the reality that surrounds them that no other artifice was for a long time found to distinguish them from it than to mark them with the sign of the spirit and, in order to pay them homage, to regard them as having come from another world (408/330).

Truth presents itself as otherworldly but such presentation is false. The effort to make it otherworldly is a consequence of the desire to endow it with significance, to weight it with a meaning that the surrounding reality alone does not or cannot bear. When Kit sees the earth's sharp edge she imagines herself transported to a cubic planet, knowing full well that that the reality she imagines is this planet. There is only one scene of Kit and Port's life together beyond the diegetic parameters of the novel. It begins oddly, in that the narrator presents it as a memory that Kit has forgotten. But Port's words to her that "August afternoon only a little more than a year ago" are recounted in direct quotation:

"Death is always on the way, but the fact that you don't know when it will arrive seems to take from the finiteness of life. It's that terrible precision that we hate so much. But because we don't know, we get to think of life as an inexhaustible well. Yet everything happens only a certain number of times, and a very small number,

really. How many more times will you remember a certain afternoon of your childhood, some afternoon that's so deeply a part of your being that you can't even conceive of your life without it? Perhaps four or five times more. Perhaps not even. How many more times will you watch the full moon rise? Perhaps twenty. And yet it all seems so limitless" (190).

The narrator then continues: "She had not listened at the time because the idea had depressed her; now if she had called it to mind it would have seemed beside the point. She was incapable now of thinking about death, and since death was there beside her, she thought of nothing at all" (190).

When nature is present, it requires no representation. Death is not figured because death is there. This memory of Port is one that she has forgotten. And yet it is recounted. Like *Remainder's* narrator in flight on an infinite loop, this is something that could only happen in fiction. *Remainder's* narrator is also a character in the work. *The Sheltering Sky's* narrator is not. The narrator is omniscient, but coy. Again, this is the only scene of Kit and Port's life outside the space of the novel or the story that is recounted. In any event, Bowles, in writing this scene, figures forth an impossible scene. He insists on the importance for Kit of a memory that she consciously disavows – of a truth that she did not want to hear at the time and that, if she had heard it, she would not want to recall now.

### Nature and Negligence

Returning to France in 1774 after his visit to the Hermitage in Russia, Denis Diderot discovered Christian Ludwig Hagedorn's *Betrachtungen über die Malerei* (*Reflections on Painting*). Combined, the trip and the work inspired him to write some "Isolated Reflections on Painting." The derivative nature of Diderot's reflections is suggestive, not least because the derivative relation between art and nature is a leitmotif of these jottings. A cardinal sin in Diderot's view, as that of any critic, is to be negligent in one's work as an artist. But the representation of negligence – in the sense of heedlessness or *oubli de soi* – is a supreme technical accomplishment.<sup>9</sup> "Negligence in a composition is like a young woman in her morning *déshabillé*; in a minute, fully dressed, she will have spoiled everything"

<sup>9</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980, esp. 13, 55-70, 75.

(338). But the phenomenon is unique to the extent that it can only occur in art, not nature itself:

Why do we never see negligence in nature? Because, whatever object she presents to our gaze, at whatever distance it is placed, from whatever angle it is seen, it is as it must be, the result of causes whose effects it has experienced (338).

Nature is the domain of cause and effect, codified as so many natural laws. To intervene in nature is in some way to break with it, to impose form on it, to disrupt what would otherwise be a law-like regularity. But in so far as nature insists, it is not justifiable. It is not criticisable. Earlier I deployed the example of the weather, suggesting we can regret it, but we can't really criticize it. Until recent decades, perhaps even just this decade, the truth of this example would have been plainly evident, even if it required a moment's reflection. It was certainly evident to Diderot. But such is not the case today, when the discourse of the Anthropocene is ascendant, the geological denomination for the epoch of human-induced climate change.

Among other things, crucial to the discourse of the Anthropocene is the desire, if not the need, to see the world as *made*, not as something that simply is. To name the motivations behind such a discourse a "desire" is not to challenge the empirical claims that support the truth value of statements about human-induced climate change. It is instead to highlight the ontological implications of such a breakdown between actor and environment. Here as in other respects *The Sheltering Sky* is remarkably prescient because in its pages all that appears natural is recast as figured. Consider the comfort Kit feels when she spots "once more the thin pencilled border between earth and sky" (217). Everywhere she looks she sees craft in nature. In this case she sees a pencilled line, a figure drawn for her gaze. The images evoke Kant's notions of a purposiveness in nature that must be presupposed, but in no way known or verified, in order for aesthetic judgment to take place. But a paradox arises. If everything in nature is always just as it ought to be, what happens to the force of the ought in this case? If something is ontologically as it always ought to be, then there is never a case in which it is criticisable, because there is no deviation from a norm. But what is a norm that literally cannot be deviated from if not a natural law rather than a moral one?

Diderot was attuned to this problem as well. “Everything that has been said about elliptical, circular, serpentine and undulating lines is absurd. Every part of the body has its line of beauty, and the line of the eye is not the line of the knee” (340). If every part has its unique way of being beautiful, then no part is perverse – there is no deviation. But what happens to the potential for a misfire in this case? How can one do something wrong? Can we honestly judge Port and Kit for their behaviour in *The Sheltering Sky*? Bowles himself signals the difficulties in resolving such a question: “It was so long since she had canalized her thoughts by speaking aloud, and she had grown accustomed to acting without the consciousness of being in the act. She did only the things she found herself already doing” (222-23). Previously, Kit’s speech had been a mode of thought, interiority actualized in speaking aloud. Now, intention is consciously disavowed, which is to say intentionally foresworn. *She did only the things she found herself already doing.*

This is the inverse – *l’envers*; the other side – of the ethic exuded by *Remainder*’s narrator. Whereas he seeks to imbue all events with the intention that would make them actions, Kit seeks to recast all actions as mere events. All would-be acts – the things she might purposively do – were those things that she already happened to be doing. In such a scene, it is impossible to be negligent, not least because the aim is to *appear* negligent. Kit has effectively naturalized herself. She is “the result of causes whose effects [she] has experienced.” But *The Sheltering Sky* is not a scene of nature; it is a work of art. And it is one that consciously, purposively exposes its protagonists to judgment. In this it bears comparison with Jacques Rancière’s discussion of “Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed,” to wit: “she is sentenced as a bad artist, who handles in the wrong way the equivalence of art and nonart” (240). Rancière’s point is to signal the contrast between the “subject of desire,” which is the way of a character in a plot, with the “fabric of an impersonal sensory life – which is the way of the artist” (244). Flaubert subtracts himself from the work, and puts himself in a position to judge Emma as a result. In this, he is the polar opposite of Proust. But we should contrast this account of Flaubert with the discussion of *The Red and the Black* in Rancière’s *Aisthesis*, where the author Stendhal is absented from the analysis. “At the decisive moment,” Rancière writes, “Julien acts without choosing: he subtracts himself from the universe where one must always choose, always calculate the consequences of these choices, always copy the right models of political, military, or romantic strategy” (51). For Rancière, such subtraction is intimately related to freedom and not least the freedom embodied in what he terms “the aesthetic regime of



art.” In this regime “no situation, no subject is ‘preferable’. Everything can be interesting, it can all happen to anyone.”

Julien’s freedom is Kit and Port’s finitude. To arrive in a situation in which nothing is preferable is to arrive at a scene in which any man can deliver the same experience as Belqassim can. To act without choosing is, for Rancière, to enjoy a suspension of natural causality. But it is not to enter a Kantian space of freedom, which remains beholden to moral law. Such a space remains governed by laws that can be broken, laws that are laws precisely to the extent that one can default on them. It is instead to enter a space where no law exists, either as determination or as moral injunction. Rancière’s account of the aesthetic regime of art is by turns diagnostic and ambivalent. But the main aim of his investigations is to concentrate our focus on a place that quite literally does not exist, that is utopian in the pure sense, constructed, the inexistent space of sensuous representation that occurs not in the world but in the aesthetic regime of art. Here Rancière’s motivations become more discernible. To speak of Stendhal in the account of “Plebeian Heaven” would be to speak not of the space figured beyond the sheltering sky – which is, in many respects, the subject of his effort in *Aisthesis* – but the world below.

Rancière elevates idleness and play. What gives *The Sheltering Sky* its contrastive moral seriousness is also what gives it its political meaning. More than a plot device, the counter-utopianism that lies at the heart of the depiction of Port and Kit and their complementary fates is intimately related to the book’s formal affirmation of craft, intention, and purposiveness against the desire for the dissolution of these properties in the equivalences that obtain within natural causality and, for Rancière, between natural causality and its imagined absence. The final indicator here is Bowles’s deployment of a convention that had already become quaint if not forced by 1949 – he signs the book with the place of its composition. The last words of the novel are set apart from the main text and indented: “Bab el Hadid, Fez.” Kit and Port are not in North Africa. But he is.

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## Representation and Intelligibility

Bowles’s aesthetic effort gives us a model of how to think the Anthropocene not as a problem demanding a solution but as a problem that is not yet intelligible as a problem. With detours, this essay has focused on a novel, and its main concern has been to show the ingenuity required to represent the desire to have

done with desire, to recast the world as a space exhausted solely by mere events rather than comprising events *and* actions (with criticisable consequences) as a related but somehow distinct class of events. Its agenda has been shamelessly “meta-.” Many are rightly concerned to think through the technical scientific and policy challenges of climate change. But the analogy I’ve sought to exploit reads Bowles’s formal relation to his own fiction, which is to say the totality of his representational and aesthetic choices, as harbouring insights not so much for how we think the ontological dilemmas of the Anthropocene – as if such a possibility were plausible – but for how we represent these dilemmas to ourselves *as dilemmas*. This is what I mean when I describe climate change as a problem that is not yet intelligible as a problem. Representation is a *sine qua non* of intelligibility. And here the irony insists. By Bowles’s own account, the final third of *The Sheltering Sky* was written on hashish in an attempt at something like automatic writing. But the result that stands before us in each printing of the book is not an ephemeral experience, but a consequence of formal determinations. Every line, each word, remains obdurately *on purpose*.

The final point to make about Paul Bowles’s relationship to his novel is to emphasize the virtues of artistic subtraction, in the sense that Bowles subtracts himself from the novel in a way analogous to Flaubert. Where McCarthy signals his theoretical commitment to minimal materialism from the opening line of *Remainder* – “very little, almost nothing;” a bald allusion to his conspirator Simon Critchley’s work on Levinas with that title – Bowles and Flaubert construct spaces in which actors can be judged precisely because the space in which they exist cannot. As works of art, such novels are perfect, in that they are exquisitely formed unities. They are, as works, just as they are meant to be. But when the characters in the works think they have finally assimilated themselves to a world as it actually is “in reality” rather than a world as it might have been or is meant to be, we see clearly the error of their ways. The complications that ensue when our desires confront a world indifferent to them have not become clearer in the age of Anthropocene. They have become more recalcitrant than ever.

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Justin Clemens\*

## Syllable as Syntax: Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*

“To his lot fell the heavy duty of thinking out afresh the whole poetic problem, of envisaging the poet’s task in its rarest form, of refining the poet’s medium till it should be adequate to that task. His was the exceptional destiny to conceive the perfect work, to labour at it for more than twenty years in the interval of ungrateful drudgery and to die, exhausted by the tension of those years, when freedom at last had come.” – Christopher Brennan<sup>1</sup>

*Un Coup de dés* is one of the masterworks of modern literature, and a kind of *summa* of Stéphane Mallarmé’s lifework. It could not have been better served by writers and thinkers: on the one hand, it immediately transformed the field for working poets as different as Paul Valéry and Christopher Brennan, as for so many more thereafter; on the other, a strong lineage of European philosophy registered the poem as an event for thought, encompassing Maurice Blanchot, J.-P. Sartre, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, J.-C. Milner, Quentin Meillassoux, and many others.<sup>2</sup> Confronted by this sequence of commentaries by great poets and philosophers, a contemporary reader could be forgiven for experiencing the torment of a methodological and intellectual impasse. How could one add to this sequence of readings except as a supernumerary number that could always be another? Yet how could one also not feel that the sequence itself demands another numbering or enu-

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<sup>1</sup> C. Brennan, *Christopher Brennan*, ed. T. Sturm, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia 1984, pp. 206-7.

<sup>2</sup> See, inter alia, J.-P. Sartre, *Mallarmé, or the Poet of Nothingness*, University Park, Penn State University, University Park 1988; M. Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, trans. C. Mandell, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1995; J. Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. D. Attridge, Routledge, New York 1992; J. Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. S. Corcoran, Continuum, London 2011; A. Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, Continuum, London 2005; Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, Second Edition, intro. W. Godzich, Methuen, London 1983; J.-C. Milner, *Constats*, Gallimard, Paris 2002; Q. Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, trans. R. Mackay, Urbanomic, Falmouth 2012.

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meration of the operations of the poem? Even more tormentingly, does not this double address itself mimic the structure of the limit as delivered by Mallarmé himself: the spontaneous eruption of the crowd of history, to which one cannot add except by subtracting oneself, as per the disappearance of the author, the purification of the verse, the becoming-abyssal of content? With these orienting reservations in mind, this article will accordingly take the route of a speculative reconstruction of a (one) sequence of thought that *may* have taken place for *Un Coup de dés* to become what it is, along the lines of the now-familiar, even banal paradox that a *dispositif* can only find its own conditions of possibility following the act that retrospectively creates those very conditions.

As all its inheritors testify, the poem poses the question *what is a poem?* in and as a poem itself, according to the most strenuous conceptual criteria. As Martin Heidegger announces regarding his own adherence to certain poems of Friedrich Hölderlin: “I did not choose Hölderlin because his work, as one among many, realizes the universal essence of poetry, but rather because Hölderlin’s poetry is sustained by his whole poetic mission: to make poems solely about the essence of poetry. Hölderlin is for us in a preeminent sense *the poet’s poet*. And for that reason he forces a decision upon us.”<sup>3</sup> If Heidegger himself did not and could not himself say the same of Mallarmé, there is no question that this remark can also serve as an orientation to the French aesthete: a poet’s poet who forces a decision upon us.

Yet the question concerning the “meaning of Mallarmé” cannot simply, *pace* Heidegger, be posed according to the (Romantic) problematic of language, nation and people à la Hölderlin. Whereas Heidegger was consumed – especially in the 1930s-40s, for all the well-known reasons – with trying to think-through the problem of the truth of historicity of the German people according to the dictates of the work of art – Mallarmé’s moment is precisely not a nationalist one. Approximately a decade ago, Slavoj Žižek, launching a new *Lacan Dictionary* in Melbourne, remarked that Australia was precisely the right distance from Paris to be able to get Lacan right. The same goes, *a fortiori*, for Mallarmé. In a first moment, then, I wish to mark the importance of Australia as a poetic site for the interpretation of Mallarmé – at once poetic, critical and parodic – from

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<sup>3</sup> M. Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, trans. K. Hoeller, Humanity, New York 2000, p. 52.

Christopher Brennan, through Gardner Davies and A.D. Hope, to Chris Edwards and Rosemary Lloyd, David Brooks, John Hawke, and now Christian Gelder and Robert Boncardo.<sup>4</sup> I don't make this point for merely nationalist reasons, not least given that I have already doubted the putative "nationalism" of Mallarmé; on the contrary, as I will try to show, it rather is for odd poetic reasons. Part of the point will be that Mallarmé ushers in a new modality of possibility for a poetry no longer tied to its empirical or linguistic site; in doing so, however, his work has recourse to a kind of sibyllic syllabary that at once mimes and reverses the linguistic labours of European colonisation.

This aspect of Mallarméan poetics can be confirmed by a number of indicators, not only along the chains of interpretation and influence I have already noted, but in the symptoms constituted by the points-of-antagonism between the express statements of the most significant critics themselves. We can see this in Rancière speaking of Mallarmé's "types" as correlated with the deracinated industrial design of Peter Behrens; in Friedrich Kittler, noting that Mallarmé's "instant insight," under new media pressure, that literature was nothing but the deployment of letters; or J.-C. Milner's analyses that show how modern science renders all human experience patently imaginary.<sup>5</sup> But it is also to be found in Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*, regarding Mallarmé's development of the relations between "the crowd" and poetic negation, or in Meillassoux's doctrines regarding the situated problem for Mallarmé of the failure of Greek, Catholic and Wagnerian liturgy.<sup>6</sup> To extend Robert Boncardo's analyses here, it was not only great 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosophers who found Mallarmé exemplary of

<sup>4</sup> See, inter alia, C. Brennan, *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope & Pocket Musicopoematographoscope*, ed. A. Clark, Hale and Iremonger, Erskineville 1981; G. Davies, *Mallarmé and le drame solaire* J. Corti, Paris 1959; R. Lloyd, *Mallarmé: The Poet and his Circle*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1999; C. Edwards, *A Fluke*, Monogene and Jacket, Sydney 2005; D. Brooks, *The Sons of Clovis: Ern Malley, Adore Floupette, and a secret history of Australian Poetry*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane 2011; J. Hawke, *Australian Literature and the Symbolist Movement*, University of Wollongong Press, Wollongong 2009; C. Gelder and R. Boncardo (eds.), *Mallarmé: Rancière, Milner, Badiou*, Rowman and Littlefield, London 2017.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. G. Elliott, Verso, London 2007; F. Kittler, *Optical Media*, trans. A. Enns, Polity, Cambridge 2010; J.-C. Milner, *L'Oeuvre claire: Lacan, la science, la philosophie*, Seuil, Paris 1995.

<sup>6</sup> See A. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. B. Bosteels, Continuum, London 2009; Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, *passim*.

the bond between literature and politics, caught between the admirable intransigence of his high art and its apparent concomitant rejection of poetry as the voice of the people.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, integral to this interpretative history is the constant sequence of philosophical inversions of the sense of Mallarmé. For Sartre, Mallarmé exemplifies a kind of complicit hermeticism; for Pierre Macherey, Octavio Paz and Rancière, Mallarmé is not at all hermetic, but a vital public artist; for Meillassoux, again, Mallarmé is entirely hermetic but not according to any political compromise.<sup>8</sup> Or, to take a different track through the tangled thickets: Derrida shows Mallarmé's excesses vis-à-vis metaphysics; whereas Pierre Campion sees Mallarmé attempting to make philosophy from literature, to discern a Sense in Mallarmé; and André Stanguennec sees the unleashing of a new ethics of poetry.<sup>9</sup>

I will add to this sequence in turn, by pointing to a certain peculiarity regarding Mallarmé's mission to purify verse, along the lines of writing a-poem-that-simultaneously-embodies-and-exposes-the-essence-of-poetry.<sup>10</sup> To accomplish such a poem would be to produce pure poetry, that is, nothing but poetry itself, *poetry itself as a (one) poem*. But "to not to be anything else" means that such a poem must bear the mark of its own singularity within itself. Such a poem by definition cannot work like anything else. Such a poem cannot pose the question of its essence *philosophically*, for instance, that is, *propositionally* or *hypothetically*. Such a poem would have resolve the question it poses *as itself* – *actually*. But, actually, what can *actually* then mean? At the very least, it must mean that the

<sup>7</sup> See R. Boncardo, *Appropriations politiques de l'oeuvre de Stéphane Mallarmé*, unpublished PhD thesis, Université d'Aix Marseille and University of Sydney, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to those texts already cited, see P. Macherey, "The Mallarmé of Alain Badiou" in: G. Riera (ed.), *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*, SUNY, Albany 2005, pp. 109-115; O. Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare*, Arcade Books, New York 1990.

<sup>9</sup> See P. Campion, *Mallarmé: Poésie et philosophie*, PUF, Paris 1994; A. Stanguennec, *Mallarmé et l'éthique de la poésie*, Vrin, Paris 1992.

<sup>10</sup> This is my own rephrasing of what Bertrand Marchal famously calls *La Religion de Mallarmé*, José Corti, Paris 1988, or what other commentators have parsed as, for example, "The hymn of spiritual hearts," Rancière, *Mallarmé*, pp. 24-42 or Meillassoux, pp. 106-113, where he remarks: "Thus the central stakes of Mallarméan poetry – at least from 1895, the year of the first publication of "Catholicism" – become those of its capacity or otherwise to produce a diffusion of the divine, by way of the convocation of a human Drama, at once real and of universal significance," p. 112.

discourse of poetry – or the poem – on its own being, on being, cannot be separated from its own existence. Perhaps this doesn't mean that being and existence would have to be one and the same for such a poem, but it does raise the question as to whether there can be any ontic-ontological difference for such a poem. For such a poem would be such a poem only insofar as its existence be too its being.

Yet this immediately raises questions about such a poem's identity and unity, its apparition-value. For how can being = existence = identity = unity = recognizable-as? Under such a description, if a poem is recognizable *as* a poem, then it isn't a poem; it would merely have the *form* of a poem. But a poem cannot be reducible to its form. Not only because poetry has historically shown that it can harbour all forms, including the anti- or zero-degree form of the prose poem, itself a crucial interest of Mallarmé's – therefore rendering any *particular* form a compromise of the pure poem – but because a poem cannot in principle be reducible to its form. No formal, technical, prosodic device, be it meter, rhythm, sense, or enjambment can serve such an existential role. Nor, of course, can a pure poem be reduced to its content; again, poetry self-evidently has no particular content, even if we wanted to say its proper content is nothing. Neither form nor content, then. Not in general, nor in particular. Any pure poem would be historically situated by its particular form, thereby immediately compromising its purity. No poem can be recognizable as a poem if it is to be a pure poem. We may now also consider the preposterous converse of this proposition: not everything that is not recognizable as a poem is potentially a poem.

To be a poem not recognizable as a poem but nevertheless a poem, in fact, the/a pure poem, such a poem would still have to detain something to distinguish it from all those other things not recognizable as poems. It would have to inscribe internally and integrally a peculiar mark – perhaps itself unrecognisable – of its own pure poetryness. Or, in another vocabulary, it couldn't have any of the predicates of a poem, nor could it simply share the absence of such predicates. One possible solution would be that what gives a poem its identity as a pure poem would be that it present itself as positively not-having the predicates that would make it a poem, in a form of Kantian infinite judgement. This would be a paradoxical form of self-nomination as neither non-nomination nor non-non-nomination, a mark of the suspension of the poem above the abyss of itself. The pure poem would name itself by not-naming and not-not-naming itself with a single stroke. This seems like a difficult trick to pull off. Yet can it be done?



Throughout his work, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has regularly foregrounded the decisive agency of *deixis* in and for philosophy. In *Language and Death*, Agamben writes that “*the problem of being – the supreme metaphysical problem – emerges from the very beginning as inseparable from the problem of the significance of the demonstrative pronoun, and for this reason it is always already connected with the field of indication.*”<sup>11</sup> The demonstrative pronoun is today part of the grammatical study of *deixis*.<sup>12</sup> Deictics are fundamental to all natural languages. Agamben: “every language has at its disposal a series of signs (which linguistics call [sic.] ‘shifters’ or indicators of enunciation, among which, for example, there are the pronouns ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘this,’ and the adverbs ‘here,’ ‘now,’ etc.) destined to allow the individual to appropriate language in order to use it.”<sup>13</sup> Shifters have a number of peculiar properties: although they are integral to the *use* of every language, they have *no meaning* in themselves; they take on their meaning through a contextual reflexivity of performance. As Emile Benveniste writes, “I signifies ‘the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing I.’ This instance is unique by definition and has validity only in its uniqueness. If I perceive two successive instances of discourse containing I, uttered in the same voice, nothing guarantees to me that one of them is not a reported discourse, a quotation in which I could be imputed to another.”<sup>14</sup> Note Benveniste’s emphasis upon uniqueness here: uniqueness that establishes person, place, and time.

<sup>11</sup> G. Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. K.E. Pinkus with M. Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1991, pp. 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> For a useful introduction to the study of *deixis*, see L. Edmunds, “Deixis in Ancient Greek and Latin Literature: Historical Introduction and State of the Question,” *Philologia Antiqua*, 1 (2008), pp. 67-98.

<sup>13</sup> G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, Zone, New York 1999, p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> E. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M.E. Meek, University of Miami Press, Florida 1971, p. 218. Benveniste continues: “This constant and necessary reference to the instance of discourse constitutes the feature that unites to I/you a series of ‘indicators’ which, from their form and systematic capacity, belong to different classes, some being pronouns, others adverbs, and still others, adverbial locutions,” p. 218. In yet another essay he adds: “The personal pronouns provide the first step in this bringing out of subjectivity in language. Other classes of pronouns that share the same status depend in their turn upon these pronouns. These other classes are the indicators of *deixis*, the demonstratives, adverbs, and adjectives, which organize the spatial and temporal relationships around the ‘subject’ taken as referent: ‘this, here, now,’ and their numerous cor-relatives, ‘that, yesterday, last year, tomorrow,’ etc. They have in common the feature of

Perhaps the most famous philosophical meditation on the problems posed by deixis can be found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the section "A. Consciousness," under "I. Sense-Certainty: or the 'This' and 'Meaning,'" Hegel writes, that the first, immediate knowledge of the object means that "the singular consciousness knows a pure 'This,' or the single item."<sup>15</sup> Yet, as Hegel at once adds, "the 'This' splits into a 'Here' and a 'Now,' and, in the inscription of this Now and this Here, it becomes indifferent to its own truth. 'This' is therefore 'the universal This'; or, 'it is,' i.e., *Being in general*."<sup>16</sup> By deixis, we assert a singular truth that immediately contradicts its own singularity, introducing the temporality of auto-negation through the attribution of indexicality: the Here, for instance, becomes in itself "a 'simple togetherness of many Heres.'"<sup>17</sup> A shifter therefore simultaneously: anchors an utterance to its speaker; refers to the context of its own taking place; indicates a singularity that, in being so indicated, exposes its own multiplicity; is implied in every utterance; must always be repeated; self-differs in its very utterance; opens the road to universality by a minimal form of negation.

A shifter is therefore the enaction of the "point" at which language interrupts itself by exposing the conditions of its own taking-place. In saying "I," then, individuals become subjects at the same moment that they become other than they are (i.e., they are simultaneously de-subjectivised). In doing so, at least in Agamben's interpretation, a shifter also exposes the Thing – the other of language that can emerge only within language. A shifter may seem to effect the transition from world to language, but in fact it effects an intra-linguistic shift ("from langue to parole" or "from code to message" or "from semantic to semiotic"). It is this problem of deixis that Agamben considers as the place of the Voice of language, the radically negative foundation of Western metaphysics. In this sense, the problematic of reference is at once foregrounded and complicated by the irreducibility of the event of deixis.

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being defined only with respect to the instances of discourse in which they occur, that is, in dependence upon the *I* which is proclaimed in the discourse," p. 226.

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller with analysis and foreword J.N. Findlay, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Hegel, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, op. cit., p. 66.

If “ordinary language” then, or even what we might call in a Benjaminian mode “language as such,” cannot forego such an event of reference, this is not necessarily the case for mathematical formalization. On the contrary. Formalization, as opposed to form, requires the indifference of all or any particular set of letters to what they can be deployed to demonstrate. Yet it is precisely for this reason that the *principles of their deployment must be explicitly and essentially manifested in and by their deployment itself*. Moreover, this must be done *immanently* to the demonstration: at every point of a mathematical demonstration the linkages between steps of a proof and the principles of such linkages must be practically shown as inseparable. Indeed, formalization can be considered the immanent rendering-consistent of the indifference of its own contingent materials. In mathematical and logical systems, this rendering-consistent – at least in classical and intuitionist logics – is equivalent to the impossibility of producing any contradiction within that system. So consistency is what mathematics and logic inseparably do *and* what they think *in and by* this doing. To put this yet another way, the difference between appearing and doing or between showing and proving is itself indifferent in mathematical practice – and *only in this* practice. This is equivalent to what Brian Rotman, from an essentially Peircean perspective, derisively refers to in mathematical formalization as being “completely without *indexical* expressions.”<sup>18</sup> Mathematical formalization’s indifference to empirical criteria – more precisely, any external referent – is ensured precisely through the effective suppression of any markers of the taking-place of the “utterance,” which is therefore not an *utterance* in any existing semiotic sense. The suppression of deixis simultaneously suppresses the moment of reference to the speaker, the context, and to any particular empirical thing. As such, this peculiarity of mathematical formalization – its elaboration of a pure syntax through suppression of all deictic markers – can also seem to give it, as

<sup>18</sup> B. Rotman, *Ad infinitum: The Ghost in Turing’s Machine: Taking God Out of Mathematics and Putting the Body Back In*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1993, p. 7. Rotman’s very interesting book nonetheless suffers from a number of serious problems, evident in the current context. Above all, his understanding of what constitutes “Platonism” is quite naïve, and certainly unable to account for Badiou’s peculiar interpretation. Another problem is that, despite Rotman’s emphasis on the materiality of mathematical signification, he doesn’t quite separate – as the French thinkers in Lacan’s wake have – the “signifier” and the “letter,” such a distinction enabling a more detailed, materialist and persuasive account of the issues. For a longer account of what I argue here, see J. Clemens, “Can Mathematics Think Genre? Alain Badiou and Forcing,” in: V. Duché et al. (eds.), *Genre, Text and Language: Mélanges Anne Freadman*, Garnier, Paris 2015, pp. 203-223.

philosophy has historically recurrently believed from Plato to Badiou, a peculiar *ontological* destiny.

But is this suppression of ordinary-language deixis through the asemantic intrication of letters not moreover one of the most notorious aspects of Mallarméan poetics? And is it not self-confessedly at stake according to the rigours of number? As Derrida himself phrases the Mallarméan wager, in a brief encyclopaedia entry: “A text is made to do without references; either to the thing itself.... or to the author who consigns to it nothing except its disappearance.”<sup>19</sup> Or, as Derrida puts it elsewhere, speaking of Mallarmé’s *Mimique*: the text engages a kind of “reference without referent.”<sup>20</sup> What I wish to argue that Mallarmé shares with mathematical reasoning is therefore a kind of *suppression of deixis*, the “elocutionary disappearance” of author to the benefit of a “flower absent from all bouquet.” Yet pure poetry is not for all that mathematics; it does not engage in theorems and proofs in the same way. Mallarmé is certainly not reducing mathematics to poetry. Rather, he is confronting ordinary language with mathematics in order to produce a third thing. That third thing is the poem, purified. So what are the details and the sense of the operations by which Mallarmé essays to suppress ordinary language by mathematical means to the benefit of poetry? How, exactly, does this cash out in *Un Coup de dés*? My answer is relatively simple: Mallarmé accomplishes this through a *syllabarization* of writing, that is, by decomposing and reconstructing the minimal bond that binds letters in order that they make words and, in this reconstruction, extends this operation of binding across the surface of the page itself. Hence Mallarmé’s famous declaration that: “We need a guarantee – Syntax –.” Instead, however, of syntax being delivered by deduction in the service of consistency, Mallarmé establishes the claims of syntax through compositional disposition across the site of writing itself.

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When Aristotle starts to worry about the identity of objects in the *Metaphysics*, he comes up against a fundamental paradox. For an object to be an object, it must be more than the sum of its parts; but this individuating element cannot be another relation, since that would lead to an infinite regress. Contradiction is in tension with the abyss in the thought of identity. A philosopher, it seems,

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1981, passim.

cannot be happy with either pole (contradiction and dissemination must be foreclosed), but any attempt to explain a thing's principle – that by which that thing is that thing – broaches this aporia. At this point, Aristotle has recourse to an extraordinary double comparison:

Now since that which is composed of something in such a way that the whole is a unity; not as an aggregate is a unity, but as a syllable is – the syllable is not the letters, nor is BA the same as B and A; nor is flesh fire and earth; because after dissolution the compounds, e.g. flesh or the syllable, no longer exist; but the letters exist, and so do fire and earth. Therefore the syllable is some particular thing; not merely the letters, vowel and consonant, but something else besides. And flesh is not merely fire and earth, or hot and cold, but something else besides. Since then this something else must be either an element or composed of elements, [20] (a) if it is an element, the same argument applies again; for flesh will be composed of **this** and fire and earth, and again of another element, so that there will be an infinite regression. And (b) if it is composed of elements, clearly it is composed not of one (otherwise it will itself be that element) but of several; so that we shall use the same argument in this case as about the flesh or the syllable. It would seem, however, that this “something else” is something that is not an element, but is the cause that **this** matter is flesh and **that** matter a syllable, and similarly in other cases. And this is the substance of each thing, for it is the primary cause of its existence. And since, although some things are not substances, all substances are constituted in accordance with and by nature, substance would seem to be this “nature,” which is not an element but a principle. An element is that which is present as matter in a thing, and into which the thing is divided; e.g., A and B are the elements of the syllable.<sup>21</sup>

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Flesh and syllable – what a doublet! – it is as if Aristotle, whether consciously or not, is alluding to his own strictures in the *Politics* regarding man as the only animal which has language and politics, here renders that man and that language down to their basic components in which the very connection of elements becomes obscure, *to their flesh and to their syllables*. For Aristotle, the form of

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7, 1041beta, 10-30. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0051%3Abook%3D7%3Asection%3D1041b> Accessed 13 October 2016. Note the (symptomatic?) introduction of the bolded shifters by the translator(s) here in an attempt to clarify Aristotle's propositions.

the object provides its unity, as well as its identity in concert with its materials (form + matter = individual, as the Scholastics will later specify).

But this solution is unacceptable for Mallarmé, for whom form cannot (or can no longer) be a criterion of identity for the poem, at least under any received description of form, type, or idea. Is it then matter that matters? As we have already noted, every Mallarméan image disappears itself; it is, in fact, is an ensemble of disappearances.<sup>22</sup> So let us take one counter-Aristotelian determination seriously, to suggest that it is precisely the unavowed or suppressed *political* relation of flesh and syllable to humanity that remains at stake in *Un Coup de dés*. When commentators invoke Aristotle in the context of Mallarmé – which is occasionally the case – their authoritative texts tend to be the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*, not the *Metaphysics*. It is the questions of *mimesis*, *theatre*, and *writing* that preponderantly seem to occupy the critics. Yet this does not quite enable us to explain Mallarmé's doctrine regarding “ – Syntax – .” For what sort of guarantee is syntax anyway?

For Aristotle, invention is precisely a *topology*: it is the placement or *disposition* (*taxis*, the second part of rhetoric) that is at stake in the *exposition* (*hypokrisis*, *actio*) of syllables, in and from which the trace (*memoria*) is confounded with its *elocution* (style). So let us here revisit some of the syllabic hijinks familiar to Mallarméans. In his already-cited entry to the *Tableau of French Literature* (1974), Derrida characteristically offers a characterization of Mallarmé as deploying syntax as undecidable: “The syntax of the short word *or* is sometimes calculated to prevent us from deciding whether it is the noun ‘gold,’ the logical conjunction ‘or,’ or the adverb of time, ‘now.’”<sup>23</sup> As Derrida continues: “Mallarmé has also, by disintegration, liberated its energy. The word, for him, is no longer the primary element of the language... Mallarmé knew that his ‘operation’ on the word was also the dissection of a corpse; of a decomposable body each part of which could be of use elsewhere.”<sup>24</sup> Derrida provides a familiar list: *l’or*, *des lors* (from

<sup>22</sup> Here, see Badiou's extraordinary analyses of the three versions of negation operative in Mallarmé, e.g., in *Conditions*, trans. S. Corcoran, Continuum, London 2008; Milner on the problematic of the constellation in “Les Constellations Révélatrices,” *Elucidation*, 8-9 (2003), pp. 3-7; Rancière on the work of types in Mallarmé in *The Future of the Image*, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, “Mallarmé,” p. 114.

<sup>24</sup> “Related to the whole of nature and in this way coming closer to the organism that possesses life, the Word presents itself, in its vowels and its diphthongs, like a piece of flesh,

then on), *dorure* (gilding), *dehors* (outside), *fantasmagoriques* (phantasmagorical), *tresor* (treasure), *horizon* (horizon), *majore* (increase), *hors* (outside), etc. To which could at once be added: *sonore*, *encore*, *alors*...and many more. The point here is that a syllable is precisely a non-decomposable composite body. If a letter is, in Aristotle's own terms, a *stoikeion*, an element, and words (sense) are aggregates that are precisely decomposable into their elements (letters), a syllable is composed of elements yet is not decomposable back into those elements without losing the principle of its unity: it is an *atomic compound*, much like the chemical elements of the periodic table, itself one of the great scientific inventions of the later nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

If this "operation" is a well-known aspect of Mallarmé's method, its import has not always been treated very perspicuously or persuasively. One of the notable lapses in the tradition is that nobody (to my knowledge, anyway) has linked this dependence on *or* to a key element of Poe's extraordinarily important essay on "The Philosophy of Composition," an essay that had its most decisive impact upon the great French poets of the late nineteenth century, Mallarmé included.<sup>26</sup> Why is this essay relevant here? Because it is Poe's account of the (literally) *literal mechanics* of the construction and functioning of *The Raven*. And what is the refrain of this famous poem? The word *Nevermore!* Yet this word qua refrain is really a doubled refrain: if the word *nevermore* can repeat, it is because it is itself comprised of an absolutely fundamental syllable, that itself repeats in a variety of words throughout: *or*. For Poe, the repetitive variations upon the "or" sound itself become nothing more than a mechanism for generating affect. Mallarmé is not above polylingual punnings (homonymic scramblings) along this line: *Ce lever de lune or* resonates with Lenore, Lunar, Lore, Law, Laura, etc. But what is determining here is that it enables us to see that it is the *exigencies of generalized syllabic disposition* – neither simply literal nor verbal – that is one crucial

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and, in its consonants, like a skeletal structure difficult to dissect. Etc. etc. etc. If life nourishes itself from its own past, or from a continual death, Science will trace this fact in language...." Mallarmé, *Les mots anglais*.

<sup>25</sup> Dmitri Mendeleev published what is widely considered the first version of the Periodic Table in 1869.

<sup>26</sup> E.A. Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Graham's Magazine*, XXVIII (4 April 1846), pp. 163-167. See Marie Blaise, "Mallarmé et Poe: 'la personne analogue,'" in *Mallarmé herme-neute, Acts de colloques et journées d'étude*, 10 (2014), <http://ceredi.labos.univ-rouen.fr/public/?Mallarmé-et-poe-la-personne.html>, accessed 6 July 2015.

moment of the Mallarméan intervention. Mallarmé is an anti-philosophical poet neither of the word nor the letter – but of the syllable. The syllable is the primordial apparition of syntax as such: it is simultaneously speech and writing; it is one and multiple at the same time; it cannot be permuted without becoming other than it is. A syllable is the *pure* element of *language*, insofar as it binds letters to letters, letters to sounds, language to its topos.<sup>27</sup>

We can verify these properties by recourse to a perhaps-unexpected source. This source is none other than late nineteenth-century Imperial linguistic anthropology. In the 29 April 1887 issue of *Science*, an anonymous author reports on “A System of Orthography for Native Names of Place”: “The Royal geographical society of London, and the Société de géographie of Paris, have each adopted a system of geographical orthography which is intended to put an end to the existing confusion in the mode of spelling in maps and books.”<sup>28</sup> What is absolutely crucial to note about this attempt by the respective Societies to promote such a standardization of nomination is that it is not only intended to ensure scientific and commercial security along epistemological and pragmatic lines. Rather, the very attempt – however uncertain or insufficient – is also directed at ensuring a regular capture of non-Western oral languages by Roman script. If the article’s author then proceeds to complain that “the individuality and nationality of the author give the sound a peculiar character which not at all corresponds to the word as pronounced by the natives,” we see that “the rules adopted by the societies named can only help the explorer who is not at all acquainted with linguistics – which every explorer ought to be – to write down the names in an intelligible form.” What, in other words, underpins such colonial programs of

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<sup>27</sup> Meillassoux’s striking interpretation suffers from various weaknesses, including that he never fully or seriously questions that the basic unit of language is the word. Indeed, he busies himself to assert that the unit of Mallarmé’s count cannot be “syllables or some other unit of language”: “For to count the words is to play with the indeterminacy of compound words, and thus to be able to make of one of them – the one whose meaning summarizes the entire project – the cause of that ultimate reversal of the code into its uncertainty. And perhaps this was the secret ambition of the *Coup de dés*: to write the most beautiful *peut-être* in the French language, the cause of itself in its letters of fire,” *The Number and the Siren*, p. 214. In the context, such an assertion can only seem an exemplary instance of logical question-begging.

<sup>28</sup> Anon., “A System of Orthography for Native Names of Place,” *Science*, 29 April (1887), p. 421.



uniform orthography, is a commitment to a theory of universal composition dependent on a form of translinguistic syllabarization.<sup>29</sup>

Whether or not Mallarmé himself knew of and considered the implications of such “scientific” attempts, I have as yet been unable to ascertain.<sup>30</sup> Yet it is clear that, between Poe’s “poetic” deployment of the syllable in his philosophy of composition, and the attempts of colonial anthropologists to generate a uniform orthography capable of capturing and inscribing the never-before-heard words of utterly unrelated “native” tongues, the question of the foundational powers of the syllable as the minimal syntactic unit of language was indisputably “in the air.” Mallarmé himself proposes several notorious investigations into the problematic of the translation and transcription of languages, including his “pedagogical” grammar *Thèmes anglais pour toutes les grammaires*, and his “scientific” study *Les mots anglais: petite philologie à l’usage des classes et du monde*.<sup>31</sup> In the latter in particular, we find, for example, Mallarmé’s famously aberrant discussions of supposed laws of reduplication and permutation which presuppose, despite the lack of any supreme language, operators of translinguistic syntax.

This situation is perhaps most express and fraught in French letters in the nineteenth century, due to at least two related factors. First, the alexandrine seems to have dominated French poetry in a more imperious way than had comparable formal measures in other languages. The iambic pentameter in English

<sup>29</sup> For a brief, accessible account of some of the basic elements of such orthographic programs, see David Moore, “A uniform orthography and early linguistic research in Australia,” <https://hiphilangsci.net/2013/10/16/a-uniform-orthography-and-early-linguistic-research-in-australia/> accessed 13 October 2016. I coin the barbarous neologism “syllabarization” because, precisely, it chimes with *barbarization*, as well as with *sybaritic*.

<sup>30</sup> For a different account, see A. Stanguennec, “Fiction poétique et vérité morale chez Mallarmé,” *Littérature*, 111 (3/1998), pp. 11-27, which notes that the poet was a contemporary with the rise of Comtean positivism. Regarding Mallarmé’s colonial or anti-colonial *piste*, there seems to be relatively little written on the subject. Vladimir Klima cites J.I. Gleason linking Mallarmé to *négritude*: “*Négritude* as a poetic objectifying process, therefore, is a re-creation of the absent and as such is closely linked to the methodology of the symbolist poet, Mallarmé...this is *négritude*’s romantic, passive side. The active aspect is an attack on colonialism,” in: V. Klima et al. (eds), *Black Africa: Literature and Language*, D. Reidel, Hingham 1977, pp. 66-7.

<sup>31</sup> S. Mallarmé, *Thèmes anglais pour toutes les grammaires*, Gallimard, Paris 1937; *Les mots anglais: petite philologie à l’usage des classes et du monde*, Leroy frères, Paris 1877.

versification, for example, had never been quite as central as the alexandrine in French. Second, the alexandrine is a function of a pure count, 12 vowels (or syllables) usually considered to be broken by the caesura into two groups of 6/6, rather than, as in syllabic accentual metres, a combination of count and stress. Yet, as I have been arguing, the relation between the alexandrine and free verse has put the count into question for Mallarmé. As Rancière phrases it: "In Mallarmé's epoch, one had 'forgotten the manoeuvre,' lost with the ancient bar of the alexandrine which had been sabotaged by the adept of uneven verse and then that of free verse, before being carried to its tomb by the Hugolian ogre."<sup>32</sup> In French, then, there had been the necessity of a *count* at the very base of poetry, a count that had recently been ruined by poets themselves. A simple count of the syllables of a line could therefore no longer function to guarantee the presence of poetry. Moreover, if one wishes to create a pure poem under such circumstances, it certainly cannot be mistaken for prose, nor for any particular form (for which the alexandrine had been the paradigm in French): such a poem must now somehow, impossibly, mark simultaneously the *necessity of form* and the *necessity of a negation-of-form*. As the syllable is the very basis of both prosody and prose (so to speak), by way of the fact that while the syllable is not-yet-language, there is no language without the syllable, it will be the radical implementation of an operation upon this primary pre-semantic binding condition of both sense and nonsense that Mallarmé effects.

Yet it will not be the syllable "itself" (or any particular syllable) as a simple ground, but the *principle* that enables a syllable to be a syllable. That is, syllables function in *Un Coup de dés* as the element of the count that makes-poetry-poetry-when-no-particular-inherited-number-can-hold-any-longer. A syllable can do this because it is the most basic moment of *articulation* of any language, whether ordinary, mathematical, or poetic. As I have already elaborated above, a syllable binds letters (which require some kind of syntax to organize their deployment) before they are words (which presume a syntax that they show but don't say), etc. Of course, a syllable cannot alone define the essence of poetry, no more than the word or Word. On the contrary, if the syllable is a condition of all language and all languages, Mallarmé makes it what-is-not-itself-one-but-is-the-unit-of-the-count-which-itself-makes-the-unique-number-that-cannot-be-another.

<sup>32</sup> Rancière, op. cit., p. 54.

Because classical French prosody required the pronunciation and elision of certain syllables that would otherwise go un/enounced, then the recitation of French verse inevitably comes to produce weird foam-chimera-syllables that appear and vanish at once. This particular mode of reading is usually dependent on the recognition of a verse *as* a verse: here, given the disappearance or rather dislocation of the standard line, any putative reading must encounter undecidables of enunciation, let alone undecidables of direction and sense. The concomitant absorption of the “musicality” of the verse (or even musical notation) as syllables means here that we are forced to know that we cannot know if we ought to sound out what is notated, even as the popping bubbles of ocean foam or champagne fizz are tickling the hairs of our ears and noses. Likewise, all the numbers that are regularly cited as expressly Mallarméan – 0, 1, 5, 6, 7, 12, and so on – are certainly present here in their operatory spectrality, as emanatory actualities of the poem in its purity, but none of them can function as the secret of a cipher.

It is precisely here that a close reading of *Un Coup de dés* needs to be done (if there is unfortunately not the space here to do so) in order to verify the sequence of hypotheses I have elaborated: 1) Mallarmé seeks to write a “pure” poem; 2) such a poem must indifferentiate the ontic and ontological, that is, it must negate the ontological difference and, thereby, cannot be identified with or by any particular form, nor with any lack-of-form; 3) to this end, Mallarmé recognizes the possibilities offered by mathematical writing, whose deductive syntax is achieved through the suppression of deixis; 4) if it is letters that provide the basis for mathematical formalization, it is the syllable that provides the basis for Mallarméan formalization, as the fundamental atomic compound of language; 5) but because the syllable cannot function in a pure poem by being given an inherited number or function (e.g., the 12-count of an alexandrine), nor simply an indifferent number (e.g., the arbitrariness of a syllabic count in free verse or prose), it must be now otherwise deployed; 6) this deployment compels a construction of the poem as a total, topological distribution of syllables in space; 7) the “numbers” with which the poem is undoubtedly playing cannot be reduced to a particular “count,” whether of syllables, words, or pages: if anything, the poem is itself the “One” which sutures event to being.

So if the poem thus names itself as the apparition of itself – not the flower absent from all bouquets, as Mallarmé says, but poetry absently present in and as the/a poem whose elements uncannily appear and disappear because their being can-

not be separated from their appearance<sup>33</sup> – is there another way to specify its particular modality of inconsistency? One could invoke logic to ask: is the pure poem contradictory or paraconsistent? Indeed, there is now a well-developed discourse on poetry that renders it eminently contradictory, inconsistent in the classical sense. In their very different ways, one could see critics such as Derrida, Badiou and Meillassoux all sharing such a doctrine. But one can also construct a paraconsistent structure by rendering an object intransitive. As Graham Priest puts it, regarding such a situation (which he himself calls “dialethics”): “the transitivity of identity will fail. We have  $a = \xi$  and  $\xi = c$ , but we will not have  $a = c$ .”<sup>34</sup> However, Priest’s object – his name is “gluon” – is not poetry or poetic in the particular sense I am describing here. Between the commentators who end by rendering poetry a paradoxical nomination of the event of which it is a part, *qua* without-being, trans-being (*event*) or can-being (*peut-être*), and those who are concerned with identity-in-general (*being*), we will say that Mallarmé’s ultimate poetics is neither eventual nor paraconsistent, but puritan. Between inconsistency and paraconsistency, there is poetry. *Pure* poetry.

Drawing on the mathematical triplet that establishes equivalence relations in the construction of objects – reflexivity, transitivity, symmetry – we are able to parse Mallarmé’s reference-without-referent more precisely. Given a relation P (for “Poetry”) on U (for “*Un Coup de dés*”), P is reflexive on U if every element u of U, that is, its syllabic disposition, satisfies the relation with itself, that is, (u, u) P. *Un Coup de dés* is a *model* of such a reflexive set; it is itself a universe. What’s interesting in this context about reflexivity – in distinction from transitivity and symmetry – is that, meta-mathematically speaking, it requires *specified* pairs to be in a relation, rather than given *in general*. For Mallarmé, one could hazard that a poem is only reflexive, that is, it models only the elements related to itself, “the unique number that cannot be another”; though it must also be intransitive as “the unique number that cannot be another”; and its symmetry could only be the automorphism of its reflexivity, insofar as this can be the only mapping of the object onto itself that preserves its identity.

<sup>33</sup> “I say: a flower! and beyond the oblivion to which my voice relegates any shape, insofar as it is something other than the calyx, there arises musically, as the suave idea itself, the one absent from every bouquet,” *Crise de vers*.

<sup>34</sup> G. Priest, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 17. Priest uses here the Chinese symbol for “centre,” “zhong.”

For the reasons I have already enunciated above, it is with the poem, and only the pure poem, that appearing and being can be one and the same. Such a poem would therefore be entirely composed of what Badiou calls in *Logics of Worlds* “real atoms.” In Badiou’s words: “A real atom is a phenomenal component, that is a kind of sub-apparent of the referential apparent which, on one hand, is an atomic component (it is simple, or non-decomposable), and on the other, is strictly determined by an underlying element, which is its ontological substructure. At the point of a real atom, being and appearing conjoin under the sign of the One.”<sup>35</sup> This, in other words, is the meaning of Mallarmé’s symbolism: topological establishment of a real poem on the principle of syllabic binding of *Un Coup de dés*. A syllable cannot be further decomposed, as it would then be a letter: it both appears as such in its deployment, as in its further assemblage. This is why *Un Coup de dés* must be considered univocal. Not because it is not susceptible to irreducible interpretations, but because no syllable can be altered without transforming its identity. If a mathematical proof can use any symbols one likes, just so long as they are used consistently, but is rendered entirely false if any one of its letters fails to hold up, *Un Coup de dés* is rendered entirely false if the disposition of its syllables fails to maintain its peculiar lack-of-reference. If mathematics is axiomatic, declarative, invariant, poetry is anaxiomatic, in-suspense, yet invariant. It is the presentation of the bond between appearing and being, in which every intensity of appearing is also an ontological element: in fact, *Un Coup de dés* is the “l’événemètre” or “l’êtrévenement” par excellence.

That Mallarmé only achieves this at the very end of his life is no accident. His lifelong efforts regarding the rewriting of poems are famous, as are his constant experiments at the very limits of form. If we track this development according to the above argument, we can see at every point how his complex development concludes in the identification of the syllable – the syllable as minimal disposition in an open field – as the basis of all poetry, and therefore the “allegorical content” of the pure poem itself. If the prose poem obliterates the line-count and enjambment retained by traditional verse – the Scylla and Charybdis of the late nineteenth century crisis of verse – *Un Coup de dés* retains a variability of

<sup>35</sup> A. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. A. Toscano, Continuum, London 2009, p. 250. Technically, the definition is as follows: ‘If a given atom, defined by the function  $a(x)$ , is identical to a single atom of the type  $a(x)$ —in other words, if there exists a single  $a \in A$  such that for every  $x \in A$  we have  $\alpha(x) = a(x) = \mathbf{Id}(a, x)$ —we will say that the atom  $\alpha(x)$  is real.’ p. 250.

count in the line by referring the syllable and enjambment to the disposition of each page, and thence to the totality of the pages of the poem, without simply obliterating the principle of the count itself. The poem is the constellation and the wreck whose apparitions it stages, the master and the die, the mast and the foam, thus becoming at once the real of writing, the turbulence of its own vanishing, and a crystalline absolute.



Henry Sussman\*

## Digital Parables<sup>1</sup>

Let's start these remarks, ones not entirely alien to Lacan, that therapeutic "healing" is a *medium* rather than a conceptual model, technique, practice, or school. Therapeutic "healing" in this sense is a process of *re-mediation*. Its parameters as such are features including intensity, duration, *grain*, absorptiveness, verisimilitude, simulation, addictiveness, feedback, entropy, meta-critique, auto-poiesis, and mutation. In the sense of its configuration and constitution as a medium, therapeutic re-mediation is free to transpire in books, art museums, theaters, cinemas, music and dance halls – indeed, in the street – as well as in the "official" consulting office or laboratory. A notion of therapeutic intervention grounded in such values as "absorptiveness" and "mutation" leaves such conventional values promulgated in the long-standing intramural struggles over methodological dominance as "truth," "theoretical rigor," and "clinical efficacy" temporarily (as in Hofstadter's telephonic image for recursion) "on hold."

As a *medium*, therapeutic redress opens up its multiple and interactive *dimensions*; it occupies its characteristic *spaces* (again, the resonant book, concert-hall, or other performance-space as much as the clinical *cabinet*); it concentrates itself in identifiable *nodes*, whose circuitry (interferences as well as flows) can be *mapped*; once in process, it establishes *interfaces* between a multiplicity of *inputs* relevant to and impacting upon the healing process.

At this juncture we can already characterize this battery of interventions as the invariably provisional redressing of systematic insult in the process of *rendering explicit* conditions of thwarting and unconditional closure, and *opening alternate circuitry* to jammed messages and shorted-out initiatives to performance. Once under way, the therapeutic intervention, prepossessing to the point of virtu-

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<sup>1</sup> I am most appreciative to my editors at Bloomsbury Publishing for their gracious permission to reprint here condensed sections of the Afterword, "Healing, Systematically," to my *Playful Intelligence: Digitizing Tradition*, Bloomsbury, London 2014.

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al absorptiveness and verisimilitude, attains a momentum and force field intrinsic to its own process. Systematic “healing” is by its very nature polymorphous, and once in process can be stimulated/diverted by multiple inputs. Seeing and hearing an opera can exert a profound catalytic effect upon a conventional (i.e. trans-subjective, theoretically coherent) formal therapeutic process already under way. Conversations with “civilians” (i.e. non-clinicians), reading books, or pondering theoretical paradigms can consolidate or divert the remediation: both when a formal program of therapy persists and when it has been “terminated” or temporarily suspended. We are concerned here as much with the *ambient* circumstances and intrusions of “healing from systematic insult” – the impact of strangers, books, other aesthetic and conceptual experiences, and conversion, encountered randomly – as we are with the no doubt informative and edifying history of spiritual dysfunction and its inventive remediation.

The downbeat in the configuration of theoretical backdrops as I am here assembling it is far more on the posture, drift, and variegated circuitry of therapeutic remediation (and on the switch-offs between circuits) than it is on its nature, sources, authenticity, and ultimate results of the quest for “wholeness” or the cessation of pain.

### **Movement and Melancholia**

The most visceral and indispensable virtual window or *clearing* for healing that I could invoke is movement itself, particularly over and against the stasis ensuing from subjection to multiple *gravity-sinks* of rigidity, from *thwarting*, writ or delivered systematically. The history in which melancholy, for one condition, is inextricably bound up with inertia, with a seemingly irreversible break in momentum, is a particularly long and rich one.

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How ironic it may seem that one dramatic spinoff to this long and varied tradition of phlegmatic melancholic self-absorption, stasis, and run-on rumination, possibly to no good end, transpired in an animal laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania, where a researcher named Bernard Seligman produced depression in dogs by strategically imposing a lid on a wooden box between whose partitions the animals had been allowed to jump freely. The laboratory conditions of the experiment, the scientific protocols under which it was carried out, allowed of course for the conditions, both of the free circulation between wood-

en compartments and its withdrawal, to be carefully calibrated and monitored. The scientific presupposition of the project articulated itself in the following way: the rigors specifically built into the experiment-design would allow for a no less objective, methodical, and repeatable parsing and interpretation of the behavioral implications, including the temperamental or modal dimension, than the careful orchestration of the conditions under which free circulation between compartments was permitted and barred. The condition that the arbitrary foreclosure of initiative produced on the dogs was called “learned helplessness” (*erlernte Hilflosigkeit*). Seligman’s learned helplessness experiments achieved canonical status in the empirical literature of clinical psychology not only because of what they added to knowledge regarding the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of one of the major spectrum-conditions under psychology’s purview. Their cult status, a major step toward the evolution of cognitive psychotherapies, it turns out, also arose because the clinical project affirmed the relevance and indeed indispensability of laboratory trials, above all, the principled acceptance or rejection of wisdom also available from non-experimental sources (e.g. clinical case-studies, intuition, philosophical speculation, data and analyses gathered under the aegis of the “soft” social sciences, notably social psychology and anthropology).

In the language of laboratory experimentation, the “learned helplessness” findings confirmed what had been expressed over so many centuries in radically different textual displays:

When an experimentally naïve dog receives an escape avoidance training in a shuttle box, it usually responds in this way: at the onset of the first traumatic electric shock, the dog runs frantically about until it accidentally scrambles over the barrier and escapes the shock. On the next trial, the dog, running and howling, crosses the barrier more quickly than before. Eventually, the dog learns to avoid shock altogether. ... A dog that has experienced uncontrollable shocks before avoidance training usually stops running and sits and lies, quietly whining, until shock terminates. The dog does not cross the barrier and escape from shock. Rather, it seems to give up resisting and to passively accept the shock. On succeeding trials, the dog continues to fail to make escape movements and it accepts as much shock as the experimenter chooses to give.

It is too tempting for us ensconced in literature and the arts to dismiss the production of depression in another species of mammals, in an experimental environment, as everything that Swift was aiming at in his rendition of the British Academy in the third Book of *Gulliver's Travels*: as what common sense and basic human recognition have taught us about melancholy, displaced to the quaint trappings of laboratories and the terminologies of science-babble. Nothing that we can glean from Seligman et. al.'s recapitulation of the dogs' experiences has not been stated more eloquently, and perhaps on a higher conceptual level than the memorable and habitually consulted avatars in this history of melancholy, from Theophrastus to Burton. A memorable recent addition to this list is Gregory Bateson,<sup>2</sup> in his compelling account of familial and mental doublebinds. Seligman and his team go on to write:

We believe what ... lies at the heart of depression is this: the depressed patient has learned or believes that he cannot control those elements of his life that relieve suffering or bring him gratification. In short, he believes that he is helpless. Consider a few of the common precipitating events of his life. What is the meaning of job failure or incompetence at school? Frequently it means that all of a person's efforts have been in vain, his responses have failed to bring about the gratification he desires; he cannot find responses that control reinforcement. When a person is rejected by someone he loves, he can no longer control this significant source of gratification and support. When a parent or a lover dies, the bereaved person is powerless to produce or influence love from the dead person. Physical disease and growing old are obvious helplessness experiences. In these conditions, the person's own responses are ineffective and he must rely on the care of others. So we would predict that it is not life events per se that produce depression, but uncontrollable life-events.<sup>3</sup>

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Depression in these lines is the human twilight to the closed system rendered in laboratory materials for the dogs. It is the emotional climate that we would expect to ensue from the catastrophe orchestrated by Kleist in his "Earthquake in Chile." It is a measure of Kleist's perverse irony that for his protagonists' sake, he can appropriate the sudden-onset melancholy ensuing from the disaster. He

<sup>2</sup> Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, U of Chicago P, Chicago 2000, pp. 310-31.

<sup>3</sup> Martin E. P. Seligman, et. al., "Learned Helplessness and Depression," in *Essential Papers on Depression*, ed. James C. Coyne, New York UP, New York 1985, p. 203.

refits it into an improbable escape-hatch from their arbitrarily dead-end predicament. Gregor Samsa's own particular transformation, from traveling salesman into "giant vermin," unfortunately preempts him from seeking out therapeutic intervention. But the only drift of his frenetic initial efforts to adapt and the negative reinforcement proceeding from all family members save his sister Grete is further toward "learned helplessness." Traumatic catastrophes, the more devastating the better, make for the most vivid imaginative literature. In human terms, especially when all escape routes are barred, as in Bateson's compelling account of the double-bind and its familial home, they spawn the full spectrum of depressive conditions.

It is in the scene, *khōra*, and theatrical *orchestra* of melancholy and depression that the most compelling motive arises for tribute to Terpsichore, the muse of dance. Classical tragedy, even as the schematic blueprint of systematic closure at the deep strata of family kinship, and community, opens the scene where the elements of the tragedy receive their choreographic expression, where they *move*. Immoderate desire, obdurate taboo, power, memory, political affiliation and interest, revenge: all these find expression, in character, on the tragic stage, which registers the traces of their movement. Tragic catharsis, therefore, consists as much in the sheer *dynamics* of representational space as in the specific negotiations of nobility, trespass, necessity, and communal memory adjudicated by the play. The open-ended poetic screen that Stéphane Mallarmé devised for lyrical expression as late-Capitalism and its technologies dawned, a display that could be folded in several directions and could be made to mirror itself.

Of writing in general I would say that it constantly demands the coordination between two registers of movement: the *horizontal* addition of words and the vertical a) negotiation of pre-existent grammatical and syntactic structures; and b) a search-function for needed signifiers fluctuating between memory-stores arrayed at different *depths*. Definitively checking effortless fluidity in either its horizontal or vertical ranges of movement, writing, under these conditions, staggers forward. Under optimal conditions of relaxation and attentiveness, it may be said to dance, but never effortlessly. Any palliation emerging in the course of cultural composition arises from positive reinforcement in the feedback loop between the compositional search for words, also their felicitous arrangement, and the tentative, emergent worked object.

Writing is then, the impossible choreography between grammatical and syntactic structures and constraints and semantic possibility. As fitful as any overall movement internal to its process and along its overall arc may be, this dynamic, with its irreversible movement, invariably feels better than “learned helplessness.” It is replete with regenerative power, if we can wean ourselves from banking on restorative wholeness or full restitution. What we may well regenerate, if we can break our various inertias and *move*, above all along the panorama of annotation and composition, is *mutations*, hydra-heads, “probe-heads.” It is an aria of exhortation, a rallying cry to resume motion at any cost, a movement foreclosed in various fashions, along the lateral passageways of semiosis, polysemy, and homonymy. The expanding thresholds of mathematics are arranged in steps, it is true, but the defile that these breakthroughs assume is by no means linear when mathematics is on task, working through relations that are meaningful. It is the devil’s pact that mathematics has closed with movement per se that enables me to implicate Zen kōans, as we shall see, with an irreducible mathematical dimension. Poetry as well pays considerable taxes and *impots* along the horizontal axis of its articulatory baseline, its grounding in grammar and logic. But then, Buddhist monk or terrorist? that it is, poetry disguises the time-bomb that it is carrying, the visual resources and tricks that it has enlisted. And if I appeal to mathematics in this demonstration, it is as one who, back in the day of primary learning, was utterly daunted and humiliated by its unforgiving demand for linear attentiveness. The mathematics with which I have made my peace as a failed acolyte is the expanding matrix of possibility whose experience can be conveyed either by a master-narrator (Jorge Luis Borges) or even by an enlightened physicist and computer scientist (Douglas R. Hofstadter).

The latter’s *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* succeeds, on purely literary and theoretical grounds if on no others, as one of the remarkable works of interdisciplinarity and intertextuality of the twentieth century. Hofstadter’s strategically meandering narrative betrays the meticulous planning of a master-teacher; also an uncanny instinct for revelatory examples, woven in their full complexity into the braid. Building up with linear meticulousness the logical and numerical steps accounting for cybernetic architecture as processing, Hofstadter nonetheless choreographs, in a constant feedback loop, three simultaneous and mutually-referential panoramas for scientific discovery and improvisation: mathematics’ unavoidable recursion to double-binds (Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem), variation and fugue in music (Bach); and “impossible”

figuration in graphic art (Escher). The dance between these seemingly inimical fields is as breathtaking as the pedagogical virtuosity by which Hofstadter can “make sense” of computers and the mathematics, physics, and engineering out of which they arise. Hofstadter’s master-introduction to Computer Science slowly unfolds through sequentially arranged “lessons,” elaborated in discursive prose, in which he takes leave, as the occasion demands, to segue in crablike fashion over to Gödel, Escher, or Bach, or to any of the subsidiary interests their inventions implicate.

These core-lessons in mathematical and scientific thinking fluctuate, systematically in fact, with fanciful dialogues, after the manner of Lewis Carroll’s fiction, in which such characters as Achilles, the Tortoise, and the Crab invoke a common set of terms and cultural materials as they dramatize alternate explanations to the by no means intuitive account of computers, their functions, and their correlatives. At crucial transitional moments in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, Hofstadter invokes Zen culture and kōans as instances of a radically discontinuous thinking that is nevertheless completely at home in the stringing and chunking that computers must customarily perform; in the non-linear leaps between levels of processing that is a basic feature of their architecture and capability. “Kōans are supposed to be ‘triggers’ which, though they do not contain enough information in themselves to import enlightenment, may possibly be sufficient to unlock the mechanisms inside one’s mind that lead to enlightenment.”<sup>4</sup> In this sentence, Zen kōans help Hofstadter reference a function in a computer that may trigger a higher level of processing while not itself encompassing or embodying that higher level.

## Zen Annotation

The briefest of book-marks to underscore that the kōans, compiled in such collections as *Mumonkan* and *Hekiganroku* are arranged in a progressive order – one simulating the movement toward realization or enlightenment which is the aim of the composite aesthetic and political-theological complex of which they comprise part. In their arrangement itself, there is an embedded movement or progression, but in no way a logical or linear one. It is a fundament of Zen dis-

<sup>4</sup> Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Vintage Books, New York 1979, p. 246.

cipline that the cues and encounters most material to enlightenment may well emanate from the most peripheral outlying areas of thought and purpose. In this sense, the untoward steps by which the *Mumonkan*, say, leads toward its end, is a performance of, an allegory, in Walter Benjamin's sense of the early-modern *Trauerspiel* tradition in European drama, of what we would now call higher-level processing or thought. In preemptive fashion, the overall movement between kōans performs its very end or culmination – a facility for improvisational thinking grounded in discontinuous logic, tenuous inferences, and wild associative leaps. Not only do the kōans consistently import and activate stunning poetic freshness of figuration into their reduced scale and minimal stage-trappings; the time-lag between their logico-semantic drift, import, or meaning and their performative thrust, the virtual illustration that they deliver, is non-existent, or at least radically curtailed. It is surely this speed and parsimony of feedback – within an overall architecture of astonishing, historically momentous insight that inspires Hofstadter to wire the kōans within his “eternal golden braid.” This is, generally speaking, the celebration of intelligence and complexity and the capacity for synthetic and by no means intuitive thought-processes that meanders, indirectly but smoothly, in and out, in a short-circuit of ongoing mutual interactivity, between the traditional scenes of writing for scientific, logical, graphic, musical, and poetic inscription.

It is, then, a particular possibility for motion in the generation of *différance* that we can trace in the progression from one kōan to the next, between *all* kōans. It is on nothing less than a daunting level of Zen-sensibility (or *Zensibility*) that the *Mumonkan* sets off: To an unspecified monk's query as to whether Buddha-nature extends to dogs, Jōshū interjects the Mu-syllable, a shifter in the direction of the emptiness underlying all Being in Zen philosophy. Often the final syllable in communal chanting, “Mu,” is accentuated by a collective exhalation. The collapse of the lungs after such a concerted, voluntary outward breath corporeally *illustrates* “Mu.” One could well argue that the very first kōan in the *Mumonkan* cycle is in fact the last. There is no question more fundamental and far-reaching than whether the Buddha-nature, whose discovery is the ultimate task of Buddhist meditation and practice, extends to “sentient beings” other than humans.

It should be noted that the core text of each kōan, the situation-based anomaly or discovery both registering and prompting what we would now call cognitive (or mathematical) “popping,” is indeed the tersely worded enigma that the

kōans are known to be. Yet Mumon, compiler and editor of the *Mumonkan*, saw fit to supply the text of every kōan with a commentary in the form of a lyric poem even terser and more enigmatic, if that were possible, than the narrative vignette in which each emergent enigma is choreographed. The irony of this “explanatory” lyric (its poetic format is already suspicious), is that it is just as sublimely arbitrary and mysterious as the situation that provoked it. Many editions of the kōans supply supplemental notes, to Mumon’s lyrics as to the stories themselves, thus transforming each “unit” into a scene of interpretation replete with an “ur-text,” a “canonical” exegesis, and “hypertext” in the form of footnotes. The canon of structured but non-linear meditations known as the kōans sets out as the embodiment and illustration of emptiness underlying all knowledge and social systems; it quickly eventuates, however, into an expansive generator of textual and exegetical possibility. The kōans are themselves fated to reside on the “jewel-hinged jaw” between austere parsimony and exhilarating expansive movement. This double-agency in processes of stark miniaturization and sublime multiplication is precisely what draws Hofstadter to the core-achievements in mathematics and physics that find instantiation in the bodies and circuitry of modern computers. Zen meditation and practice becomes, in the purview of *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, another receptive scene of inscription and cultural production indelibly scored by the “eternal golden braid.”

The narrative and communicative accouterments to an allegory of enlightenment as non-linear realization have already reached a prodigious level of complexity by the third kōan in the *Mumonkan*, “Gutei Raises a Finger”:

Whenever Gutei Oshō was asked about Zen, he simply raised his finger. Once a visitor asked Gutei’s boy attendant, “What does your master teach?” The boy too raised his finger. Hearing of this, Gutei cut off the boy’s finger with a knife. The boy, screaming with pain, began to run away. Gutei called to him, and when he turned around, Gutei raised his finger. The boy suddenly became enlightened.

When Gutei was about to pass away, he said to his assembled monks, “I obtained a one-finger Zen from Tenryū and used it all my life but still did not exhaust it.” When he had finished saying this, he entered into eternal Nirvana.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Katsuki Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, Weatherhill, New York 2000, p. 34.



This kōan and everything that it implicates, turns on the sublime riddle: what could “one-finger Zen” be; how could it persist in its inexhaustibility, even in the hands of an acknowledged master? The coincidence in this vignette of two sub-narratives, concerning the teacher and his pupil and the death-scene at which his lifetime wisdom can be displayed and tested, adds all the complexity needed to frame the enigma of pointing fingers, the lessons they indicate, and the difference between tangible and absent (“explicit” and “implicit”) ones. On the one hand, the kōan acknowledges that at least to one master, all the Zen necessary for eternal enlightenment could be reducible to an act and sign (the finger) of pure indication, indication devoid of content and direction, indication, hinting, intimation – simply for their own sakes. This is what a master could possibly know, but never his juvenile retainer. When the boy attendant presumes to mimic Gutei’s wisdom, but without an inkling of understanding, having never processed it, the master deprives the pupil of the offending digit. Painful and austere punishment, but the loss of the appendage is not life-threatening. Since the full wisdom of “one-finger Zen” inheres in the gesture of indication itself, a speech-act of “pure” indication, the adherent is amply rewarded for this severe discipline in the exchange: loss of finger/sudden enlightenment. What has been transacted when the master shows his finger to the pupil, the pupil whose corresponding digit has been cut off is, precisely, the transmission of “one-finger Zen.”

What is most recognizably “kōan-like” in this meditative stepping stone is the extreme compression enacted by the coincidence between the reduction (or consolidation) in the boy’s instrumental digits, and the precipitous, vast augmentation in processing capability signaled by sudden enlightenment. From a Western perspective, we may be tempted to import all the dialectics (and sexual, familial baggage) triggered by Freudian castration into the reception of this scene. Far more relevant here, it seems, both in terms of Zen philosophy and the systems theory underlying cybernetic technology, is the way that the terrain of relation and relationality itself is mobilized by the figure of the teaching-finger (or the corporeal embodiment of the teacher’s pointer). This has a lot to do, I think, with Hofstadter’s most productive soldering of Zen into the circuitry of “the eternal golden braid.”

“Gutei Raises a Finger” is, then, *digital* in multiple senses of the word, whether the incriminating finger happens to be absent or present. Its “way” (or drift)

points in the direction of enlightenment, among other things, as an apprehension of “pure” relationality, unfettered by baggage from multiple existential domains, which is a dominant feature of digital organization and operation. Surely the possession of a finger is a characteristic deeply rooted in the world of analog relations: there is an implicit “one-on-one” between my sense or interest and what I am pointing to. But the way of enlightenment intimated by “Gutei Raises a Finger” is toward the pure relationality that Anthony Wilden, already in 1972, perhaps with greater lucidity than anyone else, recognized as a telling feature of the rapidly-emerging regime of digital communications and information:

The analog computer is an icon or an image of something “real,” whereas the digital computer’s relation to “reality” is rudimentarily similar to language itself... The analog is pregnant with MEANING whereas the digital domain of signification is, relatively speaking, somewhat barren. It is almost impossible to translate the rich semantics of the analog into any digital form for communication to another organism... The digital, on the other hand, because it is concerned with boundaries and because it depends upon arbitrary combination, has all the syntax to be precise and be entirely unambiguous. Thus what the analog gains in semantics it loses in syntactic, and what the digital gains in syntactics it loses in semantics. Thus it is that because the analog does not possess the syntax necessary to say “No” or to say anything involving “not,” one can REFUSE or REJECT in the analog, but one cannot DENY or NEGATE.<sup>6</sup>

Enlightenment, in terms of “Gutei Raises a Finger” is nothing less than “popping” out of the analog, but in no definitive way. If Gutei’s young assistant achieves instantaneous enlightenment upon Gutei’s displaying the finger that the boy no longer possesses, this may be understood, among other possibilities as an opening up to him of the domain of digital relationality. Backed by Gutei’s coming to terms with “one-finger Zen,” the finger that he points toward his pupil is a digital digit. It alone is the transition between analog naming, comparison, mapping, division, and distribution, and digital synthesis and programming.

We mustn’t forget that Mumon applies his own exegetical “body English” to the kōan in the form of the lyrical amendment that he appends to it. We should also bear in mind that a Buddhist monk, directing interpretation’s traffic flow, is no

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure*, Tavistock, London 1972, p. 163.

less susceptible than the rest of us, to injecting his own values. What Mumon stresses in his lyrical follow-up to the “case” is how Gutei, by means of his very least concerted digital gesture, one-ups his master, Tenryū, in the precipitous chasm that he cleaves through worldly banality.

Gutei made a fool of old Tenryū,  
Emancipating the boy with a single slice,  
Just as Kyorei cleaved Mount Kasan  
To let the Yellow River run through.<sup>7</sup>

Enlightenment, the free-flowing feedback loop between the analog and digital, is nothing less than an indispensable force of nature. Buddhist practice is the mindful demolition restoring the freedom of the flow. In its pronounced non-violence “one-finger Zen” activates the force that will allow water to master earth, the Yellow River to truncate Mount Kasan.

A minimal work of narrative art, “Gutei Raises a Finger” activates a full range of motifs and scales of articulation calling out for further elaboration. Among these are surely: mind (enlightenment)/body (finger), mastery/ignorance, mental force (meditation)/physical force, age/youth, death/life, enlightenment/logic, digital/analog. Such complexity stands to be scored along these continuums that the results of the deliberation can only be inconsequential – in terms of instrumental standards or action-language. If we take this “case” or *kōan* as a single flagstone in a Japanese garden of meditation, progressing “beyond” it would not so much involve a definitive proof or inference as much as a sideways step to a neighboring narrative environment in which parallel dynamics achieve different weightings, emphases, and outcomes. The meditation or movement is anything but progressive; it sets out, rather, in a philosophical milieu in which the *direct* application of torque is doomed to inconsequentiality.

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Each *kōan*, then, by dint of its multiple resonances, leads to an unlimited set of other *kōans*, indeed, to ones that may not yet have been devised. It is only in this sense that we can turn to Case 5, “Kyōgen’s ‘Man up in a Tree’” as an extension of “Gutei Raises a Finger”:

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<sup>7</sup> Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, p. 35.

Kyōgen Oshō said, “It is like a man up in a tree hanging from a branch with his mouth; his hands clasp no bough, his feet rest on no limb. Someone appears under the tree and asks him, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West?” If he does not answer, he fails to respond to the question. If he does answer, he will lose his life. What would you do in such a situation?”<sup>8</sup>

As opposed to “Gutei Raises a Finger,” whose sudden and unanticipated realization is a matter of delight, even if accompanied by pointed physical suffering, this kōan leads right into the heart of a dead-end. In this respect, the kōan has much in common with “Ganto’s Ax,” a text Hofstadter makes much of. The tree-man’s choice, between dying in observance of his meditative practice and in effect “killing” his practice (at least putting it on serious hold), is the “double-bind” situation whose elaboration by Gregory Bateson shed such illumination on the mental world of schizos, substance-abusers and the impacted family systems that produce such outcroppings. The discourse of deconstruction will come up with a term perhaps more philosophically respectable, “aporia,” for this kind of a situation. The cleaner term from the Greek enacts deconstruction’s overall turn toward the etymological subtext and network self-sufficient in itself for programming social possibility and outcomes; a vector leaving tangible actors, historical circumstances, and the metaphysically grounded constructs prevalent in philosophy and the social sciences behind. The aftermath of the particular “step” taken by “Kyōgen’s ‘Man up in a Tree’” in the Japanese garden is to imprison its taker in the starkest impasse, one whose only “escape” is enlightenment itself, an enlightenment, as we already know, that can ensue only from the offhand gesture, a chance misstep, the most random and minor detail on which the dream, according to Freud, pivots, the Lacanian “*objet petit a*.” It is no accident that the incriminating question in this “case” mobilizes the unboundedness of a directional coordinate, the West. From a Japanese perspective, it is indeed out of the West, India, that Buddhist philosophy first made its sweep, in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, via China.

It is within a kōan’s capability to sharply curtail motion, action, and consequence, even while contributing to the cognitive stretching, limbering, and de-contracting that is the ongoing thrust of meditation. Interestingly, the supplemental “Comment” and “Verse” by Mumon can only reiterate the double-bind

<sup>8</sup> Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, p. 38.

into whose crux the kōan leads us. “Mumon’s Comment” tells us that figuring the tree-man’s predicament out will be tantamount to giving “life to the way that has been dead until this moment and destroy the way that has been alive up to now.” If meditative practice can for some reason not come up with the vivifying insight, it will be necessary to await the Maitreya Buddha for a resolution to the quandary. “Mumon’s Verse,” though, can only castigate Kyōgen for foisting on Zen an irredeemably deadly meditation.

Both as narrative engines and as cognitive maps, in their reduced scale and minimal accouterments, the kōans open vast domains of meditative possibility; in their poetic compression, they clear away morasses of thematic and logical obstruction. They slide jarringly, but also tellingly, into one another. Their interaction produces change both along the vertical axis, in sudden “pops” and leaps in higher-level processing capability; but also along the horizontal panorama of “chunking,” permutation, and combination – of theme, parameter, and scale of discrimination. Any composite “map” to the kōans would be a rhizomatic affair, careening randomly and even dramatically from one sector to the next, in one geographical coordinate or another, but moving incessantly.

## Conclusion

It is to Hofstadter’s enormous credit, in such a work as *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, that he was not only capable of isolating, explicating, and orchestrating the underlying processes of structural fabulation, coding, programming, and replication common to a bewildering array of scientific and cultural breakthroughs: among these, Baroque fugues and canons, two-dimensional graphics, as practiced by Escher, with “impossible” three-dimensional features, fanciful literary embroideries on mathematical concepts, such as Lewis Carroll placed in the mouths of his characters, the conceptual steps and transpositions that enabled Watson, Crick, and their colleagues to “break” the genetic code. To these must surely be added the mathematical representation of bubbles and other anomalies in the domain of numbers that were ultimately to translate into cybernetic capacities for leapfrogging back and forth between different levels of generality, languages, and operating systems. Not only could Hofstadter penetrate the particularity of the inventions and transpositions necessary for the signature crystallizations in these fields; he fashioned the resonant feedback loop, or, if you will, the *cognitive DNA*, allowing these syntheses and advances in very different fields,

scored in different typefaces on very different pages or screens, to be, if not exactly perfectly continuous with one another, to engage in productive mutual conversation by means of shared tropes, figures, and dynamics.

Our debt to Hofstadter is monumental for the lucidity and sanity, already at the outset of the cybernetic age, that he contributed in the medium of his panoramic view of 1) the decisive centrality of the underlying *codes* and *languages* of science and of the communications between them; and, 2) his activation of the *transcriptions* between them already constituting the very *possibility* for the emergent interactive technologies and disciplines. So inventive are the textual features that he installed into Gödel, Escher, Bach, among them an ongoing alternation and “dialogue” between more-or-less didactic “lessons” leading to an understanding of contemporary Computer Science and its mathematical, logical, systematic, architectural, and aesthetic components, and the fanciful fictive encounters, à la Lewis Carroll, “illustrating” the most salient principles and points, that the work warrants a full-fledged literary analysis of its own. The movement that Hofstadter launches and marshals to multiple effects in this work is in itself a rejoinder to the melancholic “learned helplessness” that an age first deploying multiple new technologies, each intimidating in its complexity and with side-effects just as daunting, could well engender. I am arguing here that fanciful and inventive movement, such as Hofstadter has harnessed from fields including number, logic, music, graphics, Zen, and engineering, is itself redress and recompense in the face of increasingly expansive, encompassing, intrusive, and extractive systematic architectures.

A notable taking-off point for the work’s relentless, polymorphous motion is the plasticity that Hofstadter ascribes to intelligence itself. Among the de facto “rules of intelligence” that Hofstadter posits are the abilities “to respond to situations very flexibly,” “to make sense out of ambiguous or contradictory messages,” and “to synthesize new concepts by taking old concepts and putting them together in new ways.”<sup>9</sup> Chief among the intelligent attributes that he dwells on is the processing of rules in general:

What sorts of “rules could possibly capture all of what we think of as intelligent behavior, however? Certainly there must be rules on all sorts of different levels.

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<sup>9</sup> Hofstadter, *Gödel Escher, Bach*, p. 26.

There must be many “just plain” rules. There must be “metarules” to modify the “just plain” rules; then “metametarules” to modify the metarules, and so on. The flexibility of intelligence comes from the enormous number of different rules, and levels of rules. The reason that so many on so many levels must exist is that in life, a creature is faced with millions of situations of many different types. Some situations are mixtures of stereotyped situations – thus they require rules for deciding which of the “just plain” rules to apply. Some situations cannot be classified – thus there must exist rules for inventing new rules... Strange Loops involving rules that change themselves, directly or indirectly, are at the core of intelligence. Sometimes the complexity of our minds seems so overwhelming that one feels that there can be no solution to the problem of understanding intelligence.<sup>10</sup>

Among the most endearing of many of *Gödel, Escher, Bach*'s performance-features is its ongoing celebration of human intelligence and its non-species specific outcroppings. In significant respects, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* is an extended hymn to the blessings and remaining potentials of intelligence. It is no exaggeration to say that intelligence is the *prima mobile* of the work; that it articulates and diversifies itself on many different levels, assuming formats and processes no less specialized and diverse. Not only does intelligence address an astonishingly broad set of challenges and limits, often determining the degree of satisfaction and felicity in any historico-epistemological configuration that will be achieved. Its preeminent characteristic as outlined in the citation immediately above, is maintaining its flexibility in the processing of a bewilderingly daunting manifold of rules, rules whose interactions – mutual attenuation, or exacerbation, or suspension – are often more daunting than their specific strictures. It could well be argued that the trajectory of *Gödel, Escher, Bach* is to track the vicissitudes and transformations of intelligence as it addresses major conundrums in a range of sciences and arts, tackles technological challenges in different spheres (sound-reproduction, cybernetics), and accommodates itself to unprecedented media.

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<sup>10</sup> Hofstadter, *Gödel Escher, Bach*, pp. 26-27.

Juliet Flower MacCannell\*

## Refashioning *Jouissance* for the Age of the Imaginary

Almost a century ago (1919) famed American anthropologist A. L. Kroeber undertook a study of women's fashion using magazines from 1844 to the time of his writing. He was excited to learn, via objective measurements of skirt length and width, waist size, distance from model's mouth to hemline, et al., that fashions *always change*. He concluded that the fact of change proved our civilization was an actually existing "higher order" (a supra-individual realm he called the "Superorganic") – and that it was *alive*.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1: Edwardian to 1960s dress styles

Why does the opposite now hold sway? The clear patterns of fashion change that characterized the century Kroeber documented as well as the following one (the Edwardian to the Reagan eras) seem to have ground slowly to a halt. The decades since the 1990s show very few identifiable differences of the sort that distinguished the long slender dresses with diminutive waistlines and hobble skirts of the 1910s from the 1920s' short hemlines, flat chests and absent or

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<sup>1</sup> A. L. Kroeber, "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes in Fashion," *The American Anthropologist* New Series, 21, (3/Jul.-Sept. 1919), p. 260.

Changes let us see "what lies beyond ourselves as individuals": that "a succession of human beings have contributed to the same end":

That which touches and permeates our lives at all moments, which is the material on which our energies is released, which could not be if we did not exist, but which yet endures before and after, and grows and changes into forms that are not of its own making but of its own definite unfolding.

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lowered waistlines, and in turn distinguished these from the shoulder-padded women in suits of the 1930s, and then from the slim elegance of 1940s' dress that gave way to the rocket shaped bustlines of the 1950s, the swinging colorful patterns of the 1960s, etc.



Fig. 2: 1950s Bustlines

Arguably the result of globalization and international clothing chains, there are far fewer marked *departures* in clothing styles since the 1990s than those accompanying the mass industrialization of the previous decades. Hairstyles show more variation than clothing styles: since the 1990s, often it is only men's facial hair that provides clues to pinpointing the era of a photograph.<sup>2</sup>

The real uniformity in dress style these days, and on a global scale demands that we ask, "What does this indicate about the nature of society today?" As young students in Europe in the 1960s, my friends and I could usually identify

<sup>2</sup> Dan MacCannell, [Private communication] writes:

[T]he absence of distinctive styles is really [due to] the knowledge of postmodernism and Warhol's "pop will eat itself" for both designers and reviewers and (to an extent) consumers also. So since as early as 1992 [...] we have been seeing 1970s retro; then five years or so after that, they added in 1980s retro. These two things formed a big share of the market through the '90s to a point that I would be hard pressed to remember or identify any distinctively '90s look, other than by the way(s) it got the '70s and '80s wrong. By the mid-aughties, both '70s and '80s retro were still vaguely discernible but Monkees-esque late-'60s mod looks, which had risen and fallen as retro within the period 1986-'89, were back also. As of 2005, however, '80s retro was the strongest, at least in Britain and Scandinavia. [...] In short, fashion "innovation" now genuinely does seem to consist of deciding WHEN to reintroduce WHICH old look from WHICH decade 1920s-1980s.

The Spring 2016 Paris show was described in the news as drawing from the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

the country of origin of those visiting, say, the Louvre. That would be impossible now. The *Gap* style of casual dress (virtually unchanged since its introduction in the late 1960s) predominates among both locals and tourists in my home city of San Francisco: no matter where they hail from, even in the city center people wear exclusively casual-to-sloppy clothing, or dress down even further in trekker styles, sporting gear purchased from the *Gap*'s subsidiary *Banana Republic* or from more serious outfitters for hikers and campers. Standardization of style is found on every street of every city in the world: the upper image is a snapshot of tourists on Lombard Street in San Francisco; below, a Tommy Hilfiger advertisement –both absent gender differentiated clothing.

**Fig. 3:** Tourists in San Francisco (photo: Dean MacCannell) and Tommy Hilfiger advertisement 2015



Art historian Dan MacCannell suggests one possible economic motivation for this phenomenon:

The multi-generational unemployed, for their part, now wear “sportswear” that ALSO changed little from the mid 1970s onward, i.e., sweatsuits with brand logos, mostly so that whether used or new there is minimal stylistic differentiation.

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(Homeless people used to forage for jogging suits so they could blend in more easily on our streets.)

Indeed, the *New York Times*'s generally astute film critic A. O. Scott was recently puzzled by Noah Baumbach's 2014 film *While We're Young*, which features a financially successful older couple who befriends and gradually starts to imitate a less well off younger couple who cheerfully make do with old thrift shop items and out-of-style clothing. The older man finds himself unexpectedly sporting “a

narrow-brimmed fedora” – popular in the 60s, the fedora went out of fashion by the 70s, was brought back as “retro” in the 80s, went out of fashion again, but is now a favorite for thrift store shoppers.<sup>3</sup>



**Fig. 4:** Adam Driver and Ben Stiller wearing matching fedoras in *While We're Young*

Financial considerations are not, however, the only factor in the homogenization of our dress. I recently saw the Saudi Arabian film *Wadjda*, which features a young girl from a middle class family who, whenever she is in the street or at school, conforms to the covered dress (the hijab and later the abayah) demand-



**Fig. 5:** A: Wajda in street dress B: Wajda at home (stills from the 2012 film *Wadjda*)

<sup>3</sup> A. O. Scott, “A Wry Coupling of Gen X and Y,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2015, p. C1.

ed by her religion. But at home she wears a Tee-shirt with a cheeky logo, jeans and sneakers – our new universal uniform.

While the hijab, niqab and burka remain the most identifiably “different,” non-universal and culture-bound traditional styles of dress for women world-wide these days, they are also fodder for High Fashion:

**Fig. 6:** Fashion maven Isabella Blow's own “burka” (still from 2015 film *The Year in Fashion*)



As Europe and America begin imposing new bans on traditional Muslim women’s clothing (for reasons of “national security” or “preserving democratic secularism”) their style is just fresh material for High Fashion, marking its refusal to follow social dictates and norms. Of course, designers have always looked for inspiration anywhere and everywhere – in nature, in other arts like mural art (Prada), hip hop (Rick Owens) or even Lacanian “theory” (the letters of the body in Marc Jacobs’ final collection for Vuitton):



**Fig. 7:** Marc Jacob, final collection 2014  
(still from 2015 film *The Year in Fashion*)

Bergdorf Goodman window displays even featured mannequins wearing high-priced “bag lady” outfits in the early 1980s as homelessness first hit the news. But once everyone’s street wear came to resemble the homeless, this trend quickly faded. There is diversity here, but not difference of the kind that marks an era as distinctive and there is no change over time.

As High Fashion distances itself from the everyday, however, fashion writers strain to make it responsible for the “big picture” – for evaluating the state of society today. Designers are charged with providing insight into the condition of our economy and our culture: Vanessa Freidman complains, for example, that Veronica Etre’s collection “did not attempt to address any larger questions of contemporary culture and as a result lacked a certain currency”.<sup>4</sup>

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Still, something fundamental has shifted in the *position* of High Fashion: it has lost its pre-eminence as supreme arbiter of dress; its exclusive power to create trends has largely vanished. Where once its original creations were avidly copied in less costly versions for wider consumption, High Fashion now operates on

<sup>4</sup> Vanessa Freidman, *The New York Times*, March 28, 2015, p. A 18.

**Fig. 8:** Hip hop inspired design by Rick Owens 2014 (still from 2015 film *The Year in Fashion*)



a rarefied plane, and ordinary people are no longer guided in what to wear by *imitating* High Fashion. Instead people *mirror what everyone else around them wears*.<sup>5</sup> The Internet column “On the Street” by the *New York Times*’ Bill Cunningham is written after he roams city streets to report on what people are wearing *right now*. His sightings of the “new” are confined to small details; for example, as spring arrives Cunningham notes, “On the fashion front, legs emerged

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<sup>5</sup> I called this *egomimesis* (MacCannell 1991). Mirroring “heals” the narcissistic wound inflicted on you by the “superior” mirror image.

and New Yorkers added a surprising color to their signature black-white-gray looks: chrome silver.”<sup>6</sup>

Big surprise! (Though hardly the same kind of surprise of the shocking pinks, psychedelic colorations and swooping patterns of the 1960s). Now we have a puritanical uniformity of color and pattern (black-white-gray), with certain small items like men’s socks, hats and sneakers exempted from this austerity: “Young men are pushing the style envelope with felt hats, winged sneakers [...] and embroidered shoulders.”<sup>7</sup>

If the authoritative voice of High Fashion has ceased to act the big O Other in our culture, this is perhaps appropriate for an age which claims to be at the “end of history” (Francis Fukuyama), for a society that declares “Society doesn’t exist” (Margaret Thatcher), and for an era that promises the end of want, with plenty for all: the so-called “post-scarcity condition” (Andrew Ross.) To make any case for restarting history, we would need to lay out the Reason (its universal logic) and the impasses of our current order, and begin configuring a different one (I will propose that this different or supplemental universal be the logic of the feminine, about which more later).

A quite particular Imaginary has configured our global order “at the end of history” as a stable, unchanging order intended to guarantee enjoyment for all: a world of universal satisfaction – or unlimited *jouissance*. So much, then for Kroeber’s thesis that regular departures in fashion prove that ours is a *living* civilization whose traditions are vibrant enough to birth change and innovation, like that enjoyed by the Native Americans he studied. As *art* (even high art, e.g. Erwin Blumenfeld)<sup>8</sup> High Fashion once indexed a realm of *change and desire for change in our societies*, now definitively displaced by the new imperative that everyone *be and have the same*.

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<sup>6</sup> Bill Cunningham, “Spring Unfurls,” “On the Street,” internet column, *The New York Times*, March 29, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, “Fashion-Forward Lads,” “On the Street,” internet column, *The New York Times*, January 25, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> See *The Man Who Shot Beautiful Women*, a biographical film about Erwin Blumenfeld, a Jewish-German artist turned art photographer who fled Hitler. In New York, Blumenfeld invented original scenarios and conventions for fashion shoots, distinguished by high artistry. Directed by Nick Watson; BBC 4 2013.



**Fig. 9:** Indistinguishable gender in these designs by Alexander Wang (magazine advertisement 2015)

### The Imaginary Social Order: As Foretold By Freud

What is really going to happen at the end of history? It will be a question of and for *jouissance* (and the logic or *Reason* supporting it): the paradox of our culture's impossible conjunction of images of fabulous accumulations of wealth with the stipulation of equal enjoyment for all. The deep logic of a social order that claims to put "*jouissance*" wordlessly and immediately at all our fingertips but in reality reserves it to the few is disturbing at best. Should we not attempt to imagine refashioning *jouissance* beyond the "end of history" to resolve this contradiction?

My first interrogation of the current universal is: *what* precisely is enjoyed in the post-historical order? To answer, I turn to Freud's *Group Psychology* (*SE XVIII*, 1922); and then to Lacan's late research on the social discourses in *Seminar XVII* (especially the discourse of capitalism), for which he makes extensive use of the *Group Psychology*; as well as his study of the *Imaginary* in *Seminar XXIII*.

Let's begin by recalling the new type of social group Freud analyzed (which he labeled "artificial") that was characterized by an *imaginary equality*. Its psychological underpinnings are highly relevant to the matter of *jouissance* today. Freud's 1922 *Group Psychology* uncovered the relation of *ego* to *group life* in modern society. He investigated this social group on the model of associations whose members are unrelated by blood, like the Army or the Church, and which was fast becoming the pattern for whole societies. Freud called them "artificial" but I prefer to call them "imaginary" for reasons I presently make clear. He established that a cardinal feature of the synthetic group is its founding imperative: to



*conformity and uniformity in looks and dress.*<sup>9</sup> “Everyone,” he notes, “must have the same and be the same” (*Ibid.* 120-21). Moreover, even *gender distinctions* are undesirable.<sup>10</sup> The *equality* that prevails in such groups is an equality neither of wealth nor of rights; it exists purely at the level of *visual images*; which is why there should be no visibly marked gender differences.

In his delineation of group psychology, Freud thus framed a startlingly original way of rethinking the structure of contemporary society: as a set of *autonomous individuals* bound to each other by *visible images* rather than by *abstract symbols* (e.g., language, law, religion, morality, art and ethics). His thesis is that image-based *social ties* bind *discrete egos* together into a *unified whole* through *mutually reflecting self-images*, and that those party to this mirroring are and must be *just like one another*.<sup>11</sup> Inter-ego conflict is muted by its deepest *commandment to conformity and uniformity, a uniformity required for access to full equality in the group*. Because it develops as a singular totality (a whole composed of individual egos acting as visual mirrors for each other) the group can call up the resources of *self-love* to ensure the attachment of each ego to every other in (and to) the social group.

Human society thus defined as a *commerce of images* appears to have major advantages in cohesiveness over societies formed through *symbolic exchange*. In reality, however, their uniformity is a two-edged sword. The pressure to conform to the ideal identity of the group in them is not unlike the often intense pressure one feels today to declare one’s identity politics, one’s belonging to an “identity group” even though this means one must yield on the many different identifications s/he is necessarily composed of in favor of one singular trait, generally defined visually (skin color or attire e.g.).<sup>12</sup> Extrapolated on a larger social scale the consequences are hardly benign.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, SE XVIII, 1922, p. 93ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141; Lacan says frankly that capitalism begins by “getting rid of sex” in *Télévision*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1974, p. 51.

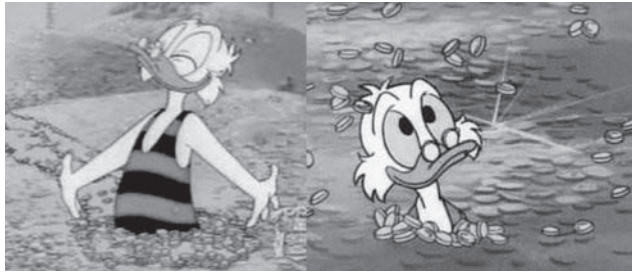
<sup>11</sup> He acknowledges Gabriel Tarde on imitation and Gustave Le Bon on “crowds,” but finds both limited in terms of the new group.

<sup>12</sup> Freud: “In the individual’s mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent [...]” – others the ego tries to deny. (Freud, 1922, p. 69).

When large, pluralistic nations attempt to take on a group psychology that excludes all people who deviate in *looks* from a single norm this is perhaps the most troubling political outcome of image-dominated identity politics. Anyone antagonistic to a particular “identity” group can mobilize the same image or trait to “prove” that its members deviate too far from a larger society’s ideal ego, its *imago*. They argue the whole society would be more homogeneous, more harmonious – without *those* people. (See the rhetoric of Donald Trump.)<sup>13</sup>

The chief *economic* corollary to a large social group ordered by images is an implied superiority of Western *capitalism* over other forms of economy. Capitalism is perhaps unique in its power to create the wealth of nations and individuals and, in theory; each person under its regime has an even chance of obtaining

**Fig. 10:** Disney’s Scrooge McDuck, swimming in his money



said wealth. And yet, acquiring wealth is not an attribute of 99% of those who live under late capitalism. Indeed, capitalism must continually seduce masses of people to espouse its economic ideology, which does not necessarily benefit them, with well-crafted images tying us libidinally to its discourse: images of a vast *wealth-available-to-all*. Recall the superabundant piles of money in Disney’s Scrooge McDuck, who is pictured swimming in his gold. Or the American television programs saturated with images of massive wealth (as depicted and classically represented in pop culture in the series, *Dallas*).<sup>14</sup> Or the advertise-

<sup>13</sup> France recently singled out the Roma for deportation and news outlets published front-page images of the gypsies’ shabby lifestyle and dark looks. Simultaneously, President Sarkozy launched a campaign to get his compatriots to define “Frenchness” by making checklists of “real” French attributes.

<sup>14</sup> Please see my discussion in “Lacan’s Imaginary: A Practical Guide,” in S. Tomsic and A. Zevnik, *Jacques Lacan Between Psychoanalysis and Politics*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York 2016, pp. 72-85.

ments in our leading newspapers that turn ordinary items like purses, watches, or shoes into ultra luxurious, exorbitantly expensive, unattainable fetishes – “luxury goods.” Hence the inordinate attention television and the internet pay to the lifestyles of the “rich and famous,” which has now borne political fruit – wealthy Donald Trump, reality television star, has become a serious political challenger for the presidency of the nation.

The more images of extreme wealth contradict the reality of people’s economic condition, the more they become attached to the concept of wealth. Why? Lacan once asked, “What is wealth?” and his response was a tautology: “Wealth is an attribute of the wealthy.” He then asked why those without wealth support the wealthy; he answered that they *identify with the wealthy* though they are so far from being like them.<sup>15</sup> Each person must feel convinced that the wealthy really are *just like you and me*.<sup>16</sup> Lest we forget that the *identification* that reconciles you to your abjection by submerging it in an empire of images has a notably dark history, as in Freud’s picture of the exploited plebeian in Ancient Rome:

No doubt one is a wretched plebeian, harassed by debts and military service; but to make up for it, one is a Roman citizen, one has one’s share in the task of ruling other nations and dictating their laws.<sup>17</sup>

Identification with wealth (as with the grandeur of empire) is destructive because the Imaginary it constructs ends by stifling Imagination: we lose the ability and the freedom to dream of alternative futures, contemplate different social arrangements, or devise economies not defined exclusively by wealth accumulation.<sup>18</sup>

### Symbolic To Imaginary Identification

The human subject is shaped, Lacan says, by the operation of language, the Symbolic par excellence. Language “carves a body out of animal substance,”

<sup>15</sup> Lacan, 2007, pp. 94-5.

<sup>16</sup> A common feature of American conservatives’ critiques of the poor is that they are insufficiently enamored of wealth, insufficiently identified with the affluence of the whole.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, SE XXI, 1927, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Money as symbolic is supposed to be external or objective measure of social worth (per Emmanuel Levinas), its *value* socially authenticated. Virtual money, e.g., Bitcoins, has no specific social symbolic contract; amassing it is all that counts.

and splits the *ego* into two parts, conscious and unconscious, forming the *subject*, divided by language: *the speaking being (parlêtre)*.<sup>19</sup> The conscious part follows the dictates of language and society, placing its passions (and aggressions) under the rule of the original *Symbolic* law: Oedipus, the “No” of the Father. The inhibiting Father will model your symbolic *identification* as an *ego-ideal*, anchored in your newly formed *unconscious*.

The subject’s *body* is also shaped by language, which “carves” away its simple animal pleasures and reshapes it as an erotic body, fashioned by fantasies of the lost *jouissance* that return to stamp themselves upon it: Lacan’s “letters of the body.” (These phantoms settle mainly in the genitals, though not exclusively so, e.g., the feminine and the perverse versus the masculine body.) Henceforward, organized by a *linguistic logic* that supersedes *organic logic*, the individual’s *body* is reordered as the fantasmatically eroticized body, *a body without organs*.<sup>20</sup> Though it has suffered the *loss* of direct satisfactions, this loss is a *gain* for culture, civilization and the *Symbolic*: after all, Freud says the amputation of animal satisfaction drives us to strive to *work* – to fill in for its loss, *sublimate* it, and imagine other ways of finding pleasure.<sup>21</sup>

This is how *art* is born – and *desire*: Oedipal desire; *symbolic desire* or *jouissance*, deferred. Like language, which always promises a meaning it can never finally deliver, desire promises a satisfaction that it is itself instrumental in deferring. After all, Lacan characterized the dominion of the *symbol* as developing from its power to insert *productive voids* into the *real* of one’s anatomical body.<sup>22</sup>

For Freud, the original basis of humanity’s life in common (civilization, society) is also a void, an inescapable *lack*. *Everything held in common is nothing – except for what each subject has yielded claim to for itself*. The entirety of one’s relation to others is structured by the *recognition of mutual lack* – we can see that the other’s lack is the same as one’s own. From religion as sacrifice to love, what counts in *Symbolic* order is that each person offers the other precisely *what they*

<sup>19</sup> Lacan 1974, p. 16; 1977, p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus*, Continuum, New York and London 1977.

<sup>21</sup> Freud, *SE VII*: p. 168.

<sup>22</sup> MacCannell, “The Abyss of Mind and Matter: Sexuality on Edge,” in *Erogene Gefahrenen Zonen: Aktuelle Produktionen des (infantile) Sexuellen*, ed. Insa Härtel, Kulturverlag Kadmos, Berlin 2013, pp. 73-89.

*do not have*: their nothing, their desire, their want.<sup>23</sup> In a Symbolic Order, under Oedipus, identification is based on this recognition of a want held in common. While the individual may secretly harbor lingering resentment against sacrificing enjoyments to the collective, in the main it realizes the value of a social order that recognizes this shared lack and strives to mitigate it.

The fundamental definition of *Symbolic equality* then is not that everyone enjoys the same things, but that *no one fully enjoys*. The constitutive void at the heart of the Symbolic is precisely what grants its social order a crucial *openness to change, to creating meaning, to becoming rather than being*, and prevents the entropy inherent in total satisfaction (the entropy of death drive). Hostility to the other persists in the unconscious: a knot ties abstract symbols of mutual lack/desire to the illicit and hostile passions and hostility preserved in unconscious *fantasies of enjoying what one has sacrificed to the Symbolic social contract*. This resentment largely stays under control and with good reason: the Symbolic/Oedipal order bans certain enjoyments not only for the sake of the whole society but for the sake of its individual subjects: complete satisfaction is literally unbearable, impossible for any speaking being, the *parlêtre*.

Compare this with Freud's discovery that image-based group psychology has a different psychological foundation from the constitution of our earliest human psychology (our impulse to work in concert, to profit from a collective force against nature). The group-to-ego relation in the imaginary structure is not that of symbolic desire as a mutual lack, but the repression of a primordial *envy* among siblings in the nursery. Each child rivals the others for its parents' love and affection, and each imagines that one or another of them, especially a newborn, is getting more than their fair share. The envy gets masked when the harmony and unity of the family is imposed over it via an idealized love of all for all:

What appears later on in society in the shape of *Gemeingeist*, *esprit de corps*, "group spirit," etc., does not belie its derivation from what was originally envy. No one must want to put himself forward, everyone must be the same and have the same. Social Justice means that we deny ourselves many things so that others may have to do without them as well [...]. Thus social feeling is based upon the

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<sup>23</sup> Freud, 1927, p. 6.

reversal of what was first a hostile feeling into a positively-toned tie in the nature of identification.<sup>24</sup>

Freud illustrates, using the description of a group of girls who surround a crooner they idolize and who are all united in their “love” for him – until he happens to single one out for special attention, perhaps the one among them wearing a form-fitting red dress. Then the hair pulling begins.<sup>25</sup>

Lacan placed the origin of inter-ego rivalry further back than the conflicts in the nursery, in the first glimpse the child has of its own reflection. In the pre-social “mirror stage” the infant assumes the other in the mirror *is superior to it* due to its completeness as an image – a wholeness the infant feels it itself lacks. It infers the mirror-other must have deprived it of its own full-bodied *jouissance*. Mitigation of this hostility follows upon the infant’s coming to language, where the Symbolic’s big Other inducts the child into the laws of society and justice.

In the Imaginary, by contrast with the Symbolic, complete satisfaction is not only presumed possible but no longer needs to be sacrificed for the sake of the collectivity: indeed, “*Jouissance for all*” could be its slogan. Imaginary identification fashions the solidarity of the whole society on the basis of a faith in the equal enjoyment of all, a belief that creates the condition for an equal love of all for all within the whole without distinctions.

Except for One. Freud: “Do not let us forget, however, that the demand for equality in a group applies only to its members and not to the leader. All the members must be equal to one another, but they all want to be ruled by one person” (*GP* 121). Proof for this lies in the fact that even wealthy and powerful political leaders try to look like, and posture like ordinary people. (Old wealth hid itself, because it knew it was different. Now Trump can flaunt it saying in effect, “I’m doing exactly what you would do if you were me.”) We can question whether in the largest societies if this “Leader” – this “one person” who rules – is an actual *person* any longer: does not *wealth itself* reign supreme today? Everyone loves money equally, and money always commands our social order.

<sup>24</sup> Freud, 1922, pp. 120-121.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

A postmodern society that claims the capacity for full and equal enjoyment – but not full employment – must be based on the universal identification of all with all, with no need either for *desire* (mutual want) or for *art* (with its partial, sublimated) *jouissance*. To assert the absolute *equality of enjoyment* today for everyone surely masks the deepest real inequality, and is patently ridiculous extended in the absence of a group psychology and obligatory imaginary identification. Still, this particular kind of Imaginary looms over us today and informs so much of our thinking that it is clear we must begin to take the consequences of its distinctive mode of identification very seriously.

### What harm a society of the imaginary?

Ours has historically been a terrible experience of a politics of the Imaginary, with manipulations of visual images (of race and religion) used to stir conflict, war, persecutions and genocides (see Nazi propaganda films against Jews). Still many people have been and remain optimistic about the flip side of group psychology: its alleged harmony. Indeed, after World War II, thinkers and planners firmly believed that creating small *societies of likes* (called “garden cities” or “suburbs”) would generate greater cohesion – and prevent more conflicts – than traditional societies ever had.<sup>26</sup> They designed living groups for economic, ethnic and religious homogeneity, claiming that only such standardization could prevent interpersonal, economic, and religious strife.

But trying to solve social antagonism by using matched *individuals* as the basic building blocks of a social group with which each must identify is highly questionable. While group psychology provisionally quiets inter-ego antagonisms, according to Freud, it never eradicates it: groups formed through ego identification with their group are always hostile to other groups.<sup>27</sup> If we assume that any large scale social order can ever be achieved on an Imaginary basis (Nazi Germany came close) then every sub-group based on their own internal imaginary identifications will be inherently and adamantly hostile to the whole – and the

<sup>26</sup> Chief New York city planner Charles Abrams demurred from this notion when he criticized the Nineteenth International Conference for Housing and Town Planning held in 1948, Zurich, Switzerland, and attended by delegates of 30 countries: Charles Abrams, “Human Relations in City Planning,” *Third Session of the Chicago Conference on Civic Unity*, 1949, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> Lacan demonstrated that the ego is born in an originary narcissism: in *hostility* to the other at the very moment of its inception in the mirror: See MacCannell 2016, pp. 72-3.

whole “establishment” composed of these sub-groups will find the very mechanism that holds it together will cause it to fly apart.

So what creates the unity and solidarity of the group psychology Freud discovers? The following diagram explains:

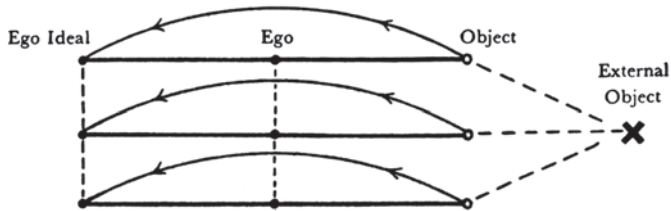


Fig. 11: Group psychology and the analysis of the Ego<sup>28</sup>

For each ego tied together with each other here, its paternal *ego-ideal* (the “Symbolic Father” anchored in the unconscious) is replaced by an *ideal ego*: an external *visual object* that unites all egos in their love for it. The image-object fuses everyone’s *ideal ego* with that of all the others through *identification with the Leader’s* visual image. Through their love, all *identify* “themselves with one another in their ego.”<sup>29</sup> The focus for all is the sole exception to the rule of equal *jouissance*: the Leader. The *symbol*, neither a *having* nor a *being*, meets its dialectical antithesis in this *image-object*, which asserts we can all *have* (the object) and *be* (the object) at the same time – not *despite*, but *because* of our social commitment, our tie to the whole which in group psychology becomes just a flat mirroring of all by all.

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This is the real appeal of Imaginary society: if an *undivided individual ego* is the foundation of a *social order built by identification*, that means the Oedipally split ego is healed, made whole, with no further need to sacrifice its *jouissance* to the collective. The *ego not split by language* is not subject to symbolic commandments. The *undivided ego* is also the necessary basis of imaginary *equality*:

<sup>28</sup> Freud, 1921, *Group Psychology*, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



“Every one must be the same and have the same.”<sup>30</sup> If the other is *you*, the very same as you – same value, same being – then no language or metaphor is needed to bridge the inalterable gap between you and me, no necessary *symbolic* passage from one to an other.

The problem with a society based on set of like individuals however, is that their egos exist as “undivided” only by virtue of their *inclusion within the whole*, a bounded totality whose oneness and singularity mirrors and sustains it. Only the One can support a multitude of ones. *Identification with the whole* is both required and assured by the fact that society itself is one whole and every individual is at one with this whole which is the sum total of *jouissance* itself. The potential for oppressive conformity means a real, radical excision of differences.

### (Un)Limited *Jouissance*

Slavoj Žižek has described our era as that of the *obscene or sadistic superego*, in which an “anything goes” mentality (of “*Jouissance* for all,” as I put it) combines with intensifying self-imposed regulations against (guilty) pleasures (e.g., the various fads for “giving up” eating sugar, fat or meat and now gluten).<sup>31</sup> The drawback to Žižek’s approach is that it is very insightful at the level of *individual psychology* but does not address corresponding alterations in the constitution of *society* itself – material changes in what Lacan called *discourses* or varying *forms of the social tie*.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Oedipus, desire, and symbolic social ties no longer seem to compel us subjectively indicates less the reign of the Superego than the rise of the *Imaginary* which now has the power to determine what only the *Symbolic* once determined: the shape of *society itself*.

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All societies promise individuals a measure of satisfaction for forbidden wishes – otherwise that portion of us which is “enemy” to civilization would have long since prevailed. Lacan knew that desire, lack, unfulfilled longing – all these still rest on the primal passions originally installed (and “fulfilled” fantasmatically)

<sup>30</sup> Freud, 1921, *Group Psychology*, pp. 120-21.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Freud thought the superego a benign voice of moral conscience; her rival Lacan found it pernicious, hostile “extimate” Other. Freud notes the same in *The Ego and the Id*, SE XIX, 1923, pp. 54-5.

<sup>32</sup> He develops the theory of social ties – of the *discourses* – systematically in *Seminar XVII*, 1969-70 and in *Seminar XX* which shows his algorithms in final form.

in the unconscious. Those primal passions require some satisfaction – for as Freud once put it, these drives emerge from a hellish unconscious as shades that must be fed with blood. *Art* has been the main avenue for simulating the satisfaction of our unspeakable drives – sublimation.

Where drive satisfaction is not strongly proscribed, however, sublimation is ineffective. In the post-Symbolic what was once consigned to the unconscious rises to the surface. Recall the 1960s slogan, “Just *do it!*” Nonetheless, Imaginary society can no more dispense with sublimation than Symbolic society can: no society can exist without limits on the enjoyment of all by all.<sup>33</sup> But where exactly does that limit exist within the field of Imaginary plenitude?

Lacan discovered the locus of sublimated satisfaction in the Imaginary group in the *objects* that *promise complete enjoyment* (“Satisfaction guaranteed,” blockbuster action movies, video games). If simulating drive-satisfaction was once the province of great writers, talented dramatists, and outstanding artists, today we have automated the production of image-objects simulating the satisfactions of the most forbidden drives. (Some of today’s video games consist of killing and counting up the victims, with no story line on the reason for killing.) The difference from Symbolic sublimation is not of kind, but of degree: Lacan calls its avatars *jouissances en toc*, counterfeit enjoyments, mock fulfilments.<sup>34</sup>

Already in 1969 Lacan predicted that such *jouissances en toc* (fake, simulated enjoyments) would shortly become embedded in the kind of little gadgets (*lathouses*) just beginning to appear in our *aléthosphère* (*world picture*).<sup>35</sup> Note, please, that Lacan predicted this well before the deluge of *i-objects* now flooding over us: iPods, iPhones, iPads, etc. He deduced them logically from the image/egocentrism that he, like Freud, found to be the basis of our imaginary society today. The true function of such *jouissance en toc* was to reassure us, through an overwhelming proliferation and accumulation of gadgets, that our drives are fully satisfiable and under the control of an ego secure in its wholeness, unity, and mastery.

<sup>33</sup> Lacan, 1989, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Lacan 2007, p. 95 ff; MacCannell, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-1970, W. W. Norton & Company, 2007 188.

At first, when he looked into our new social reality, a realm of simulated fantasies and of total *jouissance*,<sup>36</sup> shaped by the imaginary process that originally fashioned our egos, he still believed that psychoanalysis could counter its fantasies with the signifier: fantasies could never survive being spoken, he wrote.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps he should have considered the possibility that they might, however, persist by being *worn*.

### Sexual Difference Encore

Lacan first turned directly to the Imaginary to question in depth our basic *models for jouissance* in his brilliant *Seminar XX*. Here he began to formulate two differing *logical* universals (as distinct from biological ones) that can be drawn from the way our bodies, fashioned by language and the ghost of lost *jouissance*, are identified as masculine and feminine in logic. The *masculine* side's logic, extrapolated universally, is that "all are castrated by the signifier": all *want*, none can access unsublimated *jouissance* – except for One. The sole exception to universal castration he termed *le père jouissant*. The logic of the *feminine* side's relation to *jouissance* is nuanced differently: it is that "everyone is castrated by the signifier" – except for *some*. Not all are submitted to the deprivation of *jouissance* but there is no single One who alone enjoys unchecked as in masculinity's universal.

That One is Freud's exceptional "person," the Leader who alone is permitted to be *unequal*: "All the members must be equal to one another, but they all want to be ruled by one person."<sup>38</sup> If everyone else is castrated, and lacking, in this context it is not a symbolic sacrifice, but an imaginary version of "social justice": "[It] means that we deny ourselves many things so that others may have to do without them as well."

<sup>36</sup> Using Freud's group psychology, focused on the "revolution" (a quarter turn) in discourse from Mastery to University (*Seminar XVII* 2007). University discourse puts  $S_2$  (*the sum total, or treasury of knowledge*) in the dominant position, making it parallel to the dominant of accumulated wealth in the discourse of capitalism. (See MacCannell, "More Thoughts for the Time on War and Death: The Discourse of Capitalism in Lacan's *Seminar XVII*," in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J. Clemens and R. Grigg, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2006, pp. 202-3.

<sup>37</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 1959-1960, Norton, New York 1992, p. 80.

<sup>38</sup> Freud, 1922, p. 121.

The masculine universal, like group psychology means that the One can become *the sum total of all available jouissance*.<sup>39</sup> We witness today how the 1% enjoys virtually all the money while the 99% are left with little or nothing – that 1% is clearly parallel to the “exception” Lacan points out as the privileged One. At the very least such truly massive universal inequality has to have developed from a one-sided imaginary logic, with no alternative model at play: in this case the feminine universal is strikingly absent.

What are the real consequences of doing away with sexual difference (as I have illustrated in the case of fashion) for society today? In a 1970 interview, published as *Télévision*, Lacan says directly that capitalism begins *by getting rid of sex*.<sup>40</sup> This is not an idle claim: it makes clear that capitalism requires a new relation to the object of satisfaction, and that the “artificial” groups that proliferate under its universal aegis are part and parcel with it. Structured as it is around the immense accumulation of commodities and the amassing of enormous surplus satisfac-

**Fig. 12:** Model with holographic belt that resizes the model's waist (Dutch designer Iris van Herpen NYT)



<sup>39</sup> MacCannell, 2006, pp. 202-03.

<sup>40</sup> Lacan, 1974, p. 51.

tions, the whole of society must embody all the profit, the excess, and the waste socially produced by us, without the interference of desires for anything else.

The fate of the body in women's fashion offers an extreme example: while clear distinctions in dress between the genders have all but disappeared in everyday life, we should note that women's bodies *as such* have largely disappeared from High Fashion as well. Traditional feminine shape is now admitted only if purely reconfigured by the Imaginary, and not by its logical (sexual) constitution by the signifier. This Iris van Herpen outfit features a holographic belt that drastically reduces the model's waistline:

Apparently, "woman's" accession to "equality" in the new order has meant the loss of *her specific body*. What does such gender equity at the Imaginary level really signify?

Public efforts to acknowledge women specifically while trying to adhere to the "equality" imperative display a telling ambivalence. During early 2015, fashion analysts wrote: "Follow the Leaders: Women in power were the backdrop as designers showed updates tailored to contemporary visions of strength and



**Fig. 13:** Maison Margiela, 2015 caption: Model as sad Clown; Yves Saint Laurent, 2015: [caption woman as hobo or assault victim?]

authority.”<sup>41</sup> The following week the same fashion section featured designs in which female models show the very opposite of strength and authority. On the left: hobo or clown? On the right: victim of assault?

What better proof of the difficult acknowledgment of women and their bodies today than the many anorexic young girls now vanishing themselves by starvation? Analysts attribute the mania for becoming ever-thinner to their imitating emaciated fashion models; indeed, France is considering laws against underweight models (in 2010, model-actress Isabelle Caro died of malnutrition – she weighed just 53 pounds), and against internet sites that promote anorexia.<sup>42</sup> As the lawmakers’ searched for a solution to the vogue for anorexia, French psychiatrist Marcel Rufo remained unsure that this was the heart of the problem (“he believed the public was searching for an explanation for children’s pursuit of thinness: [...]. So, one designates fashion as to blame, but I believe it is much more complicated than that.”<sup>43</sup>

Are the French girls (like many in other Western societies) really copying the hollow-eyed, disheveled, skin-and-bones runway models as they seek ever-thinner bodies? Or is some *hidden imperative at play* that none is able to resist falling victim to – an imperative that the fashion models were the first to articulate?

There is something deeply ominous at work in girls’ obsessive thinning of their bodies: theirs is surely an effort to *fit in* to a world that refuses their actual bodies any cultural accommodation. In a social order whose fundamental false consciousness is that of “equality,” these young girls are seeing no room, no *place* for them in their feminine specificity; they are extrapolating from experience that neither the street nor High Fashion presents anything with a *specifically feminine* form – or even a *female body* as such.

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Some might believe that the cultural development away from marking any visible difference between male and female bodies is progress – liberating for women weary of being objectified by a male gaze. Perhaps. But the undeniable exci-

<sup>41</sup> *The New York Times*, July 3, 2015, p. A17.

<sup>42</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, “French Bill on Anorexia and Models Passes a Test,” *New York Times*, April 4, 2015, p. A4.

<sup>43</sup> Rubin, “French Debate Setting Weight Standards for Models,” *The New York Times* March 19, 2015, p. A6.

sion of the feminine body may be due less to a demand for equality than to an unconscious demand for its cultural eradication. A recent essay in the *New York Times* reported on a major survey that found three-quarters of adolescent girls today are disturbed, mortified or horrified by their development of breasts. This prompts a great many to drop out of participation in sports and gym classes: “I was taking taekwondo, and I would look in the big mirror and try to find ways to cover myself up and hide,” says Andria Castillo, a junior in high school, “I felt boys and girls were making fun of me.”<sup>44</sup> The researchers’ attempt to explain the cause as “discomfort with their brassieres” is really quite pathetic: school girls have participated in physical education and in sports for more than a century, without special sports bras, or similar psychological horror of their breasts.

Gender equality at the level of the image may turn out to be one of the more sinister parts of emancipation from Oedipal civilization; indeed, if it really marks the triumph of the masculine universal, as I am suggesting, its evil cannot be overstated.<sup>45</sup>

Returning to Lacan’s model of sexuation, we find that the *other* universal is all but invisible these days, too. The widespread acquiescence to the capture of all wealth by the few, despite strong public and political protests against it, would not be possible in the feminine universal: if “Not all” are castrated, and not all of one’s own body is under the command of the signifier then there can be no One to have it all. When I detailed the structure of group psychology above, based on the ego, I said that its utopian goal was “equal enjoyment for all.” Recall that the psyche’s original model for *jouissance* was the infant’s encounter with “the big Other” of the mirror, which seemed the quintessence of full-bodied *jouissance*. We can now understand that the archetype of that *jouissance*, of that complete enjoyment is fully on the masculine side of the logic of sexuation: its fundamental model of satisfaction – *phallic jouissance* – is “detumescence,” the organ gratification of masturbation, which Lacan call “*la jouissance de l’idiot*”

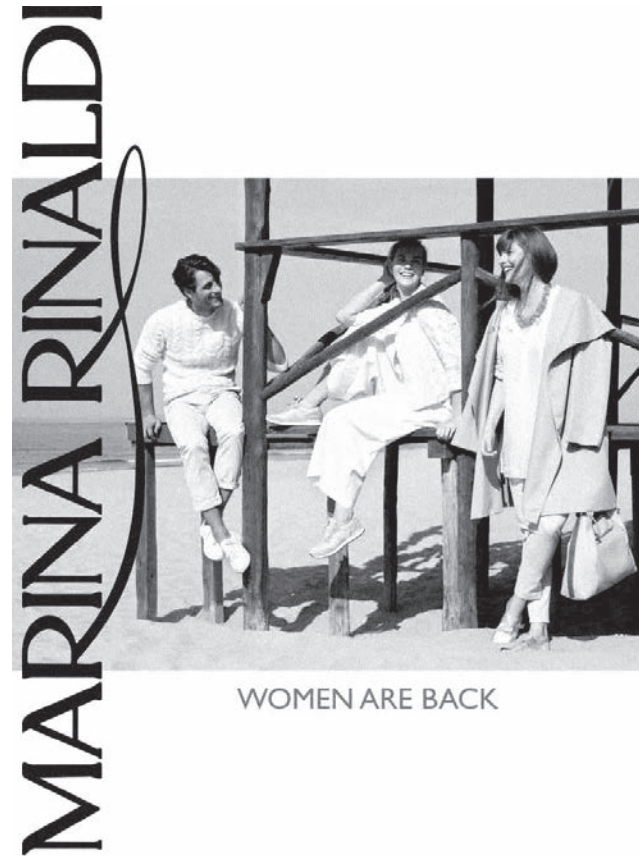
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<sup>44</sup> Jan Hoffman, “Sidelined by Adolescence” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2016, p. D5.

<sup>45</sup> In the 1960s, men were briefly as free in public as women to dress in flamboyant patterns and colors. Such free-play is now partially granted to men: “Torn trousers have been around for decades, but they now have embroidery, stencils or a dozen miniature pockets.” Cunningham, January 25, 2015.

(*Seminar XVII*).<sup>46</sup> To be fair, *Fashionistas* do periodically proclaim, “Women are Back!”

**Fig. 14:** Marina Rinaldi, 2014 [caption: Fashionistas proclaim, “Women are Back!”]



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But they systematically belie their own rhetoric: here Marina Rinaldi models her oversized outfits that completely hide any anatomical differences from men (one of whom, in the same picture, is dressed almost exactly like the women, who are themselves dressed in clothing derivative of traditional men’s styling).

<sup>46</sup> In *Seminar XIV*, 1967 Lacan says that the true source of the big Other is what we are originally alienated from: our own *body*. *Seminar XIV. The Logic of the Phantasy*, 1966-1967, session of May 24, 1967, pp. 219 ff. [Cormac Gallagher translation, unpublished.]



In other fashion images female models are hard to distinguish from the wallpaper patterns behind them:



**Fig. 15:** Stella McCartney, 2014 [caption: Women as wallpaper]

Still others hide their models' faces under long hair – which would have defeated Kroeber's measuring efforts:



**Fig. 16:** Vera Wang, 2014, Chloé, 2014 [caption: these models are faceless...]

Feminists will wish to argue that gender equality in dress is a major advance: they can boast of successfully blocking the male gaze. Yet do we not need to ask a few harder questions here? The unmistakably female body shape has yielded to one virtually indistinguishable from that of the young boy. And yet the age-

old (male) habit of undressing women with their eyes has hardly gone away; now it is simply shared by everyone. The body we all now look for is not the sexual one, but the carefully muscled and toned body. Men once looked for the body under the clothes while women looked for the drape of the fabric that artfully covered or revealed it, but both now look for the sculpting of a muscle beneath the clothes. A former model turned actress is described this way:

To keep her weight at a svelte 130 pounds, she stays fit with a rigorous stretching and strengthening routine (her firm body tone is evident when compared to photos of her earlier modelling, where she was very slim but not toned).<sup>47</sup>

If women *as such* have largely disappeared as a *specific difference* in the world of fashion, we need to ask not, “*Where* is her body?” but “*Why* has it disappeared so completely?”

**Fig. 17:** *Sports Illustrated* Model Robyn Lawley, 2015; Beyoncé at the White House [caption: Uproar over Lawley’s size (12) and Beyoncé’s curvaceousness]



Whenever a clearly female body makes its modest appearance, uproar ensues: parents complain that pictures of full bodied Beyoncé from a White House party

<sup>47</sup> <http://m.imdb.com/name/nm0005381/bio> <accessed 25 October, 2016>.

<sup>48</sup> *Sports Illustrated* model Robyn Lawley, 2015.

should not have been put online where they might be viewed by children; a size twelve model in the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue recently provoked a huge, and slightly unfathomable, outcry. Feminists have long complained about women's bodies subjected to the male gaze, but they expressed even greater outrage when it was a young woman with an unmistakably feminine shape that was put on display. So long as the models look like young boys, not even feminists mind too much; they grumble, but they only strongly protest against a body that is all too identifiably female.

## Encore

The “getting rid of sex” that Lacan points to as the originating point of capitalism only seems to have tried to submerge sexual difference by cutting off one side – the feminine. The result is that (in keeping with the Imaginary) there is no need for or grounds for any *desire* for something else – which Lacan once said was *the* fundamental desire. All you need is delivered and “satisfied” by images. Proof is found in the fashion show recently mounted by Rick Owens, in which his designs had peek-a-boo holes and slits that permitted the viewers to see the male organ beneath. It was intended to be as shocking as most of his other shows. But to me it denoted precisely the very *detumescence* that signals full satisfaction – of the male. No desire here, just satisfaction.

Alison Bancroft writes, “According to Mr Owens himself, the models were carefully cast according to height and proportions so that neither too much or too little of their member was on display.”<sup>49</sup>

While Dr. Bancroft sees this group of runway models as transformative for masculine identity, I would beg to differ. We must be very cautious when we trumpet the absence of desire. In his *Seminar VII*, Lacan noted the following about getting rid of desire:

What is Alexander's proclamation when he arrived in Persepolis or Hitler's when he arrived in Paris? The preamble isn't important: “I have come to liberate you

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<sup>49</sup> Alison Bancroft, “Masculinity, Masquerade and Display: Some thoughts on Rick Owens's Sphinx Collection and men on runways in general.” *alisonbancroft.com* accessed June 5, 2015.

from this or that.” The essential point is “Carry on working, work must go on.” Which, of course means: “let it be clear to everyone that this is on no account the moment to express the least surge of desire.” The morality of power, of the service of goods is as follows: “as far as desires are concerned, come back later, make them wait.”<sup>50</sup>

**Fig. 18:** Rick Owens Sphinx Collection, 2015 [caption: Photograph: kollektivnoir/Instagram/Instamr. What better indicator of the absence of desire and of satisfied masculine *jouissance* than this peek-a-boo display of the detumescent male organ? Right: Dice.com billboard in San Francisco 2015



When the male does seek an object of enjoyment beyond his own body, the quest remains on a male model: the phallic woman. In contemporary fashion that “object” is now made quite openly into an imitation male body, with swimsuit models who must look more like young boys than full-bodied women.

### Fantasies Of Egalitarianism

We already know what the fantasy images of “egalitarianism” shaped by the masculine universal look like: images of “equal enjoyment” for all meaning actual misery for all except the One who alone fully enjoys.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, our concrete experience of the “One” with the unlimited *jouissance* is not even a person, a leader or a father, but *accumulated wealth* itself: “only money talks.” Theoretically, of course, this *wealth/jouissance* could be divided equally among the all members of the society – the postmodern thesis, a la Andrew Ross, of plenty for everyone. In reality, however, schemes to “redistribute the wealth” always seem to be confounded by the same primordial *envy* that originally structured group

<sup>50</sup> Lacan, 1992, p. 315.

<sup>51</sup> In the male body this structure is “phallic”: the fantasy of *jouissance* is centered in the genitals. In the feminine, however, sites for *jouissance* are widespread over her whole body – the case also for the pervert.

psychology to begin with: the envy that demands each of you give up your enjoyment so that not one of your fellows, your equals, can lay claim to any either.

Where are the images of a *jouissance* that proceed from the *feminine* side of sexualisation? Where are there images coming from that feminine body which is never wholly under the command of the signifier, the body which is “not all” deprived of *jouissance*? This very body has been elided to the point of disappearance under (masculine) fantasies of “equal enjoyment.” What kind of social order might the feminine universal shape?

It is time for us to try this alternative, feminine model for *jouissance* in our age of the Imaginary. We cannot turn back the clock to Oedipus, for the Imaginary has always remained latent within it and it is now the established order. But countless efforts by social and cultural analysts and feminists and psychoanalytic thinkers to try to think their way through to this have not broken through the pre-eminence of the masculine. Rather, it is artists who have made the greatest advances: Marguerite Duras, Sophie Calle, Margaret Atwood, Hélène Cixous, Maya Angelou, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, but not only woman artists – for I include James Joyce (not a known feminist), Stendhal and Kleist as well.

Let us look, then to the *artists*, to those who can dream of *something else*, who can grasp the crucial need for *new images* to reshape our ideas about society today. Like French artist Sophie Calle who has never sacrificed an ounce of her femininity and who has offered us through it some of the most profound re-conceptions of society seen today.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

The most crucial and incisive critiques of capitalist culture and the so-called “Society of the Spectacle” are not to be found in replications of the Frankfurt School or endless reiterations of Foucault’s theory of discursive practices. They emerge from studying closely Freud’s *Group Psychology* and after it, Lacan’s late

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<sup>52</sup> Sophie Calle’s magnificent installation, *The Eruv of Jerusalem* is one example. She interviews an equal number of Israelis and Palestinians about what sites in the city are special to them, discovering that each site is shared by both. See MacCannell 2004, and MacCannell 2012.

seminars, starting from *Seminar XVII (L'envers du psychanalyse)*. In that seminar Lacan pursued an in depth study of Freud's text and found it supplied him with the fundamentals of the psychology of capitalism – and of the strongest protest against it, the discourse of hysteria. In *Seminar XX* Lacan began taking woman very seriously, well beyond her initial role in theory as object of male desire. (He also went well beyond Freud's concepts of an envy-riddled femininity and a hysteria Freud largely used to characterize "woman"). In the figure of the feminine, Lacan finds the *other* "other" side of the discourse of capitalism by laying bare the logic of sexuation (the masculine and feminine models of castration). He steers well clear of claiming any symmetry or balance (or yin/yang) between their two universals: Equivalence of masculine/feminine is a fundamental fantasy Lacan already deconstructed in *Seminar XIV, La Logique du Phantasme*.

It is only, I think, that in *Seminar XXIII (The Imaginary)*, Lacan weaves his insights together to produce what a completely new model for creativity and for the ego, a model with the power to revolutionize Oedipal and capitalist discourse both – as I show in my recent essay on the open ego.<sup>53</sup> At the urging of his assistant, playwright H  l  ne Cixous, Lacan undertakes a study of the language of James Joyce. From Joyce, Lacan discovers the operation of a variant of language – *lalangue* – which does not expel *jouissance* and relegate it to the unconscious, but instead allows it to flow freely through its words. *Lalangue* is based not on the *signifier* but on what Lacan names the *sinthome*. Tsvetan Todorov and Barthes both argued that language without a literature to contest its domination is unbearably repressive (Barthes: "Language is quite simply, fascist"). Lacan determines a way out from under the regime of language without doing away with its chief rival, literary art.

It is from Joyce, too, that Lacan framed a new model for the ego<sup>54</sup> that completely overturns the longstanding psychoanalytic conception of the ego-as-bulwark against the unconscious and its drives, in favor of an ego that is *open* to all experience.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> MacCannell, "The Open Ego: Joyce, Woolf, and the 'Mad' Subject," in M. Steinkoler and P. Gherovici, eds., *Lacan and Madness: Madness, Yes You Can't*, Routledge, New York 2015, pp. 205-218.

<sup>54</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XXIII Le Sinthome*, 1975-76, Seuil, Paris 2014, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> MacCannell, 2015, pp. 215-16.

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Julian Murphet\*

## Rosa Plus Emma: Political Pleasure and the Enjoyment of Reason

“With the decline of the ego and its reflexive reason,” wrote Horkheimer in 1941, “human relationships tend to a point wherein the rule of economy over all personal relationships, the universal control of commodities over the totality of life, turns into a new and naked form of command and obedience.”<sup>1</sup> In this grim scenario, the eclipse of reason is simultaneously the termination of all pleasure taken in the field of social relationships. Today both aspects of this diagnosis look wrong. Today, indeed, it would appear that the autonomous rationality of the system (in which algorithms manage the lion’s share of stock-market trading without any human intervention) and the compulsion to enjoy (the happiness industry and its obscene pornographic underbelly) are precisely the Alpha and Omega of senile capitalism’s *modus operandi*.

In itself and on its own terms, capital is nothing more or less than *ratio*. It has no mimetic component, inherits no sacred values, but thrives on the conversion of qualities to quantities, and the ceaseless, eminently predictable transformation of the fluctuating market value of labor power into accumulating surplus value. Rationality is its core, and calculation is its technique. But in the end its lack of subjectivity marks its limit and the cause of its innermost self-negation. The capitalist firm thinks (i.e., it employs mathematically trained accountants and analysts) in order not to think (about anything but its own returns). The rationalization of means under capitalism is put to work on behalf of an end that, socially and philosophically speaking, is the antithesis of reasonable. Profit is only possible in a situation where nobody knows or cares for what ends commodities are produced. The rationality of the profit motive is thus always framed by the generalized irrationality of planned obsolescence, overproduction, periodic liquidation of stock, crises of accumulation, capital flight, chronic underemployment, environmental degradation, and finally the depletion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Max Horkheimer, “The End of Reason,” in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Continuum, New York 1993, p. 39.

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biosphere. Capitalism excels in the proliferation of rationalizations for this very state of affairs; but as Adorno observes, “Rationalizations are the scars of reason in a state of unreason.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this wholesale subordination of local rationality to a larger irrationality should be characterized by the term “unreason.” What justifies such unreason? How is our daily complicity with it extorted from us? The obvious answer to that question today, at least in Leftist circles, is simple: *enjoyment*. What Žižek calls the “superego injunction to enjoy” saturates our contemporary ideological space, sinking below the horizon of discourse into the very pores of our micro-acts of consumption.<sup>3</sup> So, while capitalism continues to thrive on the basis of a progressive rise in the degree of rationalization, it offsets that with an obscenely irrational compulsion to enjoy, a collective self-sacrificial ritual of unfulfillable pleasure at the altar of a ubiquitous pornography. “As long as economic rationality remains partial and the rationality of the whole problematic,” notes Adorno, “irrational forces will be harnessed to perpetuate it.”<sup>4</sup> None more so than the tsunami of orgiastic enjoyment that our bodies willingly propagate through the empty space where substantial values once stood.

In the search for alternatives to this contradictory economy of *unreasonable enjoyment*, one privileged antagonist has historically commanded political centre-stage, and that is the supreme rationality of the Bolshevik party: the planned economy, “scientific socialism,” the forcible suppression of capitalist unreason through party-led proletarian dictatorship, and strict orthodoxies of theory. In contradistinction to the capitalist injunction to enjoy, however, the ideological supplement to this hardline rationalism tended to be a radical suspicion of the pleasure principle and the erotic drives. In his critique of Plekhanov’s “intellectually anarchist” advocacy of a little opportunism to protect the Party from division, Lenin mused: “Comrade Plekhanov’s supposedly novel idea amounts to no more than the not very novel piece of commonplace wisdom that little annoyances should not be allowed to stand in the way of a big pleasure.”<sup>5</sup> Charac-

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<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology (Part II),” trans. Irving N. Wohlforth, *New Left Review* 1/47 (January/February, 1968), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, Verso, London & New York 1999, p. 390.

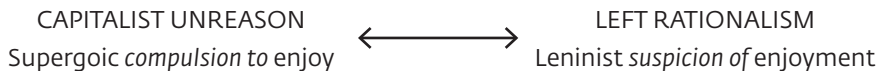
<sup>4</sup> Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology (Part I),” trans. Irving N. Wohlforth, *New Left Review* 1/46 (November/December, 1967), p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> V. I. Lenin, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back” (c.1904), *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/p.htm>, accessed on 19/8/16.

terizing the ideal of Party unity as a “big pleasure” was a scathing put-down. An infamous anecdote crystallizes this long-standing aversion. Maxim Gorky recalls an evening with Lenin, listening to some Beethoven piano sonatas.

Lenin cried out, “I know the Appassionata inside out and yet I am willing to listen to it every day. It is wonderful, ethereal music. On hearing it I proudly, maybe somewhat naively, think: See! people are able to produce such marvels!” He then winked, laughed and added sadly: “I’m often unable to listen to music, it gets on my nerves, I would like to stroke my fellow beings and whisper sweet nothings in their ears for being able to produce such beautiful things in spite of the abominable hell they are living in. However, today one shouldn’t caress anybody – for people will only bite off your hand; strike, without pity...!”<sup>6</sup>

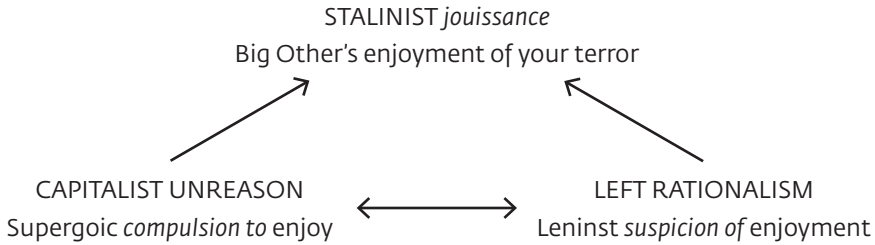
This recoil from enjoyment dovetails with a long history of Left puritanism, whose salient features we recognize again in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the anti-aesthetics of the Left avant-garde, the feminist war on the “beauty myth” and visual pleasure, and so on. In this dominant strand of opposition to capitalist unreason, pleasure (at least in its currently available forms) is taken to be beyond rehabilitation, and irreconcilable with the pitiless rationality of Marxist critique. After Marcuse’s account of capitalist “repressive desublimation,”<sup>7</sup> pleasure emerged in the postmodern era as perhaps the thorniest political problem of them all – as witness Adorno’s notorious broadsides against jazz, or Tafuri’s architecture of unpleasure.



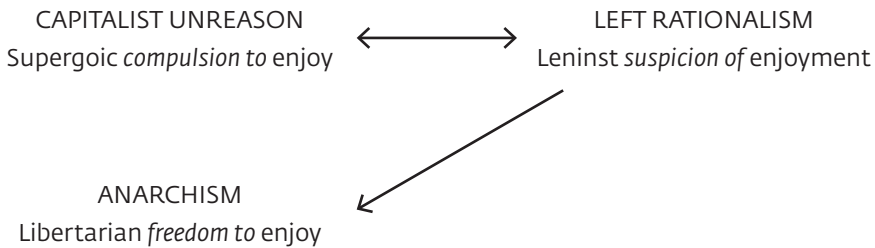
I am further tempted to speculate, if this is indeed one of the critical binary oppositions between reason and enjoyment in the modern period, whether we mightn’t understand Stalinism as a kind of contradictory synthesis of its terms; so that elements of both are fused into an hysterical hybrid political form, where enjoyment is displaced onto the Big Other, whose *jouissance* is purchased rationally at the price of your own limitless terror.

<sup>6</sup> Recounted in Georg Lukács, “Lenin – Theoretician of Practice,” *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/xxxx/lenin.htm>, accessed 19/8/16.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Beacon Press, Boston 1964.



But the larger issue is surely how to construct a full semiotic square out of these original terms and so make better sense of the full array of political options in the opposition to capitalist unreason. In the first place, we can delineate a position whose logic is the *negation* of Bolshevik left puritanism: that is, which reverses those polarities of reason and enjoyment without turning back into the original thing, capitalism, that the Leninist position had taken as its point of departure. And this position is of course Anarchism, of whose ideological complexion two things are perfectly clear: rationality is subservient to the romantic will, and pleasure is extolled as a means to the end of liberation, rather than the other way around.



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Anarchism has been Marxism’s relatively simple-minded and fun-filled political sibling from the beginning, of course, but nowhere was the determinate negation of its terms so clear as in the work and writings of Emma Goldman. Goldman survives in our collective unconscious first and foremost as something like a “subject supposed to enjoy,” as E. L. Doctorow made notorious in his novel *Ragtime*, where the character of Emma Goldman gives Evelyn Nesbitt an erotic massage, producing one of literature’s most exorbitant orgasms.<sup>8</sup> (It may not be irrelevant to note that one of her many lovers, Almeda Sperry, commended

<sup>8</sup> See E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*, Picador, London 1985, pp. 52-5.

Emma Goldman on the “rhythmic spurt of [her] love juices,” in a letter of 1918.<sup>9</sup> And Goldman herself relished the role she had invented for herself in Left circles as the fearless prophet of free love, scourge of patriarchal Leninism, and pariah of Puritans everywhere. An incendiary agitator for freely available contraception, and against the evils of marriage and the benightedness of monogamy, Goldman enjoyed the public scandals of libidinal insurgency as much as she did the ruthless critique of militarism and capitalist profiteering. Bewailing the lot of the “overwrought and undersexed middle-class girl, hedged in her narrow confines [by] Morality, which is daily shutting out love, light, and joy from the lives of innumerable victims,” Emma preferred the lot of “the young men and women of the people [who] are not so hide-bound by externalities, and often follow the call of love and passion regardless of ceremony and tradition.”<sup>10</sup> She befriended prostitutes and took up their cause. She fought hard as a union organizer to win working women enough extra income to be able to afford roses, books, tickets to the theatre, and so to pursue sexual pleasure for its own sake in their few spare hours. Free love and free motherhood, free from the sanction of church and state – which is to say unconfined enjoyment – was her credo. “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution,” as a thousand undergraduate posters quote her as saying. Against Lenin, she advocated a principled indulgence of all life’s pleasures, here and now:

I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal ... should demand the denial of life and joy. I insisted that our Cause could not expect me to become a nun and that the movement should not be turned into a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it. “I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody’s right to beautiful radiant things.”<sup>11</sup>

Before we complete the semiotic square with a fourth quadrant, it is worth contemplating the persistence of the mind-body dualism within this problematic. Leninism tends to over-value the resources of pure reason, and repudiate the chaos of the body; and Anarchism proceeds from a liberationist vision of the body, animated by the will to satisfy its own pleasures, while disavowing the

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Marjorie Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, Routledge, New York & London 2000, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, edited by Alix Kates Schulman, Humanity Books, New York 1996, p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, Penguin, London 2006, p. 42.

hold of abstract rationality over the corps. Goldman's advocacy of the spontaneous genius of the Soviets as against the theoretical prerogatives of the Bolsheviks can be taken as a "materialist" insistence on the rights of the body over the disembodied imperatives of reason;<sup>12</sup> and there is much that will resonate with the post-contemporary present in Goldman's intuitive preference for bodily immediacy and immanence over mental abstraction and dicta. For we have not yet escaped the clutches of what Fredric Jameson, paraphrasing Roland Barthes, Lyotard, and Deleuze, described as "the libidinal body."<sup>13</sup> The rise and rise of affect theory in recent years, and the collapse in the stocks of old-fashioned Theory, would seem to confirm one's apprehension that this libidinal body is very much still with us, and still awaiting its satisfactory political inscription.

If I now hastily conscript Rosa Luxemburg to this cause today, it is because no other thinker has so perfectly answered to the logical necessity implied by our unfinished semiotic square: an antagonist of Anarchism who is further still from the centralizing tendencies of Leninism, while somehow effecting in her own position the very negation of capitalist immanence itself. This last point first. While we noted the persistence of a mind-body split in the tensions between Bolshevism and Anarchism, the same could not be said about capitalism itself, whose genius, we remarked, was precisely to have "fleshed out" its remorseless campaign of rationalization through a thoroughgoing "turn to the body" – flattening the mind-body distinction in a secular plane of immanence where your pleasure is the form taken by your unfreedom, and where nothing escapes the withering equivalence of exchange value. The unique solution proposed by Rosa Luxemburg to the vexed problem of enjoyment in the resistance to capitalism is that she neither privileges the pleasures of the individual body (à la Emma Goldman), nor suppresses the pleasure principle altogether in the name of strict

<sup>12</sup> "At the first dawn which illuminated Russia in February, 1917, the Soviets revived again and came into bloom in a very short time. To the people the Soviets by no means represented a curtailment of the Revolution. On the contrary, the Revolution was to find its highest, freest practical expression through the Soviets"; though the Bolsheviks were quickly to put an end to this: "The Soviets of peasants and workers were castrated and transformed into obedient committees." Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks*, p. 389, p. 413. Of her visit in 1921, she wrote: "The Soviet institutions presented little interest. They were running true to type, managed in conformity with the established one-track idea and according to the Moscow formula." Goldman, *Living My Life*, p. 462.

<sup>13</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Pleasure, a Political Issue," in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986; Volume 2: Syntax of History*, Routledge, London 1988, p. 69.

party discipline (a la Lenin), but adumbrates a dialectical materialist plane of immanence as a negation of the presiding one. Here reason is simply another name for enjoyment, in the collective dimension of class struggle itself.

For Luxemburg, Anarchism was a romantic folly, characterized by good will, imagination, and no little courage, but ultimately explicable only as an excrescence of the libertarian left that will be historically liquidated during the course of revolution. Leninism, meanwhile, was deplored for its centralizing tendencies, and the resultant “mechanistic” view of class warfare that it harbored: socialism, she wrote, “cannot be based either on blind obedience or on the mechanical submission of the party’s militants to [a] central authority.”<sup>14</sup> And the reason for that was that “there is no ready-made predetermined and detailed tactic of struggle that the Central Committee could drill into the social democratic membership” (252); rather, the only school for revolutionary tactics is the vast, distributed, dynamic web of classes, institutions, events, and technologies that comprises the horizon of the revolution itself. As she loved to refute the old wisdom of divine right – which stipulated that “The public is not mature enough to exercise the right to vote” – “As if there were some other school of political maturity for members of the public than simply *exercising* these rights themselves!”<sup>15</sup> The same went for the working masses in the revolution. “In the mass strikes in Russia the element of spontaneity plays such a predominant part, not because the Russian proletariat are ‘uneducated’,” she once twitted Lenin, “but because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them.”<sup>16</sup> The relationship between Party and class is not one of master and pupil, mind and body. On the contrary, there is a dialectical to and fro in which no moment stands still, and the old distinctions between reason, experience, and enjoyment, break down. “Organization, enlightenment, and struggle [she writes] are here not separate moments mechanically divided in time [...] they are merely different facets of the same process.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis & Kevin B. Anderson, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2004, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> Luxemburg, “Writings on Women,” *Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 235.

<sup>16</sup> Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike,” *Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> Luxemburg, “Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy,” *Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 252.



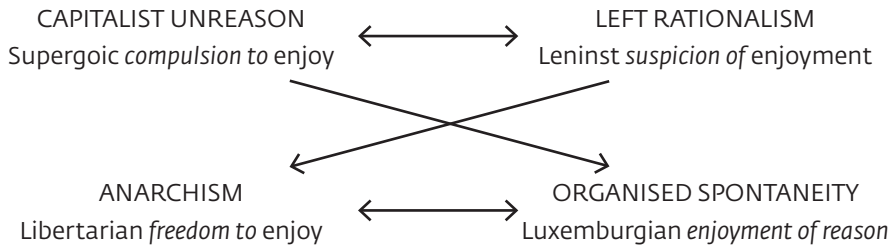
Luxemburg's full vision of this dialectical plane of revolutionary immanence was staggeringly beautiful.

It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes in individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another – it is a ceaselessly moving, changing sea of phenomena.<sup>18</sup>

But this is simultaneously a sea of organic fluids and plasma. “Instead of the rigid and hollow scheme of an arid political action carried out by the decision of the highest committees and furnished with a plan and panorama, we see a bit of pulsating life of flesh and blood, which cannot be cut out of the large frame of the revolution but is connected with all parts of the revolution by a thousand veins” (191). In view of such a panorama, enmeshed in such a pulsing sea of immanence, reason must not be reduced to a pettifogging logic of cause-and-effect; instead, it must be grasped as a living “sediment” of the embodied process itself, with the capacity to feed a degree of rationality back into it. “The most precious, lasting, thing in the rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat, which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle” (185). Rational organization, thus, does not descend from above, it emerges from within, like a new organ of sense perception on the self-pleasuring body of the working people: “from the whirlwind and the storm, out of the fire and glow of the mass strike and the street fighting rise again, like Venus from the foam, fresh, young, powerful, buoyant trade unions” (186). Reason, organization, and enlightenment are engendered within the body of the masses in movement: struggle gives birth to them, moments of painful enjoyment in the dialectical growth of communism.

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<sup>18</sup> Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike,” *Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 191.



If this is how her political theory reconciled the usual contradictions between rationality and pleasure in Left thought (as a practical synthesis in the march of liberation), it remains to specify the dynamic interanimation of the two elements “reason” and “enjoyment” in the overarching structure of Luxemburg’s own work. And here, regrettably but perhaps inevitably, a certain “division of labor” comes to affect the theoretical apparatus. On the one hand, we have the imposing edifice of her economic writings as such, her doctoral thesis on Poland’s industrial development, the splendid *Introduction to Political Economy* which she wrote out of her lecture notes for the SDP’s party school in Berlin (1909-10), her lengthy disquisitions upon feudalism, Marx’s *Capital* Vols. 2 and 3, her “History of Crises,” and towering above all of it, the magnificent *Accumulation of Capital* (1913), her masterpiece. Of this vast component of her life’s work, it must be said that it is imposingly “scholarly” in method and exposition (though written, generally, in a language that might be accessible to any intelligent working person), and builds upon a massive amount of reading, annotation, accumulation of evidence, and judicious synoptic “abstractions” of the material. It is, in a word, comparable with Marx’s own scholarly work in *Das Kapital*, and was fully intended to take a place beside it on the bookshelves of radicals the world over. It is the work of *reason* in the most august Enlightenment sense: fiercely combative with superannuated scholarship, patiently summative of the good new work, painstakingly scrupulous with facts and figures, logical in its construction, and polemical as regards first principles and theory. Graphs, formulae, extensive footnotes, and a tone of dispassionate reasonableness bind together the formidable learning on display in an apparatus of scholarship in the venerable academic tradition. *The Accumulation of Capital*, in particular, marks a breakthrough in the global or “holistic” critique of political economy on its new imperial footing, its astonishing synthesis of evidence coming from the colonial peripheries demonstrating the power of reason to disambiguate the tendency of what she calls “the struggle against natural economy” to result in

“reckless speculation in land, thriving usury and the economic ruin of the natives.”<sup>19</sup> But there is, alas, all too little pleasure in it; her own in its production seems to have been sublimated into the apparatus with little residue. Assuming the persona of “scholar” tended to dispel the often delirious pleasures of her political writings and speeches, which resound with the militant joy of intellectual and political combat, the plentiful satisfactions of having the better argument, the winning voice, and the clearer articulations with mass political praxis. And here, in the more polemical, occasional work, the dictates of reason tend, too, to be transcended in the heat of a collective intuition or sudden swerve in the movement itself; as if the imposing apparatus of the economic writings were secretly held to be provisional and circumstantial all along, quite capable of being surpassed – like the “sediment” she always claimed intellectual forms to be – by a new turn in the course of a mass movement.

The search for a proper theory of pleasure in Luxemburg’s writings, however, should be undertaken neither in the economic nor the political writings, but in her voluminous correspondence, where it rises to the surface as the innermost truth of the entire oeuvre. What she envisaged on the largest stage of revolutionary activity (i.e., the pleasurable dialectical interfusion of political struggle and intellectual attainment), she also intuited as a lived disposition of the affective body. Her letters are full of the most remarkable testimonies of what we might call a “libidinal body” attuned to the world in the sublime key of *jouissance*. Nothing was too small, too humble to fail to stimulate her hypersensitive sensory and affective apparatus with intensities almost impossible existentially to manage. As she wrote to Sophie Liebknecht near the end of her 4-year prison term, a tiny lark chick tweeting for food outside her cell window could work her up into a frantic state:

It is no use for me to tell myself not to be silly, seeing that I am not responsible for all the hungry little larks in the world, and that I cannot shed tears over all the thrashed buffaloes in the world.... Logic does not help in the matter, and it makes me ill to see suffering. ... Thus passing out of my cell in all directions are fine threads connecting me with thousands of creatures great and small, whose doings react upon me to arouse disquiet, pain, and self-reproach. You yourself,

<sup>19</sup> Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild, Routledge, London and New York 2003, p. 364.

too, belong to this company of birds and beasts to which my nature throbs responsive.<sup>20</sup>

It is remarkable how well this image of “fine threads” connecting the libidinal body to all of creation resonates with her theory of political spontaneity: “a bit of pulsating life of flesh and blood, which cannot be cut out of the large frame of the revolution but is connected with all parts of the revolution by a thousand veins.”<sup>21</sup> Shades, too, of Septimus Warren Smith, of whom Virginia Woolf writes that the “trees were alive ... the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body.”<sup>22</sup> It is virtually the same image as Rosa’s “fine threads” and her “thousand veins.” This space of immanence where everything is connected, where everything acts and reacts upon everything else, this unified field of dialectical transformation, is shot through with the most intense and vibrating *jouissance*. Here, enjoyment is scarcely a big enough word.

Duck quacks at 2 a.m. become “something irrevocable, something that has held true since the beginning of the world,” causing intense anxiety and wonder.<sup>23</sup> Standing in the prison yard at Wronke, looking skyward and feeling “a tremendous yearning to dive up into that damp, shimmering blueness, to bathe in it, to splash around, to let myself dissolve completely in that dew, and disappear” (425), she watches the swallows: “The swallows had already begun their evening’s flight in full company strength, and with their sharp, pointy wings snipped the blue silk of space into little bits...” (425). From the yard of that same prison, she writes “I shouldn’t be enjoying so much beauty **all by myself**. I want to shout out loud over the walls: Oh please, pay attention to this marvelous day!”<sup>24</sup> Life was one uninterrupted state of shattering aesthetic rapture, minute after minute, for Rosa Luxemburg: even in the depths of prison far from everybody she loved, as her nearest and dearest died or collapsed in grief, and as Europe was engulfed in the worst mass slaughter of its long history. She called

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<sup>20</sup> Letter to Sophie Liebknecht, May 12, 1918, *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/05/12.htm>, accessed 19/8/16.

<sup>21</sup> Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike,” *Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 191.

<sup>22</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York 1953, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Hans Diefenbach, June 29, 1917, in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, eds. Georg Adler, Peter Hudis, and Annelies Laschitza, trans. George Shriver, Verso, London & New York 2011, p. 422.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Hans Diefenbach, July 6, 1917, in *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 429.

it her “inexhaustible inner cheerfulness,” and it seemed to her “a magical secret that gives the lie to everything evil and sad and changes it into pure light and happiness.”<sup>25</sup> And that goes for the appreciation of “reason,” too. She notes “a wonderful book on botany that affects me like a series of pure fairy stories, and yet it is a basic text and a strictly scientific work.”<sup>26</sup> The life of the mind is merely a moment of the life of an ecstatic body embowered in immanence.

The “personal” and the “political” are thus never really in opposition in Rosa’s writings. They are the recto and verso of a single document, constantly folded over onto itself, looping like an Escher etching, the one upon the many, the inside upon the outside, reason upon enjoyment, all undecidably and infinitely, forever. The “living pulse-beat of the revolution” is finally indistinguishable from the living pulse-beat of a woman in prison contemplating her apparently miserable circumstances in a condition of constant exaltation. “I lie there [in Breslau prison] quietly, alone, wrapped in these many-layered black veils of darkness, boredom, lack of freedom, and winter – and at the same time, my heart is racing with an incomprehensible, unfamiliar inner joy as though I were walking across a flowering meadow in radiant sunshine. ... And all the while I’m searching within myself for some reason for this joy, I find nothing and must smile to myself again – and laugh at myself.”<sup>27</sup> She called this her “sweet intoxication” (455) and I am wondering whether it might become, for us, more than just another resource of hope, as Raymond Williams liked to say; whether, indeed, we might be able to convert it into a mode of political being-in-the-world. I am convinced that Rosa’s “sweet intoxication” was a product of her political ontology; of her libidinal sense of the dialectical interdependence of all phenomena. Given that ontology, revolutionary consciousness *just is* this intoxication, this limitless capacity to transform the wretched into the wonderful. It engenders an absolute faith in the comic potential of the human collective as such, the proletariat as a self-educating, self-delighting body in movement, reasoning their way together out of the tragic snares of capitalist unreason that degrade their most precious powers into mere value; and faith in oneself as a thinking reed responsive to that struggle, which goes on everywhere, all the time.

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<sup>25</sup> Letter to Sophie Liebknecht, before December 24, 1917, in *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 455.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Sophie Liebknecht, September 12, 1918, in *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 471-2.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Sophie Liebknecht, before December 24, 1917, in *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 455.

Laurence Simmons\*

## Reasoning the Disaster

“The future is inevitable and precise, but it may not occur.”

– Jorge-Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions*

“The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger.”

– Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

“The catastrophe, even though it does not occur, retains the status of a possibility, not in the sense that it would still be possible for it to take place, but in the sense that it will forever remain true that it could have taken place.”

– Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*

### Future anteriority

Will you, in the future, after reading this paper, understand the nature of the disaster? Will you have understood the disaster by the time I finish my seminar? *In what lies ahead* there is a claim that the disaster operates according to a tense structure quite different from the one we normally assume for it. This tense structure is the future perfect in English, a tense more accurately referred to as the *future anterior* in the Romance languages, “the tense that refers to something that lies ahead and yet which is already complete, not *will happen* but what *will have happened*.”<sup>1</sup> There is a trace of the impossible in the future

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2013, p.1; Also relevant here is Lacan’s discussion of the temporal order of the “*futur antérieur*” which he identifies as the necessary precondition for the realization of subjective truth (Lacan 2006a: p. 37 and Lacan 2006b: p. 247). The structure of future anteriority is the very model of temporal becoming as Lacan understood it, of “what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming” (Lacan 2006b: p. 247).

perfect, of a future that has already taken place, a future projection rooted in a memory of the past, a pro-tention founded in retention. The future perfect is almost never used in academic papers such as mine, yet it tells us something about how we craft our narratives with what we experience, the foreseeable with the unexpected. The future cannot be known, but its contentlessness (do you, *can* you know what I will write next?) is given form by the strange expectation that you are going to *have known it*, by the strange temporality of what *will have* happened. To think about an academic presentation as the future perfect is not to use it in the way we may normally use a tense: that is, as a description of the basic relation between the time of an utterance and the time to which it refers. It is to acknowledge that the reading of an academic paper is a transaction in which the past is re-experienced, but also its prospect decoded in the process of delivery as a quasi-present. The mere staging of my paper, its unfolding, produces the expectation that something unexpected will have taken place by the time it is over. You are going to *have known* the disaster (of my paper) by the strange temporality of what *will have* happened.

*In what lies ahead* it is the relationship between the future perfect and the unexpected that converges. The future perfect suggests a kind of doubling of temporal perspective, of what will happen with what has already taken place. In Jacques Derrida's work there is an early fascination with future anteriority that transmutes progressively into a preoccupation with messianic time, his term for a certain kind of unforeseen, and yet expected, arrival from the future. This context may seem quite distant from the immediate concerns of my topic of "reason and disaster," yet Derrida's concerns with the temporality of action and responsibility are often those explored in the contradictions that surround the future anterior and the unforeseeability of events. As Mark Currie concludes: "Nobody has written in a more sustained way about futural meaning than Derrida, nor engaged with the eschatological tendencies of modern thought more critically."<sup>2</sup> We might even say that the *a-venir*, Derrida's "to-come," and an interest in the future anterior as it bears upon expectation and responsibility, is one if not *the* main strand of his thought. "An event," Derrida declares, "does not come

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 6. See also Geoff Bennington: "Derrida has in fact been constantly writing (about) the future, without making any predictions," "Towards a Criticism of the Future" (p. 230). Derrida made the distinction between the predictable future and the future that actually comes about, referring to the first with the traditional French designation of the future as *l'avenir*, and the second, the surprising arrival, as *l'arrivant*.

about unless its irruption interrupts the course of the possible, and as the impossible itself, surprises any foreseeability.”<sup>3</sup> Thus the thinking about unpredictability, spontaneous eruption, interruption, reversal of fortunes, emergence and change in contemporary philosophy is part of the effort to think about the relation between unexpected events, futurity and social change. The face of contemporary thought that is the unexpected, for which we need to reinstate the future that cannot be foreseen within our conceptualization of the present, is a kind of doubling of temporal perspective, of what will happen with what has already taken place. Perhaps – and it is only a “perhaps,” a projection – the future perfect *will have been* the tense of our times.

The question of the unexpected, as must be clear by now, is not simple and it will prove difficult to talk about the prevalent concept of the future in our culture. Who would dare predict the history of prediction? And who could promise to tell it as a (true) story? And who could tell that story without giving in to a conventionally dialectical schema, whereby the history of prediction, as error, as work of the negative would be made to contribute to the process of the verification of truth. Even supposing that prediction has a history, one would still have to tell it without predicting. If there is a history of prediction it cannot let itself be reappropriated by a history of error *or* of the truth. It will prove difficult to discuss prediction of the future since that brings me to one of my propositions. One will never be able to declare agreement with or prove anything against the person who says, “I predict a disaster and I do this in good faith.” Here is the theoretical subtlety, it is as if the theoretical discourse on prediction was yet one more predictive strategy, an unavowable technique of disculpation by which theoretical reason deceives practical reason. Here is an issue that will persist for the rest of my paper: can there be a conventional dialectical schema whereby the history of the unexpected, as history and work of the negative, could be made to contribute to the process of truth, to the verification of truth as absolute knowledge? In its prevailing and recognized form prediction is not a fact or a state; it is an *intentional* act, a predicting. There is not *the* prediction, but rather this pronouncing or meaning-to-say that is called predicting: to predict would be to address another (for one only predicts to the other; one cannot predict to oneself, unless it is to oneself as another) a statement or a series of statements

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, edited and translated and with an introduction by Peggy Kamuf, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, p. 73.



that the predictor knows form assertions that may or may not be false. The prediction pertains to saying, and the meaning-to-say, not to the said. This appears at once obvious and complex and, *in what lies ahead*, each of its elements will become part of our analysis.

But in the above proclamation there remains, above all, the question of whether the prediction of a disaster always consists in a *declarative* (constative) utterance, or whether the prediction is a manifestation of the *performative* type, since it implies a promise of truth where it may even be betrayed, and since it also aims to produce an effect of belief where there is nothing to state, or where at least nothing is exhausted in a statement. This “speech act” aspect of the prediction is not a matter of truth or falsehood. It is a way, as J.L. Austin phrased it, of doing something with words. Its functioning depends on faith or the lack of faith in the one who receives it, not on referential veracity. Whether or not prediction has a delimitable space within language one sees the enormous issue of the problem of finding decidable frontiers for it. Where does its event stop, take place, or even carry on? Here, then, are a first and then a second obstacle: if what is apparently the most common concept of the prediction of the disaster, if good sense concerning prediction has a history, then it is caught up in a becoming that risks always relativizing its truth and value. But – second obstacle – we also have to distinguish between the history of the notion of prediction and the history of prediction itself, a history, as we shall see, that affects the practice of prediction, its means and effects. So before even beginning to begin I must make an assertion. You would have every right to distrust it, as you might with any assertion. I will not predict, not be able to predict, what you might think about the history of prediction. Does this mean that I have failed to predict for you, *will have* failed to predict for you? And am I accountable for this? I leave this question adjourned, I turn it over to you, at least until the end of reading my paper, and in doing so I am, of course, predicting that there *will be* questions.

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To help me in this fabulation about the prediction of the disaster as fabrication I will introduce some figures who will remain more or less present, like ghosts who appear and then wait off-to-the-side during my paper: first, as you have already seen, there is the not-too-ghostly presence of Jacques Derrida, then in introductory mode Slavoj Žižek and Martin Heidegger, Henri Bergson, Günter Anders, followed by the biblical figure of the prophet Jonah and Hans Jonas, the philosopher who rethought ethics in the light of the transformations of modern

technology, but most important for the discourse of *what lies ahead* will be the figure of engineer and social philosopher, Jean-Pierre Dupuy.

## The unexpected

I will now try and commence – and without predicting, believe me – by presenting these illustrations. I will propose some specific examples on the basis of which we will try to advance in a reflective fashion from the particular to the general. Although I am wary of the term “reflective” which implies the canonical distinction, made by Kant between a determinant judgment (where particulars are subsumed under known universals) and a reflective judgment (where we find unknown universals for given particulars).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it would appear that the essence of catastrophe has become normal for what Žižek, following Adorno and Horkheimer, calls “our Western administered world”<sup>5</sup> – we now govern according to scenarios of war, terror, ecological disasters and financial crises; the normal run of our societies is continually threatened by these things.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> “It is then one thing to say, ‘the production of certain things of nature or that of collective nature is only possible through a cause which determines itself to action according to design’; and quite another to say, ‘I can according to the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties judge concerning the possibility of these things and their production, in no other fashion than by conceiving for this a cause working according to design, i.e. a Being which is productive in a way analogous to the causality of an intelligence.’ In the former case I wish to establish something concerning the Object, and am bound to establish the objective reality of an assumed concept; in the latter, Reason only determines the use of my cognitive faculties, conformably to their peculiarities and to the essential conditions of their range and their limits. Thus the former principle is an objective proposition for the determinant Judgment, the latter merely a subjective proposition for the reflective Judgment, i.e. a maxim which Reason prescribes to it.” Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Section 75.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase “*verwaltete Welt*” (“administered society”) is derived from Adorno and Horkheimer.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy proposes an “equivalence of catastrophes” where “the spread or proliferation of repercussions from every kind of disaster hereafter will bear the mark of that paradigm represented by nuclear risk” and “the complexity here is singularly characterized by the fact that natural catastrophes are no longer separable from their technological, economic, and political implications or repercussions” ... “There are no more natural catastrophes: There is only a civilizational catastrophe that expands every time.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, translated by Charlotte Mandell, Fordham University Press, New York 2015, p. 3, p. 4, p. 34). For Massimo Cacciari, the development of the theory of catastrophes belongs to “the general emphasis placed in our culture on phenomena of discontinuity as fundamental characters of the very form

future as a shared horizon of modernist universal emancipation has succumbed to the future imagined as global catastrophe, disaster or apocalypse. It no longer seems necessary to spell out the ways in which the culture of disaster continues to characterize the contemporary moment. We can also view the entirety of late twentieth-century European philosophy as unfolding in the aftermath of a pervasive sense of catastrophe that is itself withdrawn from thought. In this vein, Žižek also reminds us that for Heidegger, the most violent catastrophes in nature and social life are nothing in comparison with the catastrophe which is “man” itself. In his meditation on Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,” Heidegger reflects:

The most powerful “catastrophes” we can think of in nature and in the cosmos are nothing in terms of their uncanniness compared to that uncanniness that the human essence in itself is, insofar as human beings, placed amongst beings as such and set in place for beings, forget being. In this way, the homely becomes an empty and errant wandering for them, one that they fill out with their activities. The uncanniness of the unhomely here consists in the fact that human beings themselves in their essence are a *katastrophe* – a reversal that turns them away from their own essence. Among beings, the human being is the sole catastrophe.<sup>7</sup>

With Heidegger, we must conclude, says Žižek, that “the essence of catastrophe has nothing to do with ontic catastrophes, since the essence of catastrophe is the catastrophe of the essence itself, its withdrawal, its forgetting by man.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in Heidegger it is not clear that we need the threat (or fact) of an actual ontic catastrophe in order to experience in a negative way the true catastrophe that pertains to human essence as such.

We live with and within the idea that the world is somehow more unpredictable than it used to be. The idea, the global cultural understanding, that we inhabit

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of the system ... catastrophe is change of order, structural transition.” Massimo Cacciari, Massimo, “Catastrophes” in *The Unpolitical: On the Radical Critique of Political Unreason*, pp. 146-58, translated by Massimo Verdicchio, Fordham University Press, New York 2009, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* translated by William McNeill and Julia Davis, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1998, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “The (Mis)uses of Catastrophes” in Laurence Simmons, Heather Worth and Maureen Molloy (eds), *From Z to A: Žižek at the Antipodes*, pp. 35-42, Dunmore Publishing, Wellington 2005, pp. 137-8.

an epoch that is characterized by the unexpected from war to terror to ecological and pandemic outbreaks, may seem ubiquitous, but the paradox is that this cannot be a temporal condition because it gives prominence to unforeseeability. Further invocations of the future perfect as the “postmodern tense,” and temporal structure of our epoch, are to be found in Jean-François Lyotard’s *What is Postmodernism?*<sup>9</sup> And earlier by Derrida in his “Exergue” to *Of Grammatology*. For Derrida, writing remember in 1967, the new epoch, which cannot be foreseen, is the monstrosity that guides our future anterior, so that the future anterior is the relation with the unforeseeable itself, and never the characteristic of the epoch to come. He insists:

The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity. For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue.<sup>10</sup>

It is also important to attend to the possibility that the credibility of this idea derives from the notions of uncertainty that have gathered momentum in the physical and theoretical sciences, in quantum mechanics and mathematics, in theoretical physics and evolutionary theory as well as the applications of game and chaos theory to the unpredictability of economic systems. Some of these areas have had to reconcile themselves to the opacity of the future, for example Heisenberg’s “Principle of Uncertainty.” Others have constructed the category of the unforeseeable as the state of exception among the predictive laws they have established, for example the distinction that John Maynard Keynes proposed in 1921 between risk and uncertainty, or later the introduction within statistics of the concept of subjective probability by Leonard Savage.<sup>11</sup> The future perfect

<sup>9</sup> “The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*... *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).” Lyotard 1984, p. 62. It is a tenet of postmodern cultural theory that we should think about the contemporary as a condition of blocked futurity, in which novelty is reduced to the simulation, repetition and recycling of past forms.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1997, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard J. Savage, *The Foundations of Statistics* and John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, Wiley, New York 1954.

and prediction may seem one and the same thing, they are both anticipations of a future which have to wait for their verification, but there is an important difference of location of the future position: where prediction imagines an event in the future (x will happen), the future perfect imagines a time further into the future in relation to which that future event is past (x will have happened).

### Projected time

*In what lies ahead* the disaster may all of a sudden become real *and* possible, and the paradox resides in this retroactive appearance of probability. Henri Bergson discussing the modality of the outbreak of World War I, which surprised him as emerging so formidably and with so little objection, wrote:

That one can put reality into the past and thus work backwards in time is something I have never claimed. But that one can put the possible there, or rather that the possible may put itself there at any moment, is not to be doubted. As reality is created as something unforeseeable and new, its image is reflected behind it into the indefinite past; thus it finds that it has from all time been possible, but it is at this precise moment that it begins to have always been possible, and that is why I said its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once the reality has appeared. The possible is therefore the mirage of the present in the past...<sup>12</sup>

The encounter of the real as impossible is thus always missed: either it is experienced as impossible but not real (the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe which, however probable we know it is, we do not believe it will effectively occur and thus dismiss it as impossible), or as real but no longer impossible (once the catastrophe occurs, it is “renormalized,” perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always-already having been possible). For Bergson the future is at stake in the memory of the present in two ways, not only in the idea that the memory is of the future, located in an envisaged future which looks back upon the present, but also in the sense that we already know what we do not yet know. He continues elsewhere:

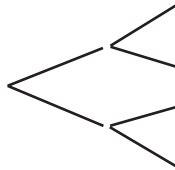
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<sup>12</sup> Henri Bergson, “The Possible and the Real” in *Key Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, Continuum, London and New York 2002, p. 230.

As I cannot predict what is going to happen, I quite realize that I do not know it; but I foresee that I am going to have known it, in the sense that I shall recognize it when I shall perceive it; and this recognition to come, which I feel inevitable on account of the rush of my faculty of recognizing, exercises in advance a retroactive effect on my present, placing me in the strange position of a person who feels he knows what he knows he does not know.<sup>13</sup>

I do not know what is going to happen but I *will have known*, or I will know what *will have happened*, and this future perfect disposition tilts me towards what is on the point of happening. There is a feeling that the unforeseeable has already been seen, which comes from the expectation that we will know it when we see it. And, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy who himself starts with Bergson, makes it clear, the gap which makes these paradoxes possible is the one between knowledge and belief: we *know* the catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not *believe* it will really happen.<sup>14</sup>



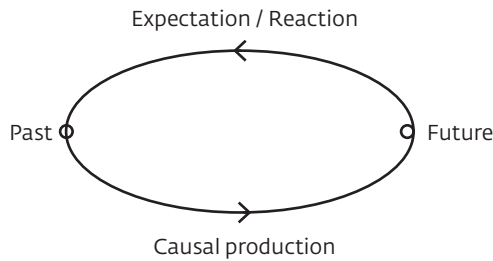
In ordinary metaphysics time bifurcates from a more or less fixed past into a possible set of branching futures, each accorded a probability of realization on the basis of particular actions in the present and the actual world constitutes one path among these alternatives. Dupuy calls this “occurring time” (*temps de l’histoire*).

But, he argues, if we are to confront properly the threat of a (cosmic or environmental) catastrophe, we need to break out of this “historical” notion of temporality: we have to introduce a new notion of time. Dupuy calls this time the “projected time” (*temps du projet*) of a closed circuit between the past and the future: the future is causally produced by our acts in the past, while the way

<sup>13</sup> Henri Bergson, “Memory of the Present and False Recognition,” in *Key Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, Continuum, London and New York 2002, pp. 148-9.

<sup>14</sup> Dupuy, 2002, pp. 142-143; For a fuller discussion of Bergson on time and the unforeseeable see Currie, 2013, pp. 31-3; pp. 62-8.

we act is determined by our anticipation of the future and our reaction to this anticipation.<sup>15</sup> The anticipation of the fixed future then functions as if it is sending signals back into the past, which then prompt action in the present. Here is proposed an alternative metaphysics of temporality based on the obstacle of the non-credible character of catastrophes.



Dupuy calls this “projected time” because it takes the form of a loop in which past and future reciprocally determine each other. He insists: “To fortell the future in projected time, it is necessary to seek the loop’s fixed point, where an expectation (on the part of the past with regard to the future) and a causal production (of the future by the past) coincide.”<sup>16</sup> This is how Dupuy proposes to confront the catastrophe: we should first perceive it as our fate, as unavoidable, and then, projecting ourselves into it, adopting its standpoint, we should retroactively insert into its past (the past of the future) counterfactual possibilities (“If we were to do that and that, the catastrophe we are in now would not have occurred!”) upon which we then act today. Thus the fixed point of the future is a superposition of two states, one of which is the occurrence of the catastrophe that is both accidental and fatal, the other is its non-occurrence. According to Dupuy, in the case of a future inscribed as catastrophe, projected time thus involves the creation of an image of the future that is sufficiently convincing as catastrophe to set in motion actions in the present that will prevent its occurrence, barring an accident. The more logical and effective strategy, Dupuy maintains, is to live in a future time, as if the catastrophe were already a certain thing; to believe that the catastrophe will not be just a possibility but will occur necessarily. In “projected time,” the enlightened common sense that understands that

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<sup>15</sup> Dupuy’s “temps du project” can also be translated literally as “time of the project” where “pro-ject” involves a throwing forward, an accompanying sense of futural potential and promise.

<sup>16</sup> Dupuy, “Rational Choice before the Apocalypse,” *Anthropometrics* 13 (3/2007), n. p. Accessed Feb 12, 2015. <<http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1303/index.htm>>.

we make our own future must be overturned. There is the future we can predict, and then there is the unexpected. In an obvious way the unexpected is the failure of prediction, and in a less obvious way, it comes into view as a result of the success of prediction.

For Dupuy, the German philosopher Günter Anders (1902-1992) was the most radical of our thinkers on the disaster in the twentieth century. In thinking *after* the disaster of the holocaust – the past is the time when some possibilities were realized and others were not: a time of blame and responsibility, the counting of those who died and those who survived – Anders’ retells the biblical parable of someone who predicts catastrophe. Noah was tired of playing the prophet of doom and forever foretelling a catastrophe that would not occur and that no one would take seriously. So Anders’ fable tells us:

he clothed himself in sackcloth and covered his head with ashes. Only a man who was mourning [the death of] a beloved child or his wife was allowed to do this. Clothed in the garb of truth, bearer of sorrow, he went back to the city, resolved to turn the curiosity, spitefulness, and superstition of its inhabitants to his advantage. Soon a small crowd of curious people had gathered around him. They asked him questions. They asked if someone had died, and who the dead person was. Noah replied to them that many had died, and then, to the great amusement of his listeners, said that they themselves were the dead of whom he spoke. When he was asked when this catastrophe had taken place, he replied to them: “Tomorrow.” Profiting from their attention and confusion, Noah drew himself up to his full height and said these words: “The day after tomorrow, the flood will be something that will have been. And when the flood will have been, *everything that is will never have existed*. When the flood will have carried off everything that is, everything that will have been, it will be too late to remember, for there will no longer be anyone alive. And so there will no longer be any difference between the dead and those who mourn them. *If I have come before you, it is in order to reverse time*, to mourn tomorrow’s dead today. The day after tomorrow it will be too late.” With this he went back whence he had come, took off the sackcloth [that he wore], cleaned his face of the ashes that covered it, and went to his workshop. That evening a carpenter knocked on his door and said to him: “Let me help you



build the ark, *so that it may become false.*” Later a roofer joined them, saying: “It is raining over the mountains, let me help you, so that it may become false.”<sup>17</sup>

In this fable, the paradox of the prophecy of doom is as follows. Making the perspective of catastrophe credible requires one to increase the ontological force of its inscription in the future. The foretold suffering and deaths will inevitably occur, like an inexorable destiny. The present conserves its memory and the mind can project itself beyond the catastrophe, speaking of the event in the future perfect tense: there exists a moment from the standpoint of which one will be able to say the catastrophe will have taken place. In the parable Noah declares: “The day after tomorrow, the flood will be something that will have been.” But if this task is too well carried out, one will have lost sight of its purpose, which is precisely to raise people’s awareness and spur them to action so that the catastrophe *may not occur* – “let me help you build the ark, *so that it may become false*” say the carpenter and the roofer. The paradox comes from a temporal looping that should, but that *does not*, occur between the earlier prediction and the future event. The catastrophe, although unrealized, will conserve its status as a possibility, not in the sense that it might still possibly be realized, but in the sense that it will always remain true that it could have been realized. When one predicts, in order to avoid it, that a catastrophe is on the way, this prediction does not have the status of a prediction, in the strict sense of the term: it does not claim to say what the future will be, to “say before,” but simply what it *would have been* if people had not paid attention. Such is the meaning of Noah’s conduct in Anders’ parable: through the staging of the mourning for deaths that have not yet occurred, Noah reverses time, or rather he renders it circular, therefore negating it by transforming it into an eternal present. But the misfortunes of the prophet of misfortune are not over. Either his predictions will turn out to be correct and no one will thank him, indeed, he may even be accused of being the cause of the foretold disaster; or, if the disaster is not realized, the catastrophe does not occur, he will be made fun of for carrying on as he did. The paradox comes from a temporal looping that should but does not occur between the earlier prediction and the future event. For, as Dupuy notes,

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, translated by M.B. Debevoise, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2013, p. 203; Anders’ German text is found in the first chapter of *Endzeit und Zeitenend*. Anders told the story elsewhere and in other forms, particularly in *Hiroshima ist überall*.

the very idea of this looping in no way makes sense according to our ordinary metaphysics, as shown by the metaphysical structure of prevention, which consists of having an unwanted possibility sent into the ontological realm of unrealized possibilities. The catastrophe, although unrealized, will conserve its status as a possibility, not in the sense that it might still possibly be realized, but in the sense that it will always remain true that it could have been realized. When one predicts, *in order to avoid it*, that a catastrophe is on the way, this prediction does not have the status of a prediction, in the strict sense of the term: it does not claim to say what the future will be, but simply what it would have been if people had not paid attention. Looping is not a condition in this instance: the predicted future has no need of coinciding with the actual future, the anticipation has no need of being realized, for the predicted or anticipated “future” is in fact not at all the future, but a possible world which is and will remain unrealized.<sup>18</sup>

If the metaphysics of Anders’ parable is not “our ordinary metaphysics” then of what does it consist? Here time appears as a loop in which past and future determine each other. The future is taken to be no less fixed than the past – “Asked when this catastrophe had taken place, he answered: tomorrow” – the future is no less necessary than the past – “The day after tomorrow, the flood will be something that will have been” – the future is of the order of fate or destiny, which means that every event that does not take place in neither the future nor the present is an impossible event.

### The Two “Jonas”

It might seem that the words of the prophet Noah have a performative power: the saying of things brings them into existence, but that is to forget the fatalistic aspect of prophesy, it describes events to come as if they were immutable, ineluctable, written already in the book of history. Prophesy is a paradoxical mix of fatalism and voluntarism. This double possibility must remain open, as both a chance and a threat, for otherwise we would no longer be dealing with anything but the irresponsible operation of a programmatic machine. Furthermore, as Dupuy reflects, “The prophesy includes itself in its own discourse; it sees itself

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<sup>18</sup> Dupuy, 2007, n.p.

realizing what it announces as destiny.”<sup>19</sup> Prophecy is both where we are going and where we have been.

And for Dupuy, no example is more striking than the prophets of the Bible, even the minor prophets. His example is Jonah, son of Amittai, the biblical prophet of the eighth century before Christ mentioned in the second Book of Kings (14, 25). Ordered by God to go to the city of Nineveh to prophesy against it “for their great wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1.2) he chooses instead to avoid his mission and to flee to Tarshish. God asks Jonah to prophesy the fall of Nineveh but instead of carrying out the task of prophesy Jonah flees. Why? We are not told. Nevertheless, everyone knows how the story develops: while on board a huge storm arises and the sailors learn that Jonah is to blame and he is thrown overboard to calm the seas. Jonah is miraculously saved by being swallowed by a large fish and then after three days and three nights vomited onto dry land. We also forget, of course, the ending of the story, which tells us why Jonah disobeyed God. It was the fact that Jonah foresaw – inasmuch as he was an efficacious prophet – what would have happened if he *had* delivered his prophesy. Now God for a second time orders him to prophesy the fall of Nineveh and this time, having understood the cost of his disobedience, he obeys. But now the inhabitants of Nineveh repent, they convert and God forgives them. Their city will be saved. But to Jonah, however, the Bible tells us: “this was very displeasing..., and he became angry” (Jonah 4.1). Jonah would appear to be one of the lesser prophets but all the religions of the book nevertheless place great importance on the story of Jonah for Jewish, Christian and Muslim tradition. Why? First there is Jonah’s disrespect. The initial conflict between God and Jonah lies in the fact that Jonah does not want the inhabitants of Nineveh to be saved. Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrians and would remain so until 612BC. The Assyrians were Israel’s most ferocious and resolute enemies. Jonah’s dilemma is thus both moral and metaphysical. But what he understands, and we come to understand, is that in this case God prophesizes the future expressly so it is *not* produced. And the future here means the fall of Nineveh. The problem with foreseeing the future in order to change it is, for our metaphysical tradition at least, a logical impossibility. And this is the basis for our understanding of Jonah’s metaphysical dilemma and his contrariness. He knows that his prophesy, in its realization in the world, will become false. He knew that the first time when he fled, and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

he knows it when God for the second time commands him to prophesy the fall of Nineveh. The inhabitants of Nineveh will repent, convert and be pardoned. Their city will be saved. How can he not be angry at God who has prepared a trap for him, the trap of time?<sup>20</sup>

For Dupuy, who plays upon the fact that in French their names are homonyms, the philosopher Hans Jonas is like the God found in the Book of Jonah. He prophesizes the future expressly with the end that it does not take place. Both “Jonases” are faced with the same dilemma: they “must foretell an impending catastrophe as though it belonged to an ineluctable future, but with the purpose of ensuring that, as a result of [their] doing just this, the catastrophe will not occur.”<sup>21</sup> In his fundamental work, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas explains why we need a new ethics in the technological age and an ethics for the future [*Ethik für die Zukunft*], for the sake of the future not of the future. Hans Jonas is not interested in a hypothetical future which is not a future at all. The problem is that to prevent the future happening by changing it is for our metaphysical tradition an impossible logic. If I had done this, while I did something else, the future would (perhaps) be different... What for Jonah seemed a “blind alley” for Jonas is cause for celebration. He declares:

The purpose of all predictions is ... that they be translated into practical politics, namely, in the sense that the actions induced by them will promote or prevent their coming true. Prevention ranks foremost of the two, as the prediction in the sense of warning is naturally and rightly a stronger motive for the exertions of statecraft, surely a more compelling command to responsibility, than the call of promise. ... The prophecy of doom is made to avert its coming, and it would be the height of injustice later to deride the “alarmists” because “it did not turn out so bad after all.” To have been wrong may have been their merit.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As Terry Eagleton points out, “It is a mistake to believe that the biblical prophets sought to predict the future. Rather, the prophet denounces the greed, corruption and power-mongering of the present, warning us that unless we change our ways we might well not have a future at all.” *Why Marx Was Right*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2011, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Dupuy, 2013, p. 191.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, translated by Hans Jonas with the collaboration of David Herr, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1984, p. 120.

The excess of our power on our capacity to foresee the consequences of our acts at the same time provides us with the moral obligation to foresee the future but renders us incapable of doing so. As Dupuy concludes, if the metaphysics of Jonah allows us to think of prevention, the metaphysics of Hans Jonas allows us to flee it. “And it is this metaphysics that will allow us, perhaps, to think the coherence and rationality of catastrophism.”<sup>23</sup>

In the path of *what lies ahead* we would appear to have reached an aporia. In our present age, the age of the technological “administered world,” we have an ardent obligation that we cannot fulfill. As Dupuy insists, “if one is to prevent a catastrophe, one needs to believe in its possibility *before* it occurs. If, on the other hand, one succeeds in preventing it, its non-realisation maintains it in the realm of the impossible, and as a result, the prevention efforts will appear useless in retrospect”<sup>24</sup>. This is the Jonah/Jonas paradox: “We must neither believe too much in fate nor refuse too much to believe in it.”<sup>25</sup> An aporia is, etymologically, a blind alley, an impasse, a no thoroughfare, in a sequence of logical thinking. You follow through a perfectly rational line of argument, one depending on clear and self-evident distinctions. Suddenly you hit the wall and there seems no way out. Given the magnitude of the possible outcome of our technological choices we have an absolute obligation to try and anticipate them. However, the very same reasons that oblige us to anticipate the future make it impossible for us to do so. This is a perilous activity that both demands foreknowledge and prohibits it. When a logician encounters an aporia in his or her train of thinking, he or she has been taught to assume that there must be something wrong with the primary definitions or presuppositions, the theorems that make the whole

<sup>23</sup> Dupuy, 2013, p. 191; “Catastrophism” here does not contain the same meaning it does in evolutionary biology as the effect of a historical series of sudden, violent, “catastrophic” events that are then used to explain the current shape and size of natural phenomena. Dupuy’s “catastrophism” is more akin to “catastrophe theory” developed during the 1960s and 1970s by René Thom and Christopher Zeeman which analyses degenerate critical points of a function. “Catastrophe theory” in mathematics and climatology argues that a tiny change in one part of a dynamical system, in the famous example, the flapping of a butterfly’s wings in Guatemala, can, through a series of rapid relays, produce a sudden wholesale rupture, a gigantic and “catastrophic change” in the whole system, for example, a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico.

<sup>24</sup> Dupuy, 2007, n.p.

<sup>25</sup> Dupuy, 2013, p. 193.

train of logical thinking possible. But what if there were another way around this ethical aporia? According to Dupuy,

The major stumbling block of our current implicit metaphysics of temporality turns out to be our conception of the *future as unreal*. ... If the future is not real, it is not something that we can have cognizance of. If the future is not real, it is not something that projects its shadow on to the present. Even when we know a catastrophe is about to happen, we do not believe it: we do not believe what we know. If the future is not real, there is nothing in it that we should fear or hope for.<sup>26</sup>

And, he continues, this is the source of our problem “[f]or if one is to prevent a catastrophe, one needs to believe in its possibility *before* it occurs. If, on the other hand, one succeeds in preventing it, its non-realisation maintains it in the realm of the impossible, and as a result, the prevention efforts will appear useless in retrospect.”<sup>27</sup>

## Anacoluthon

Will we ever get to *what lies ahead*? I can hear the objection that this paper hardly seems to know where it is headed, that it seems to be avoiding the issue it explicitly set as its object, namely to ask whether we can make a rational choice in the face of the catastrophe. It is true that this paper hardly knows where it is headed to the extent that every message is divided in its address and its destination. Which doesn't mean of course that by seeking to not know it may arrive at knowing. The rhetorical figure of this paper's agrammaticality of following is *anacoluthon*. Anacoluthon: literally a want of grammatical sequence, a passing from one construction to another before the former is completed, an interruption within the sequence. *In what lies ahead* the anacoluthon determines the (im)possibility of the promise: whatever other form it might take, the promise is always, in essence – and therein lies its gravity – a vow to defy the temporal change, rupture and discontinuity the anacoluthon represents; yet at the same time the anacoluthic discontinuity itself provides the grounds for the disavowal of any promise, since one can only claim one's non-identity with the promiser one once was. So anacoluthon is what fails to follow; it is what is non-sequential

<sup>26</sup> Dupuy, 2007, n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

or literally “without following” (*an*, privative, *akolouthos*, “following”). But, as Derrida has noted, there exists a strange and inseparable bond between anacoluthon and the acolyte. The acolyte (from *akolouthos*) is the “follower” and the apparent opposite of anacoluthon. As Derrida argues, “Logically they are opposed; but in fact, what appears as a necessity is that, in order to follow in a consistent way, to be true to what you follow, you have to interrupt the following” (life.after.theory 7). In his essay “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps*” Derrida quotes grammarian Pierre Fontanier’s definition of anacoluthon from his *Les Figures du discours* (1968):

It consists in implying and always in conformity with usage or without contravening it, the *companion* of an expressed word; it consists, I say, in letting stand alone a words that calls out for another as companion. *The missing companion is no longer a companion; it is what in Greek is called Anacoluthon, and this name is also that of the figure.*<sup>28</sup>

In Fontanier’s rhetorical definition, there is a break in presence, there is a correlation between a word that is present and one that is not. There is a missing companion that is no longer a companion. Fontanier’s definition emphasizes the interruptive element of the anacoluthon, the element that provokes feelings of disappointment, even loss, at the lack of the expected completion of the inaugural construction. Interrupting the continuity of writing or speech, the anacoluthon leaves the reader or listener with a sense of confusion and frustrated expectation. Fontanier even goes so far as to call it a “non-trope.” For J. Hillis Miller, in his essay on Paul de Man entitled “The Anacoluthonic Lie,” anacoluthon causes a perturbation and a sense of betrayal, of infidelity, of a breach of promise.<sup>29</sup> It becomes a question of what “after” means. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, “the “after” we are speaking of here stems... not from succession but from rupture, and less from anticipation than from suspense, even stupor. It is an “after” that means: Is there an after? Is there anything that follows? Are we still headed somewhere?”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Derrida, 2002, p. 182.

<sup>29</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “The Anacoluthonic Lie” in *Reading Narrative*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman 1998, pp. 149-57.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy, 2015, p. 15.

Here we are again with questions of continuity and discontinuity, sequence and consequence – or, more specifically, what (even who) does or does not *follow*. Broken and unstoppable, anacoluthia fails or refuses to complete one construction and continues instead with another. Can there be a definitive breaking off or crossing over without the possibility of some anacoluthonic attachment, even if that attachment only operates relationally in terms of negation? Anacoluthic narrative cannot be grasped as the record of past presence, without forcibly repeating the division of presence. If syntax guarantees a logic of narrative sequencing, anacoluthia doubles that logic and divides it from within. *In what lies ahead* anacoluthia describes the discontinuity not of some formed thought but of the push, skip, contraction or condensation that moves thinking.

This is what Dupuy describes – in a phrase that returns throughout his work – as the “*logique du détour*”: detour as turn, deviation, circuitous path, even a turn of phrase, the association of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives that may seem ideologically and theoretically different: rationality and faith, the anthropological and the technological. Dupuy’s theoretical use of this term would call for its own analytical exposition – a *detour* on the “*détour*” one could say. In order to indicate the cognitive movement that Dupuy has in mind with reference to the articulation between past and future, prevision and prophesy, between regression and anticipation, the *logique du détour* is a logic of the turn, an indirect logic, even a “folding back” of an element or part such as the lapel of a jacket or the cover of a book (both meanings of the French term). The theoretical point being that a movement forward or back in time, an articulation between past and future, prevision and prophesy, regression and anticipation, can no longer to be simply thought of as inserted in a temporal line understood as a succession of instants (a historical linearity) nor that of a circular restoration (an eternal return). So the centre of an anacoluthon is both a rupture and an interruption, but it is also a fold, a folding back that enables the continuation of thinking, of saying something new, of triggering a new ethical perspective. This folding over or overlap – and the creation of a final text that is agrammatically related to the initial text (that follows and does not follow it) – is the very condition of what Derrida describes as “invention.” He notes:

this word “invention” ... *hesitates perhaps* between *creative* invention, the production of what is not – or was not earlier – and *revelatory* invention, the discov-



ery and unveiling of what *already* is or finds itself to be there. Such an invention thus hesitates *perhaps*, it is suspended undecidably between fiction and truth...<sup>31</sup>

The agrammatical continuance of the anacoluthon opens the way for new thought – an after-life, one might say.

### In what lies ahead

Let us assume the end is near. The end that subverts the intelligibility of the sequence through which we have been progressing. How exactly will it happen? What can we do to prevent it? What can we do to hasten it you may well be asking at this point? The question of the future is not, then, a question about fictions that are about the future. Situating the disaster within a linear-historical temporal order – locating the occurrence of a catastrophic event sometime in the future, and choosing preventative measures from a range of current possibilities – is inadequate. Instead of approaching the disaster as a future possibility, which will only be realized if we fail to act appropriately, we ought to confront it in a more radical way, as an undisputed inevitability. Let us hasten towards *our* end, pro-ject ourselves into it. The surprise ending. Let us now revise the premises of our first question in the light of *what lies ahead*. Will we be able to think, what is called thinking, at one and the same time, both what is happening (the event) and the calculable programming of that event? For that, it would be necessary in the future (but there will be no future except on this condition) to think *both* the event *and* its incompleteness. Thinking ahead, prophesy seems to tell us, is indistinguishable from looking back; we think ahead by imagining looking back; we try to impute to the future the certainty of retrospect. The unexpected event, however, reasserts the asymmetry of time and the condition of unforeseeability. It is not that the unexpected is difficult to grasp, but that, in being difficult to grasp, it reveals the ungraspability of nothingness, of presence in general. Such is, perhaps, the reason for the dissatisfaction of any thinking of the disaster – that sense that something remains beyond our grasp, incomplete, perhaps never to be completed. This is the doubling of time of “enlightened catastrophism”; the future anterior that makes the unexpected intelligible and the temporal loop between future and past that Dupuy calls “the metaphysics of

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<sup>31</sup> Derrida, 2002, p. 168.

projected time.”<sup>32</sup> More precisely, before the disaster occurs, it can only not occur; it is in occurring that it begins to have always been necessary, and therefore, that the non-catastrophe, which was possible, begins to have always been impossible. For how does one know whether the end is an end if one does not know *what lies ahead*?

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<sup>32</sup> “Enlightened catastrophism consists in thinking the continuation of human experience as the result of a negative self-destruction — a self-destruction that is inscribed in the future fixed under the form of destiny” (Dupuy, 2007).

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## ***Est deus in nobis* or the Will to Enjoy**

In moral-practical reason, there is contained the principle of the knowledge of my duties as commands (*praeccepta*), that is, not according to the rule which makes the subject into an [object], but that which emerges from freedom and which [the subject] prescribes to itself, and yet as if another and higher person had made it a rule for him (*dictamen rationis practicae*). The subject feels himself necessitated through his own reason ... to obey these duties. [...]

The subject of the categorical imperative in me is an object which deserves to be obeyed: an object of adoration. This is an identical proposition. The characteristic of a moral being which can command categorically over the nature of man is its divinity. His laws must be obeyed as divine commands. Whether religion is possible without the presupposition of the existence of God. *Est deus in nobis*.

– Immanuel Kant<sup>1</sup>

What is in question in this passage from *Opus postumum*, Kant's unfinished, last major work, a work described by Kant himself as his *opus magnum* and as the keystone of his entire philosophical system, is nothing less than a discretely announced division of the subject that Lacan succeeded in bringing to light by reading Kant "with Sade," that is, by reading Kant, reason incarnate, through Sade's lenses, the knight of jouissance, and, as a consequence of this reading, taking his reflections on the division of the subject in some new and radical directions. To put it in a word to anticipate what follows below, it is precisely this relation between reason and jouissance that I will take up as a guideline for

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Opus Postumum*, trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993), pp. 208-9.

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some tentative comments that I propose to present here in order to situate the relation between philosophy and psychoanalysis. It should be noted, however, that in “Kant with Sade” Lacan stages not one but two incompatible couples, incompatible precisely to the extent that they bring together reason and *jouissance*: Kant and Sade, obviously, as this couple is already indicated in the very title of the essay, and, more discretely, Sade and Epictetus. Without being able to tackle the argument developed in “Kant with Sade” in depth, let me attempt to present in a rather schematic way the essential characteristics of this curious double *mise-en-scène*. To grossly summarise: if Sade is coupled with Kant in order to reveal a hidden driving force behind Kant’s moral law, the will to enjoy, Epictetus’ joining Sade is revelatory of Sade’s deficiency as a desiring subject.

Following just the theme that interests me here – for there are so many others – and Lacan’s indications concerning the radical change in the status of the subject resulting from the establishment of a new relationship between desire and will at the end of analysis, I will examine two modalities of the subject’s confrontation with the Other’s will to enjoy: that of Sade and that of the Stoics. Insisting on a few crucial points of convergence and divergence of these two modalities of the subject’s coming to terms with the will to *jouissance*, my aim here is to explore the conditions of the possibility of an ethics without the Other, an ethics of the drive that allows for a non-perverse transgression of the pleasure principle.

### Overcoming the Will-Desire Dichotomy

Although it is true that Lacan posed the question of the rapport of psychoanalysis with philosophy on various occasions, there is no denying that this was precisely to signal and elucidate a misunderstanding that conceals the undeniable heterogeneity of these two thoughts: philosophy and psychoanalysis. More to the point, Lacan delivers a penetrating critique, not against how philosophy works, but with regard to the effects of its working. Thus, Lacan seems to “correct” philosophy on numerous points. One such point is the question of *jouissance*. The problem is highly significant since, for Lacan, a dialogue with a philosopher is possible only if the latter is presented not only as a thinking subject, but also as a desiring subject, a subject divided by his passions, in short, a subject with a body that he does not know what to do with. Yet it is exactly this non-mastery, which the philosopher shares with any speaking being, that

philosophy seeks to conceal. More importantly, philosophy, as Lacan sees it, obscures what is crucial, indeed, what is most intimate to thought, namely: *jouissance*, enjoyment, considered as the secret driving force behind thought. Unable to do or say anything about this *jouissance*, philosophical discourse succeeds in blocking access to what matters the most for each speaking being: where exactly to situate this *jouissance*, this enjoyment that can never truly find its proper place?

In this light, it is rather odd that, for Lacan, as an analyst and despite his relentless criticism, philosophy strikes a reverberating chord. I am interested especially in those references to philosophy in which Lacan makes a comparison between a school conceived for psychoanalysis and ancient philosophical schools, in particular the one established by the Stoics. Emphasising a certain affinity between his School and the ancient schools, Lacan insists in particular on the following point: “A school is something different if it deserves its name, in the sense that this term has been employed since antiquity, it is something in which there ought to be formed a style of life.”<sup>2</sup> The position Lacan outlines here bears some striking resemblance to the ancient conception of philosophy as a lived practice that aims at a transformation of one’s mode of existence. Of course, Lacan does not equate the practice involved in his school of psychoanalysis with the sort of philosophical training engaged in by the ancient schools of philosophy, which aimed at rendering, in the words of Hegel, “the soul absolutely indifferent to everything which the real world had to offer.”<sup>3</sup> The parallel is rather at the level of learning not how to grit one’s teeth in the face of adversity, but rather how to see things differently, so that one does not need to grit one’s teeth. To put it somewhat differently: just like the ancient schools of philosophy, Lacan’s school of psychoanalysis was created in order to provide a kind of safe haven from civilisation and its discontents. What ancient philosophy and psychoanalysis share in common is the thought that the task at hand is to attempt to reform ourselves in order to be able to gain one’s bearings, to orient oneself in existence and thought in a situation wherein anything at all can happen.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XII, Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychoanalyse*, unpublished seminar, 27 January 1965.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie. Werke in zwanzig bände. Theorie Werkausgabe*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1971, Vol. 19, p. 402.

The Stoics' school is particularly interesting in this respect given that one of the key aims of the school was to teach and learn how to face whatever fate throws at us. In other words, in conceiving the world as something external and hostile, in learning a way of life, one is supposed to learn how to take blows, how to respond to whatever this hostile world throws at one. This also explains why this attitude of indifference to pleasure and pain, this patient fortitude, and voluntary sufferance, is characterised by Lacan as a "*politicised masochism*". Hegel's presentation and criticism of Stoicism confirms Lacan's designation of Stoicism as "*politicised masochism*". For Hegel, Stoicism marks the emergence of "the freedom of self-consciousness" which, in breaking free from "what is external and exposed to chance," only exists "as inward freedom."<sup>4</sup>

To describe the sage as free in this sense would be to portray him as being without the passions, whose satisfaction would depend on circumstances beyond his control. Epictetus is characteristically clear on this point: "And can anyone compel you to desire what you do not wish?—'No one.'" And conversely: "You are handing yourself over to be a slave and putting your head under the yoke if you admire anything that is not your own and hunger for anything that is subject to others and mortal."<sup>5</sup> The sage, by contrast, desires nothing that would make his success or happiness limited by chance or the whim of other people, and he can therefore never be defeated by external occurrences: "That man is free who lives as he wishes; who can be neither compelled, nor hindered, nor constrained: whose impulses are unimpeded, who attains his desires and does not fall into what he wants to avoid."<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, for the Stoics, the passions depend entirely on our will.

Thus, the greatness of Stoic philosophy, as Hegel sees it, consists in the fact that "the will of the subject, which in itself only wills itself, ... allows itself in its steadfastness to be moved by nothing different from itself, such as desires, pain, etc., desires its freedom alone, and is prepared to give up all else – which is thus, if it experiences outward pain and misfortune, yet separates these from the inwardness of its consciousness."<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, the Stoic sage, in his indifference

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 287.

<sup>5</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* IV. 1. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* IV. 1. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 287.

to whatever is outside himself, only knows “the notion of freedom not living freedom itself.”<sup>8</sup> Simply put, what the Stoic seeks is a freedom of thought because he has no control over the external world. Thus, the Stoic sage can well be “free on the throne as well as in fetters,” as Hegel notes, because, for him, “there is just this freedom, this negative moment of abstraction from existence, an independence which is capable of giving up everything, but not as an empty passivity and self-abnegation, as though everything could be taken from it, but an independence which can resign it voluntarily, without thereby losing its reality; for its reality is really just the simple rationality, the pure thought of itself.”<sup>9</sup> To be sure, in Hegel’s reading, the Stoics’ freedom is “a necessary moment in the Idea of absolute consciousness,” but precisely for that reason, it is also “a necessary manifestation in time.”<sup>10</sup> This is worth noting, considering Hegel’s rather harsh criticism of Stoicism. Indeed, Hegel is willing to acknowledge that such a freedom “is a freedom which can come on the scene as a general form of the world’s spirit only in a time of universal fear and bondage, a time, too, when mental cultivation is universal, and has elevated culture to the level of thought.”<sup>11</sup>

For the Stoics, self-sufficiency (*autolês, autarkês*) or freedom (*eleutheria*), which has strong political connotations for it is contrasted with tyranny and especially with slavery (*douleia*), implies that the wise man is answerable to no one. At the same time, the Stoics’ freedom, as Epictetus defines it, namely as having all things happen in accordance with one’s *prohairesis*, a term used by Epictetus to name will or choice, which should not be considered as the freedom to act arbitrarily, but must instead entail “learning to will that things should happen as they do,”<sup>12</sup> is not a freedom from casual determinism or fate. Far from being exempt from fate, the sage is precisely the one who not only accepts fate and is not troubled by irrational passions or affects rebelling against the inevitability of events, but strives to accept that which occurs which requires active cooperation with fate. To quote Epictetus: “The philosophers are right to say that if a wise and good man had foreknowledge of events, he would work to assist

<sup>8</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie, Harper Torchbooks, New York 1967, p. 200.

<sup>9</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 293-4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, I. 12. 15 and I. 12. 17.



nature even when it comes to sickness and death and mutilation, being aware that these things are allotted in accordance with the ordering of the universe.”<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, freedom, as the Stoics conceive of it, is conduct in accordance with fate insofar as the latter is itself in accordance with God’s reason. Yet such a freedom which consists in matching our will with the will of fate requires special conditions. If we are to follow Hegel, such a freedom is “a freedom which can come on the scene [...] only in a time of universal fear and bondage.”<sup>14</sup> In view of this, one can better understand the task of Stoic philosophy: instead of striving to change the will of fate, we should attempt to change ourselves by adopting the attitude of the Stoic sage, who teaches us to not seek that events “happen as you want, but [to] want events as they happen.”<sup>15</sup>

This is only to remind us that what is at stake in ancient philosophy is less theory or knowledge than a kind of practice that involves a “*savoir y faire avec*”, a certain ‘knowing-how-to-do-it’ as regards the difficulty of living in a particular turbulent moment of history. In this vein, Epictetus remarks: “In every subject, the man who possesses a skill must necessarily be superior to the man who lacks it. So in general, the man who possesses knowledge [of] how to live, how can he be anything other than the master?”<sup>16</sup> Seen from this perspective, the School can be considered to be a place in which troubles concerning *jouissance* can be dealt with. Or more exactly, the School is destined to provide a treatment for the difficulties arising from the always unsatisfactory answers to the question of knowing what is to be done with one’s body. Indeed, if finding the right measure is such a problem for man, this is because there is in him something that goes beyond every measure, namely *jouissance*.

It is surely no accident that in taking up the question of *jouissance* in his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* and in “Kant with Sade”, Lacan employs the notion of will, a notion that, unlike that of desire, is not an analytic concept. Indeed, it is hardly necessary to dwell on the effects of the analytic experience with respect to desire. The fundamental stage of any mapping out of the subject with respect to what is called his will consists in rediscovering within the

<sup>13</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* II. 10. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> Epictetus, *Handbook*, trans., with an introduction and annotations, Nicholas White, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge 1983, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* IV. 1. 8.

discourse of the Other which models him what he really desires. The neurotic comes to see an analyst because he cannot find a way to deal with his desire, which is a source of constant trouble. He cannot accomplish what he would like to do; he does not know what he desires; he does not realise what he wishes; he does not pursue what he has undertaken; he would like to succeed in doing something, but what he desires is not in agreement with his will. There is then a muddle between desire and will. A quotation from Lacan's "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" can shed some light on these difficulties inherent in desire: "what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want – a form assumed by negation in which misrecognition is inserted in a very odd way, the misrecognition, of which he himself is unaware, by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless obviously intermittent, and, inversely, protects himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences."<sup>17</sup>

Lacan draws a portrait of the neurotic and his complicated rapport with desire in a study dedicated to Hamlet throughout *Seminar VI, Desire and its Interpretation*. Hamlet, says Lacan, is someone who does not know what he wants. Indeed, even though Hamlet does not doubt for a moment that he has a task to accomplish, namely, to avenge his father, he foams with despair because he cannot decide to take this action. "Why does Hamlet not act? Why is this will [in English], this desire, this will [*volonté*], something which remains suspended in him?" asks Lacan. In effect, what is in question in Hamlet's drama, according to Lacan, is neither that he does not want, nor that he is unable to accomplish his act; what is at stake here is rather that "he is not able to will."<sup>18</sup> Here, as Lacan points out, we touch on something essential: what makes the task that is assigned to Hamlet repugnant to him, what makes his act difficult, indeed, what puts him effectively in a problematic rapport with this act, is not the impure character of his desire, the fact that his act is not disinterested, that it is not motivated in a Kantian way. If Hamlet is powerless to establish himself as a basis of the decision and cannot, for this reason, accomplish his act, this is because the desire that is at stake here is not his own desire. What Hamlet has to deal with,

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Company, New York and London 2006, pp. 690-691.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation*, Editions de La Martinière and Le Champ Freudien Editeur, Paris 2013, p. 329.

what Hamlet is grappling with, Lacan insists, is a desire that is very different from his own. It is not the desire for his mother, but, rather, his mother's desire.

Several traits can then be distinguished on the basis of this minimal clarification. Continuing the reflection from *Desire and its Interpretation* cited previously, Lacan reiterates and expands on the notion of the dependence of the desire of the subject with respect to the Other's desire, developing the argument regarding this dependence in two stages: "The first factor that I indicated to you in Hamlet's structure was his situation of dependence with respect to the desire of the Other, the desire of his mother. Here now is the second factor that I ask you to recognise: Hamlet is constantly suspended in the time of the Other, throughout the entire story until the very end."<sup>19</sup> While one might be tempted to see in procrastination one of the crucial features of Hamlet's inability to act, and, indeed, Lacan himself focuses on procrastination as "one of the essential dimensions of the tragedy," because, for Hamlet, "the appointment is always too soon,"<sup>20</sup> which is why he postpones it, it should be noted, however, that, as Lacan clearly emphasises, "when Hamlet does act, it is always too soon. When he does act it is when all of a sudden something in the realm of events, beyond him and his deciding, calls out to him and seems to offer him some sort of ambiguous opening, which has, in specific psychoanalytical terms, introduced the perspective we call flight into the dimension of accomplishment."<sup>21</sup>

A wonderful formulation used by Lacan in order to identify one of the key structural traits of the entire tragedy, i.e. "Hamlet is always at the hour of the Other,"<sup>22</sup> is the central but crucially ambivalent linchpin of Lacan's reading, which takes a surprising turn in the very next sentence. The latter, namely, appears at odds with the one proposed before insofar as, in it, Lacan clearly states that "for Hamlet there is no hour but his own. Moreover, there is only one hour, the hour of his destruction."<sup>23</sup> How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory formulations? This is also, as Lacan explains, the reason why the entire structure of the tragedy of Hamlet is constituted as a *mise-en-scène* of "Hamlet's unrelenting movement toward that hour." However, there is a more pressing point. If "the

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

subject's appointment with the hour of this destruction is the common lot of everyone," the question that arises, therefore, is: "what is the specificity of Hamlet's fate? What makes it so extraordinarily problematic?" and, more to the point, "What does Hamlet lack?"<sup>24</sup> Lacan's answer to this question helps us bridge the rival dimensions of Hamlet's desire. According to Lacan, Hamlet's deficiency as a desiring subject is due to the fact that "he has never set a goal for himself, an object for his action that has always something 'arbitrary' about it."<sup>25</sup> Or, to put it "in commonsensical terms, Hamlet just doesn't know what he wants."<sup>26</sup>

Now we are in a better position to grasp why the drama of Hamlet makes it possible for an analyst to arrive at the articulation of a deficiency of desire and the inability to act. In fact, this articulation can only be seen in retrospect, that is, from the perspective of what Lacan designates as "the final act," thus termed because Hamlet has to put his own life on the line as the price for being able to accomplish it. What is significant here is that this act itself, as Lacan insists, "serves only to enable Hamlet to identify himself with the fatal signifier,"<sup>27</sup> i.e., the phallus, Lacan's term for the signifier of the subject's alienation in the symbolic order. Thus the question of the phallus appears in a particularly striking form as the point around which Hamlet's desire and, consequently, act turn and vacillate. What is peculiar in the drama of the fulfilment of Hamlet's desire, especially when compared to that of Oedipus, is that "the phallus to be struck at" is still there, indeed, it is real, as "it is precisely Claudius who is called upon to embody it."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, if Hamlet finds himself in a situation in which he is unable to act, this is because, as Lacan points out, "the phallus is located here in a position that is entirely out of place with respect to its Oedipal position."<sup>29</sup> As Lacan remarks, what is paradoxical in Hamlet's situation, insofar as it can be considered as "the Oedipal situation," what makes Hamlet hold back, is not fear of Claudius, in his double role as the real king and the usurper, but the awareness that "he must strike something other than what is there."<sup>30</sup> Another crucial point here is that Hamlet is unable to accomplish the act that will strike at the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 417.

real phallus, despite the fact that the body that incarnated it in the real, Claudius, “wasn’t the right one,” not only because he is still narcissistically connected to the phallus, but also because he is stunned, so to speak, to discover something that is utterly unexpected, namely, that for his mother, as Lacan notes, “there must be something very strong that nevertheless attaches her to her partner.”<sup>31</sup> What makes Hamlet reproach his mother, in the end, is nothing other than “for having filled herself with it,” but in so doing he only sends her back “to that fatal, fateful object, here real indeed, around which the play revolves.”<sup>32</sup>

Hence, in “consenting to the desire of his mother, laying down his arms before something which seems ineluctable to him; namely, the mother’s desire that takes on for him the value of something which in no case can be controlled, raised up against, removed,”<sup>33</sup> Lacan argues, Hamlet’s desire finds itself crushed by the desire of his mother *qua woman*, who, immediately after her husband’s death lets another man in her bed, and not just any man, as we know. Hence, Hamlet’s nasty comment: “The meal for funeral served the following day for the wedding banquet. *Thrift, thrift!* ... As regards her, she is simply a gaping cunt. When one goes, another arrives. This is what it is all about.”<sup>34</sup>

This is the pivotal point of the whole drama, at least in Lacan’s reading, since, for him, the drama of Hamlet is the drama of desire. It is in this regard that Lacan can state that there is no moment at which the formula “the desire of man is the desire of the Other,” would in a more accomplished, tangible, manifest, complete way cancel out the subject, than in the case of Hamlet.<sup>35</sup> For what Hamlet encounters in his mother’s desire is “something of the real Other,” as Lacan points out, something that is “less desire than gluttony, even engulfment.”<sup>36</sup> Before what is thus revealed to be “the fatal necessity of this sort of mother’s desire which nothing sustains, which nothing retains,” Hamlet’s desire undergoes what Lacan qualifies as an “abolition”, a “destruction”.<sup>37</sup> In effect, this devastation, which was brought about by the mother’s desire, provides a perfect

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 338-9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

example of man's desire being "trampled by the elephantine feet of the Other's whimsy,"<sup>38</sup> which characterises "a lawless will" inherent in a whim that regulates the mother's desire. Thus, if Hamlet, for Lacan, is the tragedy of desire, it is precisely because his mother's feminine will manifests itself as the will to jouissance, whose principle of action is precisely a sort of "because I want it!" that can attain the point of "the irredeemable, absolute, unplumbable betrayal of love,"<sup>39</sup> which, as such, goes against the duty that founds the order of the world.

What is significant here is that the impasse between desire and will is a structural one. As Lacan clearly points out: "man's desire is the Other's desire in which the *de* provides what grammarians call a 'subjective determination' – namely, that it is qua Other that man desires."<sup>40</sup> The implication here is that, due to the extimacy of desire, the subject can only confront the question of his desire, "What do I want?", starting from the question of the Other's desire. Pressing this point further, one may argue that, for Lacan, if the best way to lead the subject to the question of his own desire is "the Other's question," formulated as "*Che vuoi?*", i.e. "What do you want?"<sup>41</sup>, this is because, as Lacan explains in his seminar on *Desire and its Interpretation*, in expecting to receive a response to his question, in the place of the Other, "the subject advances with his question as such," yet "what he is aiming at in the final term is the moment of this encounter with himself, of this encounter with his willing."<sup>42</sup>

In this way, the subject will have to confront the muddle of his desire insofar as this muddle is proper to the very function of desire, which is that of defence: "a defence of going beyond a limit in jouissance."<sup>43</sup> Admittedly, already in the neurotic fantasy, the Other's jouissance is considered as a version of the will to jouissance, yet within the limits of the pleasure principle. But we have not yet touched on the most surprising and, to me, most significant aspect of the relationship between desire and will. At risk of gross simplification, one could say that fantasy, as Lacan defines it, allows the subject to sustain himself as desiring. At the same time, fantasy, which is a kind of defence, assigns to desire

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject ...," p. 689.

<sup>39</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation*, p. 352.

<sup>40</sup> Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject ...," p. 690.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation*, p. 349.

<sup>43</sup> Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject ...," p. 699.

its intermittent trait; as a result, it can only appear as a flickering desire. In this light, it could then be argued that the ultimate aim of the analysis would be none other than to lead the subject to the point at which desire, once rid of its own confusion, turns into will in order to realise itself as a desire that wants what it desires, a “*désir décide*”, a determined, resolute desire, to use another of Lacan’s terms, one that complicates the picture, however, as we are dealing here with *a contradiction in adjecto*, which is why Lacan speaks of “*un désir inédit*,”<sup>44</sup> a novel, unheard of desire. For this new, resolute desire is a desire that turns into will, in short, it is a desire that knows what it wants, and is therefore capable of passing to the act. But this is only possible once desire is unencumbered by the muddle that inhibits it. It should be noted, however, that the will qua determined or resolute desire emerges together with a new subjective position that can be attained only at the end of analysis.

Hence, despite the manifestly minor importance of will for the analytic experience, it is worth noting that several elements plead in favour of a positive re-evaluation of the status of the will in its relation to desire. The first of these elements is this new affinity between desire and will insofar as it presents a desire that shares some distinctive traits with the drive: namely, its capriciousness. For this determined or resolute desire is will, but a will that knows no law or, rather, a will whose accomplishment is situated outside the law, outside all convention and common sense.

Therefore, to open a new perspective on the relationship between desire and will – in terms of agreement rather than in terms of disjuncture – I have taken as my focus an indication given by Lacan in his text “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation”. The end of analysis is conceived in terms of an injunction: “it is as desire’s object *a*, as what he was to the Other in his erection as a living being, as *wanted* or *unwanted* when he came into the world, that he is called to be reborn in order to know if he wants what he desires.”<sup>45</sup> I will formulate a few remarks regarding this relationship insofar as it requires a radical transformation of the status of the subject because the subject, to repeat once more, “is called to be reborn in order to know if he wants what he desires.” In the light of the path designated by Lacan, an analysis should allow the subject to release his condi-

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<sup>44</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Note italienne,” *Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris 2001, p. 309.

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Proposition,” *Ecrits*, pp. 571-2.

tion of the *objet petit a* in the Other's desire. This is a necessary precondition for the subject in order to have a possibility to respond to the question concerning the singularity of his being and, in so doing, to accede to "this point beyond the reduction"<sup>46</sup> of the universality of the ideal. This solution, i.e. "to want what one desires," can be seen as a reformulation of the Freudian imperative: "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*," insofar as it "calls for an overhauling of ethics."<sup>47</sup>

As Lacan points out in this essay, this absolution, more precisely the moment when desire is transformed into a determined, resolute desire, into a desire that desires or, rather, wants itself, can only be attained at the point of the last judgment.<sup>48</sup> Do I truly want what I desire? For this question requires a final, definitive response, a judgement that seals, if I may say so, the subject's destiny. Assuming, perhaps contentiously, that this is the reason why Lacan speaks of the rebirth of the subject, a difficult question to pose is the question of knowing to what extent the Stoic position – which I propose to examine here – can be considered as one leading to such a rebirth of the subject. But, first of all, why should one choose this particular, odd example: the Stoic sage, which is far from obvious?

### **Fiat voluntas tua!**

Anticipating what I will be developing in what follows, I will argue that the subjective position of the Stoic sage, characterised by an inflexible, unbending will, should be explored in some detail because we are dealing here with a subject for whom the conundrum of desire is already resolved, insofar as he considers the relation between the will and desire in terms of an agreement rather than in terms of a disjuncture. What is more, the originality of Stoicism resides precisely in a certain "culture of the will" brought to the point where it aims at the point

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 571.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 572.

<sup>48</sup> "And it is because we know better than those who went before how to recognize the nature of desire, which is at the heart of this experience, that a reconsideration of ethics is possible, that a form of ethical judgement is possible, of a kind that gives this question the force of a Last Judgment: Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?" Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter, Tavistock/Routledge, London 1992, p. 314.



of the identification of the subject with his will.<sup>49</sup> What I am going to propose concerning the relation between desire and will in the context of Stoic thought will in fact allow us to introduce some new elements in order to elucidate the following question: What status of the subject corresponds to the reconciliation between desire and the will?

In order to discuss the Stoic view of the tension between will and desire in any depth, it will first be necessary to lay out the Stoic's conception of the human soul as a foundational departure from the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. The Stoic conception of the will obviously derives from Aristotle, who, in fact, characterises will as a rational desire, more precisely, as either a "desiderative reason" or a "ratiocinative desire".<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, like Plato, distinguishes between the part of the soul that "has reason" and the part that, although it is not non-rational, can "obey reason".<sup>51</sup> The conceptualisation of desire, "the appetitive part" (*to epithumêtikon*) of the soul allows that obeying reason requires "reason-involvement" of some sort. It is clear from Aristotle's characterisation of desire, which is capable of both obeying reason and contradicting it, that desire's compliance with reason is nonetheless conceived as a relation of exteriority between two distinct faculties of the soul. What we have in Aristotle is an extremely subtle relationship between will and desire: while will is undeniably rational, it is attached to desire, a faculty that by definition is separated from reason. Thus, desire can only comply with reason when it desires what reason decides what it should desire. What Aristotle designates as *boulêsis* is precisely this desire of the desiring faculty to obey reason. Following the consensus among contemporary scholars, the Stoics, by rejecting the Aristotelian division within the soul, posited, in contrast, the rationality of desire on behalf of a unitary concept of the soul. Hence the specific Stoic contribution to the understanding of the relationship between will and desire is the formulation of an account of an assent that makes of it a nascent concept of the will. In the light of the Stoic rejection of the so-called "quarrel between reason and appetite," that is, desire, it then follows that the will, or *boulêsis*, conceived as a species of will, is not to

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<sup>49</sup> Consider, for example, Epictetus' claim: "you are not flesh and hair, you are will (*prohairesis*)," Epictetus, *Discourses*, III, 3, 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> "Hence choice is either desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire, and such an origin of action is a man." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1975, VI, 1139b4-5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 7, 1098a4.

be understood as a desire that obeys reason, but rather a reasonable impulse resulting from reasoning, in short, a *desiring reason*.

In this light, it is clear that the Stoic usage of this term, *boulêsis*, radically breaks with the Aristotelian theory of will: if will, as Aristotle conceives of it, i.e. as the submission of desire to reason, can only emerge from a struggle between reason and desire, a potentially conflictual relationship as reason can only impose itself on desire from the outside, the Stoics posit that will is from the outset identified with reason, thus, not a desire obeying reason but rather a desiring reason. Faced with the alternative “reason or will” and in stark contrast to the once dominant view that, due to Stoic rationalism, which is founded entirely on the central role of reason presiding over the universal order of nature as well as the subject’s course of action, there appears to be no room left for will,<sup>52</sup> I would rather take up the forceful reading proposed by A. J. Voelke, according to which, for the Stoics, “reason is will.”<sup>53</sup> This additional point, however, implies the rejection of the very alternative “will or desire,” insofar as Stoicism knows no idea of desire except in the guise of its identification with the will. Indeed, in Stoic teaching, the will is a rational desire that abides by the rules of the logos.

In order to examine this reconciliation inherent in the Stoic notion of will, I will draw on the few indications that can be found in Lacan’s work. I have found the first indication in his essay “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire”, in which Lacan actually broaches the end of analysis in terms of the will. He presents the end of analysis as the moment when the subject confronts not only the Other’s demand, but its will. So, anyone who really wants to come to terms with the Other’s will has two paths open two him: “to either realize himself as an object, turning himself into the mummy of some Buddhist initiation, or satisfy the will to castrate inscribed in the Other, which leads to the supreme narcissism of the Lost Cause.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, to “anyone who really wants to come to terms with the Other’s will,” Lacan outlines two paths: either to become a mummy, or to sacrifice oneself for the lost cause. But, what does it mean, in the final analysis, to say either “Yes!” or “No!” to the Other’s will? Why did Lacan

<sup>52</sup> Adolf Dyroff, *Die Ethik der alten Stoa, Berliner Studien für classische Philosophie und Archäologie* (2014).

<sup>53</sup> André-Jean Voelke, *L'idée de volonté dans le stoïcisme*, PUF, Paris 1973, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject ...,” p. 700.

provide only these two paths: tragic rebellion or Buddhist acceptance, which are both anything but appealing? Indeed, both options in the proposed alternative involved in the “coming to terms with the Other’s will” imply the subject’s complete submission. It is quite obvious that this “coming to terms with the Other’s will” ends in complete acceptance. In what follows, I will argue that it is precisely this perspective proposed by Lacan that might enable one to understand the Stoic’s infamous assent to fate. What we have here is one of the most paradoxical aspects of the Stoic conception of will: to consider that the subject’s freedom is realised by saying “yes” to the Other’s will. As Seneca put it, “Freedom is to obey God, (*Deo parere libertas est*).”<sup>55</sup> For to assent to fate means to say “Yes!” to fate the very moment its will is manifested. The very moment the event takes place our will welcomes, as it were, its achievement, despite the fact that it can neither cause it, nor prevent it efficaciously. By founding the freedom of will on this “*Fiat voluntas tua!*”, the Stoics – we have to grant them that – have the merit of having truly wanted to confront the Other, of having truly wanted to experience, as Lacan remarked, not only the Other’s demand, but also or primarily its will.

Curiously enough, this is exactly the solution that Sade himself proposes when he confronts the Other’s will, and to be even more exact, to confront the will to jouissance that it incarnates. In affirming the Other’s right to jouissance, Sade appears to be aiming at the impossible: to preserve both jouissance, which is by definition “egoist”, autistic even, and the Other, that agency namely that is incompatible with the solipsism of jouissance, as the latter would appear to rule out the very possibility of the Other’s existence. While the solution proposed by Sade may well be elegant in terms of the means used to reach the desired end, it remains paradoxical nonetheless: for the affirmation of the existence of the Other is established through the satisfaction of the will to enjoy, more precisely, through the victim’s subjection to the will of jouissance. Ultimately, what we are dealing with here is a retroactive resurrection of the Other, which does not yet exist, as it is only the attempt to satisfy the will to jouissance that brings it into existence or makes it exist or at least strives to make it exist. At the same time, the subject’s position changes radically: faced with the imperative of jou-

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<sup>55</sup> Seneca, *De vita beata*, XV, 7. See also “Of a Happy Life,” Book XV, trans. Aubrey Stewart, from the Bohn’s Classical Library Edition of *L. Annaeus Seneca, Minor Dialogs Together with the Dialog “On Clemency,”* George Bell and Sons, London 1900.

issance, the subject turns himself into an instrument at the service of the will of jouissance. Sade who, as is well known, insists on the strict separation between will and the law, could only succeed in “pairing” the will of the Other and jouissance, that acephalic, headless agency that knows no norm, no rule, no law and remains impervious to all domestication, by equating the Other’s will and a sheer whim. The Sadean maxim of jouissance, such as Lacan formulates it, expresses this will whose law is precisely the negation of all law: “‘I have the right to enjoy your body,’ anyone can say to me, ‘and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body.’”<sup>56</sup> This opens the way for a re-examination of Sade’s subjective position. He does not go so far as to turn himself into a mummy. Still, he is very close to that position because he is set on being a martyr to the will to jouissance. Sade’s ultimate aim is to achieve “the sort of apathy that involves having ‘returned to nature’s bosom, in the waking state, in our world,’”<sup>57</sup> to take up Klossowski’s formulation as quoted by Lacan himself in “Kant with Sade”. In choosing to return alive, “in the waking state”, in the inanimate state, in opting for *me phynai*, “never to have been born”, *à la* Oedipus, abundantly commented on by Lacan in several of his seminars, Sade strives to free himself from the signifier in order to cease to be its victim. Yet the price to be paid for not being a stain on the universe of language, to subtract himself from the order of the signifier and thus to finally erase his own being from it, is to become a “mummified” object, an object that is no longer troubled by the subjective division.

This brings us to the second indication, taken precisely from “Kant with Sade”. This one refers, in fact, to the Stoics, yet in a very peculiar context, namely that of a missed encounter, if one may say so, between Sade and Epictetus. The fact that Lacan, in this text, puts on stage not only the infamous couple, Kant and Sade, but also – more discretely, to be sure – another couple, that of Sade and Epictetus, will help us greatly to further develop the relationship between will and desire. If Sade, according to Lacan’s thesis, uncovers Kant’s truth, then I am tempted to argue that Epictetus is revelatory of Sade’s truth, that is, his failings as a desiring subject. What Sade and Epictetus are supposed to share in common here is the thought that the subject should put himself in the “service of the Other”, of his will, to be exact. For in both cases the distinguishing trait that

<sup>56</sup> “Kant with Sade,” p. 648.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 667.

characterises the subject's position is the Other's will rather than the Other's desire.

It is therefore very telling that Lacan addresses the same objection to both Sade and the Stoics, by saying, concerning the Stoics, that "their *ataraxia* deposed their wisdom. We fail to realize that they degraded desire; and not only do we not consider the Law to be commensurably exalted by them, but it is precisely because of this degrading of desire that, whether we know it or not, we sense that they cast down the Law."<sup>58</sup> In other words, it is because the idea that the Law itself would motivate and activate its proper transgression is utterly inconceivable to the Stoics that they are unaware of the fact that in exalting the Law, instead of rendering it efficacious, they actually render it inoperative. Saint Paul, in contrast, proves to be, according to Lacan, more perceptive: Paying very close attention to the ways in which sin manipulates and abuses the Law to seduce and then to destroy the subject, he insists that there is no greater *jouissance* for man than to go against the Law.<sup>59</sup>

Seen from this perspective, one is surely justified in stating that Sade, having no other objective than, precisely, to violate the Law, certainly went further than the Stoics in the dialectic of desire and the Law. But, at the same time, "Sade went no further," as Lacan emphasises, since he, too, was blind to the mutual parasitism of desire and the Law. Indeed, his desire can only maintain itself in defiance of the Law. It is therefore against this background that Lacan reproaches Sade for having "stopped at the point where desire and law become bound up with each other."<sup>60</sup> More precisely, if Sade failed in maintaining desire in the guise of defiance of the Law, this is because "something in him let itself remain tied to the law," which prevented Sade from taking "the opportunity, mentioned

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 663.

<sup>59</sup> "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do. If then I do that which I will not, I consent to the law, that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good. For to will, is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me." *The Letter of St. Paul To The Romans*, 7,14-17.

<sup>60</sup> "Kant with Sade," p. 667.

by Saint Paul, to become inordinately sinful.”<sup>61</sup> What is, according to Lacan, the sign of Sade’s limitation, of his deficiency as a desiring subject? If Lacan is justified in speaking of Sade’s failings, this is because Sade never presents to us a situation in which the victim would be seduced, won over, by the torturer to the point of giving her consent to him.

It should be noted, however, that the Sadean desire, despite its limitations, is a particular desire that in breaking with the paradigmatic desire – the desire of the Other – overcomes the desire’s inherent “nescience”.<sup>62</sup> In this respect one could argue that Sade is a subject concerned not with a faltering desire, but is inhabited instead by a “determined, resolute desire”, to borrow Lacan’s term, a desire that knows what it wants. Obviously, this desire is not decided, determined, by Sade, rather it is determined by that which causes it, *jouissance* or, more precisely, the will to *jouissance*, because Sade says: “I have the right to enjoy your body.”<sup>63</sup> “Legitimised” by the right to *jouissance*, the Sadean subject knows what he wants, namely to engender *jouissance* – without asking for permission. And to the extent that the Sadean subject exercises this imprescriptible right to *jouissance* without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body,”<sup>64</sup> as is clearly expressed in the Sadean maxim, we can consider the Sadean desire, a desire reduced solely to the will to *jouissance*, as being equivalent to the drive, that agency namely that satisfies itself without authorisation, outside all intersubjectivity, which means without the subject’s knowledge and without any regard for the Other’s interdiction.

A first provisional answer to the question of knowing what makes it possible for Epictetus to be impervious to Sade would be to say that Sade cannot affect, cannot shake, the Stoic subject precisely because his experience does not require the subject’s consent, it does not require her being willing. Actually, the victim’s consent is of no concern to Sade. However, what the Sadean torturer does aim at in his victim is the point of her subjective division. More exactly, what the tormenter seeks in his victim is the point at which the victim is connected to a *jouissance* that divides her. And to be even more precise, the aim of the Sadean

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “The Subversion of the Subject...”, p. 689.

<sup>63</sup> “Kant with Sade,” p. 648.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

torturer is to strive to bring out this divisive *jouissance* with no reference whatsoever to the victim's consent.

How are we to understand this maxim of *jouissance* that implies the right to enjoy the victim's body? No doubt such a maxim only makes sense on condition that the whole experience produces some kind of effect on the victim. And it is precisely in this context that Lacan evokes the failure of the Sadean experience that would be inevitable were it to have no effect on the Stoic subject, who, instead of being shaken to the core, would turn to his torturer and say: "Please, continue, I beg you." Lacan even imagines what Epictetus' response would be to the cruel infliction of pain he would have to endure in the Sadean experience. If the torturer were to break his leg, he would mockingly comment: "You see, you broke it."<sup>65</sup> In other words, if Sade fails in his attempt to apply the right to *jouissance* to Epictetus, this is because the Stoic differs from the pervert in that for him pain does not constitute an ontological proof.

Stoicism is usually regarded as a kind of asceticism. And it is asceticism, indeed, because it reaches the point at which pain means nothing to the subject. It is precisely in such a context that Lacan evokes "the Stoics' artifice": namely, scorn. "What pain is worth in Sadean experience will be seen better by approaching it via what might be disconcerting in the artifice the Stoics used with regard to it: scorn."<sup>66</sup> By responding to torture with scorn, by showing to the torturer that his body is of no concern to him, that it is a matter of indifference to him, Epictetus would reveal what is derisory in the Sadean *mise en scène*. To quote Lacan once again: "To reduce *jouissance* to the misery of an effect in which one's quest stumbles – doesn't this transform it into disgust?"<sup>67</sup>

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The Stoics' artifice thus consists in removing oneself from everything that does not depend on us, in withdrawing oneself from everything that is not what Epictetus calls "up to us" (*eph'hêmin*), only to rely on *prohairesis*, which can best be rendered as one's choice or will. As Epictetus himself put it:

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 651.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 650.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 651.

Some things are up to us, while others are not up to us. Up to us are conception, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not up to us are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing. Furthermore, the things up to us are by nature free, unhindered, and unimpeded; while the things not up to us are weak, servile, subject to hindrance, and not our own. Remember, therefore, that ... if you think only what is your own to be your own, and what is not your own to be, as it really is, not your own, then no one will ever be able to exert compulsion upon you, no one ... will do absolutely nothing against your will, ... no one will harm you, for neither is there any harm that can touch you.<sup>68</sup>

Hence, the very fact that the sage is capable of “stoically” enduring torture, that he remains perfectly impassive, proves that the Other has no hold over his will. The quotation from Epictetus clearly indicates that the Stoic position consists in entirely abandoning the whole substance of *jouissance* to the Other because, in a sense, it does not count. Ultimately, what we are dealing here with is an asceticism of disinvestment, of the withdrawal of the subjective involvement. The essential point here is that pain is not libidinally invested; it is not libidinalised, eroticised. One can see that in refusing to subjectify pain, the Stoic sage finds a way of parrying, of warding off, the subjective division that Sade wanted to inflict on him. What is truly Stoic, to repeat once more, is an attitude that demands that one only trust one’s *prohairesis*, one’s power of choice, and to abandon all the rest to the Other.

Once we realise the true location of our self, Zeus himself has no power over the subject’s *prohairesis*. *Prohairesis*, then, is what, in man, is in essence removed from all constraints. If one is situated at this point, one can, just like Epictetus, say to a tyrant threatening to throw him in chains: “Me in chains? You may fetter my leg, but my will not even Zeus himself can overpower.”<sup>69</sup> *Prohairesis* is sheltered from the tyrants. It constitutes an unassailable point, a hegemonic place – which explains its Greek name: *hēgemonikón* – which, conceived as a fragment of the divine *logos*,<sup>70</sup> designates the rational ruling faculty of the soul. The he-

<sup>68</sup> Epictetus, *Handbook*, I.I-3.

<sup>69</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, I, 1, 17, 27; I, 1, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Epictetus imagines Zeus talking to him: “... I have given you a part of myself, the power of impulse and repulsion, of desire and avoidance – in a word, the power of using impressions.” (*Discourses* 1.1.12). Later, he writes: “For if god had so arranged his own part, which



gemonikon – separates the subject from all the rest, and in so doing keeps him out of the reach of the Other. Ultimately, the hegemonikon, or prohairesis, to use Epictetus own term, marks what the Other cannot enjoy in any case, it is a point out of reach.

Where, then, is the missed encounter between Sade and Epictetus situated? Or, to be even more precise: what makes it possible for the Stoic sage to avoid the trap that Sade set for him? As Lacan presents it, what is at stake in Sadean experience is not simply to “monopolize” the victim’s will, to subjugate the victim and make her submit to a constraint, ultimately to prescribe the law to her. What the Sadean subject instead aims at is to take over, to seize the seat of the subject, to occupy what the Stoics designate as the hegemonikon or prohairesis. On the other hand, however, Sadean experience does not consist simply in imposing the law on a subject, it is not about simply “monopolizing a will” but rather “instating itself at the inmost core of the subject,”<sup>71</sup> as Lacan puts it. If we follow Lacan’s hypothesis, this Sadean operation would have no chance of succeeding if, “in his innermost core,” the subject himself were not already situated “in the place of the Other.” Hence, if Sade succeeds in evicting or evacuating the subject from his innermost core, this is because the subject himself, in his deepest intimacy, is considered to be an intruder in the locus of the Other.

It is exactly at this point that Lacan takes up the example of modesty (*pudeur*). The subject feels violated by the very fact of having passively suffered the Other’s immodesty. Even if the subject could not prevent it, one feels as guilty as if one had given one’s consent to the Other. The subject, once situated at this level, is defenceless against the Other’s attacks. Situated in this dimension, it would seem as if the refuge provided by prohairesis no longer exists. It would seem as if there is no longer any shelter for the subject, no hiding place. In view of this, it is necessary for the Stoic subject to establish a different kind of rapport with the Other, a rapport that precisely allows him to find shelter from the Other’s attacks. Stoicism can thus be seen as an attempt to be absent from the locus of the Other, to situate oneself there where the subject is out of reach of the Other.

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he has given to us as a fragment of himself, that it would be hindered or constrained by himself or by anyone else, he would no longer be god, nor would he be caring for us as he ought.” (*Discourses* 1.17.27, 36.)

<sup>71</sup> “Kant with Sade”, p. 651.

For the Stoics, the separation from the Other is a matter of will. To maintain the autonomy of one's will, of one's *prohairesis*, the subject is willing to pay any price: separating one from everything, including life. Adopting an attitude of indifference to externals, the Stoic subject can relegate his own preservation, his entire being, to the rank of things of no interest. The subject identified with the conscious ego, with the *hegemonikon* or *prohairesis*, freely uses his body as something that is at his disposal and can go to the point of abandoning his body to the Other, without this abandonment having any effect whatsoever on the self. Torture and even death do not loosen the *hegemonikon's* grip on the subject.

Here we need to focus on the Stoic identification of *prohairesis* with the ego insofar as it is founded on the rigorous separation of having and being: "You are neither flesh, nor body. You are *prohairesis*," says, for instance, Epictetus. In this respect, the opposition between *prohairesis* and the body can be reformulated in terms of an opposition between ego and that which is not ego. The Stoic subject thus incarnates a position of impassivity that allows him to thwart the Other's will, a position that paradoxically implies a *non-rapport with the Other*. One could say that the Stoic subject enjoys the separation from the Other and in order to achieve this he is ready to separate himself from the nearest Other, namely his own body; my leg in chains, as Epictetus puts it, I am quite willing to leave to you, it does not bother me in the least where I am. In view of this, one is even tempted to say that the Stoic subject is capable of escaping the will of the Other precisely at the point at which he appears to be entirely submitted to it.

How are we to situate such a paradoxical position – which is one of the most demanding, one of the most austere – since it requires that the subject renounce all pleasure, his body, and even his life?

To endure whatever fate throws at one rather than to go against the order of the world and attempt to change it is, by definition, the attitude of a slave. While the slave complies with orders and does whatever he is forced to do, the Stoic sage, by contrast, embraces whatever happens. Therefore, far from being wrenched from him, his assent originates in the act of will. For the blows of fate are not something to be suffered, but rather something to be willed. Indeed, the sage affirms whatever occurs, better still, he wills it as if it were what he would have chosen for himself. What is unsettling about this position can be seen in the fact that *mastery is coincident with assent*. While it may well require the subject to

assent to whatever occurs, it is nevertheless a position that is eminently that of the master. Involving “learning to will that things should happen as they do,”<sup>72</sup> the attitude of the Stoic sage is quite different from resignation or, even worse, passive submission to unwanted external events that cannot be avoided anyway. However, relying only on prohairesis, the sage is nevertheless able to avoid the constraints of the existing social and political order. Since what the stoic sage performs is nothing less than the rejection of the status imposed on him, that of a slave. But this operation of the “destitution” of the master consists in a gesture that is itself a gesture of the master.

To see to what point it is difficult to identify the Stoic position with one of the subjective positions deployed by philosophy, it suffices to consider it in the light of the Hegelian critique of Stoicism. Besides, Hegel himself emphasised a curious conciliation of these two aspects by presenting the position of the Stoic sage as a paradoxical synthesis of the master and the slave. For to attain his independence and freedom, the Stoic sage, incarnating what Hegel designates as a pure abstraction of self-consciousness, can only present himself as “a pure negation of [his] objective form,”<sup>73</sup> more exactly, since he is “fettered to no determinate existence,” he is, likewise, “not bound at all by the particularity everywhere characteristic of existence as such, and is not tied up with life.”<sup>74</sup> And if “it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained,” as Hegel remarks, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the Stoic sage who “obtains” his freedom, to use Hegel’s own term, by proving that “the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence,”<sup>75</sup> since life as mere self-preservation is of no concern to him, could not be further from a slave who, on the contrary, wants to stay alive, to maintain himself in life, at any cost.

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If the Stoic sage is ready to risk, to put at stake, the entirety of his life at any moment, this is because life as self-preservation is a matter of indifference to him, it is of no interest to him. This is precisely the point that brings the Stoic sage closer to the Hegelian master and separates him at the same time. The putting at stake of one’s life is what the Stoic sage and the Hegelian master have in

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<sup>72</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, I, 12. 17.

<sup>73</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 232.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

common. To prove that he is free and self-conscious, to affirm his independence, the Hegelian master is ready to sacrifice all that characterises his animality: his body and even his life. However, to be able to experience his truth and preserve the stake he has won by risking his life, it is necessary that the master “[i]n this experience becomes aware that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the master must preserve the very life that he was so willing to expose to risk, otherwise the “trial by death ... cancels both the truth which was to result from it, and therewith the certainty of self altogether,”<sup>77</sup> and the constitution of self-consciousness is only accomplished through the mediation of servile consciousness, i.e. though its recognition, which is why Hegel claims that the “truth of the independent consciousness is ... the consciousness of the bondsman.”<sup>78</sup> Just like the Hegelian master, the Stoic is not afraid to die but, contrary to the Hegelian master, this is not in view of attaining the Other’s recognition. If the Hegelian master, in the very gesture of subjugating the slave, remains dependant on him, the Stoic sage is a master in the very act of giving assent to the Other, yet a master that does not need the slave to be recognised as his master. A peculiar master, to be sure, because the Stoic sage does not have to “cling” to the Other in order to know that he is the master. Actually, he could be considered as a master without a slave. We are dealing here with a subversive guise of mastery, a mastery ready to relinquish mastery itself.

On the other hand, however, by raising oneself above life, indeed, by being prepared to sacrifice it, life surreptitiously succeeds in staying alive.<sup>79</sup> One could even say that by sacrificing life the stoic position eternalises it. What is at issue here is not of course the biological life that the Stoic subject is only too ready to sacrifice at any moment, but a life that exceeds this biological existence and which can only be identified with prohairesis. In this respect, Stoic will can be considered as a life that never ends, a life that persists, independently of biological existence. As the insatiable More! that knows no rest, prohairesis therefore

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that this “ruse of life,” in the context of Hegel’s philosophy, is already analysed in Bataille’s reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, in particular in his “Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice,” in *Deucalion* 5, Neuchâtel 1955, and emphasised in Derrida’s commentary “From Restricted to General Economy,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge, London and New York 1978.

represents that which is eternal or immortal in the subject. Indeed, for the Stoics, will is that agency that incarnates the eternity in the subject and of the subject. And to the extent that will, according to the idiosyncratic Stoic conception of its unity, represents this agency that, while being immanent in the subject, exceeds it, one could argue that it carries the very hallmark, if I may say so, of the drive. In view of its tyrannical demand for satisfaction, Stoic will clearly points to a reality situated beyond the pleasure principle. In this respect, the distinctive trait of the Freudian drive, the forcing of the pleasure principle, is precisely what characterises Stoic will.

### The Real of Reason

The main critical question, even before getting to the actual analysis of the drive-like nature of Stoic will, is whether the forcing of the pleasure principle carried out by Stoic ethics is perverse or not. To contextualise this analysis, I will follow Lacan's indication from his Seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, according to which "the course of the drive is the only form of transgression that is permitted to the subject in relation to the pleasure principle."<sup>80</sup> However, even before posing this question, it is necessary to justify the identification of will with the drive; this is my hypothesis in the present paper, and precisely so because Stoic will is rational, it is the reason's will, which is to say, the ego's will, the will of the conscious ego, while the drive can only have an antinomic relation to consciousness. The insurmountable obstacle confronting any attempt to situate Stoic ethics in the domain of the drives resides exactly in the fact that this position does not allow for a distinction between the ego and the subject. The Stoic subject, in contrast, appears to be inseparable from the ego. At first sight, nothing is more foreign to the concept of the drive than the Stoic will, an eminently rational will, a will of reason. How then can Stoic ethics be brought closer to the domain of the drives if the fundamental axiom of psychoanalysis aims at setting up an insurmountable barrier between the drives and the ego?

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Certainly, the Stoics, too, just like psychoanalysis, highlight the chasm between the ego and the drives – or passions, to use their proper term – but this is pre-

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<sup>80</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, London 1977, p. 183.

cisely because this allows them to situate the subject on the side of *logos* qua agency called in to rein in the drives, to domesticate them. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, situates the self in an agency that is dislocated with respect to the ego: the unconscious desire, the drive, the *objet a* can be considered to be such modes of being of this remainder, in which the subject does not find him. The Stoic sage, on the other hand, is not someone who is searching for an answer to the question of knowing if he wants what he desires. For he has already found the answer to the question of desire. Hence, we could say that, for the Stoic sage, “a true master”, a “true self”, is exactly that which escapes the ego, i.e. reason, that which the subject does not recognise, that which he does not want to know anything about.

How then can the drive find its place within the economy of Stoic thought? Contentious as my thesis may seem, it is unapologetically so, for I believe that to say anything of philosophical and psychoanalytical interest about the Stoics requires a readiness to step beyond the available Stoic texts. In order to discuss the location of the drive within the Stoic system it will first be necessary to examine the very structure of the rational ruling element of the soul, the *hegemonikon*, defined as consistent with itself, firm, immutable, and hence indomitable. The problem is as follows: generally speaking, all faculties of the soul are also permeated with rationality. It follows from this that there is no room in the Stoic soul for irrational elements. Consequently, in order not to contradict their major thesis that the soul is unitary because it is entirely rational, the Stoics deny that there is an irrational power, in the guise of passions or desires, that rule over reason. Amongst the problems this conception raises, most pressing regarding the issue of will is the fact that, for the Stoics, passions must be in some fundamental sense *rational* movements. Indeed, for the Stoics, regardless of its particular character, “the impulse of man is reason prescribing action to him.”<sup>81</sup> The main Stoic thesis worth salvaging is that everything that occurs in the soul is the product of one and the same rational faculty: the *hegemonikon*. Hence, if the soul is monistic and the unity thesis should be taken to refer to the *hegemonikon*, the latter presents what could be rendered as *the paradox of self-mastery*: by divesting the body of all its prerogatives, the Stoics are forced

<sup>81</sup> See Plutarch's reporting Chrysippus' saying in *De stoicorum repugnantiis*, 1037F in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987 (quoted as LS 93R).

to incorporate everything in the hegemonikon, including that which resists its domination, namely passions.

More importantly for my purposes here: if there is no force beyond the rational faculty's power to control, how, then, to account for the subject's assent to something that is "not obedient to reason," indeed, something that is "disobedient to reason and rejects it," while knowing that it is against reason. If there is no room for divisions between the rational and irrational faculties in the Stoic soul, since it has no parts and there are no parts that could come into conflict, how, then, to account for an act, a decision, a choice that manifestly disobeys reason? The much stronger reading of the unity thesis is, I suggest, that the hegemonikon cannot "turn from reason" or "fall from reason" without knowing that one is doing so, without knowing what reason calls for at the moment of choosing otherwise. Put simply, the problem is irresolvable unless one assumes a conversion of one and the same reason to its two contradictory movements.

Hence, the paradox of Stoic ethics could be formulated in the following manner: the very moment it asserts the domination of the hegemonikon qua the absolute master that nothing can escape, it is forced to acknowledge the existence of a remainder that resists the hegemonikon, a remainder that stems not from the body, as one would expect, but rather from the hegemonikon itself, but a hegemonikon that goes off the rails, which is why it does not function as it should. It is the hegemonikon itself that is divided, split up into two parts, of which one functions as it should, while the other, by giving in to the pleasure principle, endures its own perversion. This will is certainly reason, yet a perverse, corrupted reason, a reason that no longer functions as it should.

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One of the great merits of Stoic thought is therefore not only that it introduced the concept of will into the vocabulary of philosophy, but even more that it demonstrated the possibility of will's "*extimisation*", of its emancipation from reason. In Stoic philosophy will is presented as reason's unsettling double precisely because it is at one and the same time heterogeneous and identical to reason. This is what I refer to as the paradox of the absolute mastery of reason. The fact that nothing is supposed to escape it constitutes the very possibility of its perversion, the possibility of the emergence of will as an agency capable of subverting reason. Thus, reason becomes the battlefield of two wills: one that obeys reason and the law imposed by it, and another one that, in emancipating itself

from reason, becomes a power foreign, even hostile, to reason. Hence, alongside the reasonable will, there exists an odd, perverse, corrupted will, a will that is at one and the same time foreign to reason and inherent in reason. This will, while being immanent to reason, evades its control. Which is why I propose to call it: *the real of reason itself*.

This ambiguous conception of the will of the Stoics allows us to have a glimpse of the way in which the Stoics think what psychoanalysis defines as the division of the subject. It is true that the Stoics do not use this term “the division of the subject”, they rather speak of the perversion of reason.<sup>82</sup> In this light, it could be argued that one part of reason (in the guise of the passions) emancipates itself and does not respect the measure prescribed by reason itself. One part of reason loses all temperance and its head in order to do exactly what pleases it. But to be without one’s head is not to be without one’s will, because it demands what is due to it, regardless of the consequences. This gives us a first formulation of the will to jouissance, indifferent to both reason’s demands and the subject’s well-being. For the Stoics, the passions constitute a will that is in the subject, yet it is not the will of the subject; indeed, it is not a will that the subject could acknowledge as his own, a will in which one could recognise oneself, and for a very precise reason: we are dealing here with a will that assents to something that is against reason and in so doing acts against the subject’s well-being, against his interests. We can see now to what extent the Stoic identification of the hegemonikon with the conscious ego could become problematic. The hegemonikon that gets lost, that gets muddled up, that is looking for its way, is a hegemonikon qua desire, a blind desire that does not know what it wants. In contrast, a hegemonikon “equal to its task”, if I may say so, does not ask for the way, it does not ask anyone for permission to do what pleases it, not even God, but heads straight to its goal. In this sense, one could argue that the hegemonikon could best be compared to an infallible “programme” extremely reliable in its performance.

If I insist on the structural analogy between the drive and the hegemonikon, this is precisely because from such a perspective, which is the perspective of

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<sup>82</sup> On this issue, see LS 1, 420-1: “A passion is a weak opinion, whereby ‘weakness’ describes the state of a *‘perverted’* reason, assenting to impressions that trigger off impulses inconsistent with a well-reasoned understanding of what their objects are worth.” (My italics.)



the drives, although it may appear at first sight to be alien to the Stoics, it could be demonstrated that Stoic ethics is necessarily an ethics without the Other, an Otherless ethics. The hegemonikon's *modus operandi* reveals an essentially self-referential, one is tempted to say an "auto-erotic", structure in which there is no place for the Other. From this perspective, the ultimate stake in Stoic ethics is nothing other than to learn to "ask nothing of anyone."<sup>83</sup>

The paradox of Stoic ethics, which appears to be so exacting and rigorous, which is almost inconceivable to us, in short consists in assigning to the subject a goal that appears at first sight to be most humble, even "minimalist": to be content with what one is, with what one has, since it is not a matter of becoming better, more generous, more honest, or having more compassion for others. The ultimate goal is nothing other than, to borrow the famous formula ascribed to Zeno, to "live in accordance with" (*homologouménos zen*). Various re-transcribed as "in accordance with nature" or "in harmony with nature," it is most commonly interpreted as "in harmony with universal reason," following Diogenes Laertius, who fills "in accordance with" as "in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, ... identical with this Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is."<sup>84</sup> In contrast to this scholarly reading, I will follow Goldschmidt's strong reading, which aims at salvaging the peculiar nature of the object of the hegemonikon, namely to maintain its absolute sameness despite the infinitely changing concrete objectives of the hegemonikon's various operations.<sup>85</sup> From this perspective, the ultimate objective, i.e. "to live in accordance with," is what the Stoics designated as *télos*, which has to be distinguished from a series of contingent aims, designated as *skópos*. By splitting the object of the hegemonikon into *télos* and *skópos*, the Stoics can be said to have anticipated the solution to the Freudian problem of the object of the drive. In this regard, it is not by chance that Lacan in his attempt at clarifying the peculiar status of the object of the drive and its paradoxical satisfaction turns to

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<sup>83</sup> The point that the Stoics strive to reach is a kind of turning point at which the final experience of *Hilfslosigkeit*, where he "can expect help from no one," namely the state in which the subject finds himself in that relation to himself which is his death, is converted into positivity since at that point the subject "touches the end of what he is and what he is not." Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 304.

<sup>84</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, R. D. Hicks, ed. Heinemann, London 1925, 7. 88.

<sup>85</sup> Victor Goldschmidt, *Le système stoïcien et l'idée de temps*, Vrin, Paris, 1979, pp. 145-158.

the Stoic distinction between *télos* and *skópos*, by means of its translation into English. Thus, according to Lacan, the French term *but* has two meanings that can be rendered in English better:

When you entrust someone with a mission, the *aim* is not what he brings back, but the itinerary he must take. The *aim* is the way taken. The French word *but* may be translated by another word in English, *goal*. In archery, the *goal* is not the *but* either, it is not the bird you shoot, it is having scored a hit and thereby attaining your *but*. If the drive may be satisfied without attaining what, from the point of view of a biological totalization of function, would be the satisfaction of its end of reproduction, it is because it is a partial drive, and its aim is simply this return into circuit.<sup>86</sup>

To be satisfied with “wrong” objects while aiming at the true end is precisely that paradoxical feature that, in the eyes of Lacan, characterises the Freudian drive, which “may be satisfied without attaining ... its end.” This is because, in both cases, we are dealing with the same circular, enclosed structure “of which nothing else ensures the consistency except the object, as something that must be circumvented.”<sup>87</sup> The object that the drive and the hegemonikon aim at is like no other object, an object which, in a sense, is situated beyond all objects, an object which has nothing “objectal” about it, since, initially, “this object, which is in fact simply the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied, Freud tells us, by any object.”<sup>88</sup> On this point, it could be said that the object of the drive is a peculiar object to be sure, as it is nothing but the absence as object, an object reduced to its empty place, around which it circulates.

It is on the basis of this puzzling characteristic of the object of the drive that Lacan will try to solve the problem posed by the paradoxical conjunction of the implacable demand of satisfaction, on the one hand, and the indifference regarding the materiality of the object of satisfaction, on the other. Lacan’s indication concerning the object of the drive might shed some light on this matter. For Lacan, if “the drive may be satisfied without attaining its end,” this is because “its aim is simply this return into circuit.” In the end, the true object of the drive

<sup>86</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 179.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

is nothing other than its satisfaction. One could therefore claim that the drive succeeds precisely there where desire fails. Already for Freud, desire cannot by definition attain its satisfaction. The evidence of this is in the fact that, for desire, no object is the “good” one insofar as the true object of desire is what allows it to remain unsatisfied and thus “operational”. The drive, by contrast, cannot not be satisfied since, for the drive, any object is the “good” one. Actually, any object whatsoever is suitable food to satisfy it, because, as Lacan points out, using the oral drive as a paradigm, “no food will ever satisfy the oral drive, except by circumventing the eternally lacking object.”<sup>89</sup>

In the same way, for the Stoics, the hegemonikon may be satisfied with “wrong” objects, without attaining its end, because, just like the drive, the hegemonikon ultimately aims at being “in accordance with”. So, the infamous formula “to live in accordance with” designed to identify the object of the hegemonikon, only requires the conformity of action with reason, which is, in the final analysis, the conformity of the hegemonikon with itself. Hence, to “live in accordance with” ultimately aims at nothing less than at reconciliation with oneself. However, if there is something paradoxical about this position it is because that which appears to be considered a “minimalist” programme, proves in fact to be a “maximalist” ambition, to the extent that, as psychoanalysis teaches us, the most difficult task for the subject is exactly to be reconciled with oneself, this oneself being, of course, that which “drives” the one, sets one in motion, without one being aware of it. It is essential therefore to accurately situate the seat of the self in Stoic ethics in order to answer the question of knowing how the Stoic sage can remain impassive, imperturbable, impervious to Sadean experience. What is it in the Stoics’ attitude that prevents Sade from shaking the sage? This brings us back to the two paths elaborated by Lacan in his “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire”, two paths offered to anyone who would like to confront the Other’s will.

At first sight, it seems very difficult to tell the difference between the Stoic position and the Sadean position because in both cases the subject’s will is the Other’s will. But if the position of the Stoic subject has nothing in common with that of a pervert, as I am arguing, where exactly can one draw the line of demarcation between, say, Sade and Epictetus? My provisory answer would be the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

following: While Sade, in order to satisfy his most eccentric whims, turns to the Other's will, that of nature, in this case to justify these whims, the operation accomplished by Epictetus is quite different: he makes the subject responsible for the Other's will. The very fact that the subject is unhappy, frustrated, dissatisfied with what happens to him, is for Epictetus proof that he is not equal to the Other's will. It is from this point of view that a new light can be shed on one of the central maxims of Stoic ethics, insofar as it teaches us, in the words of Deleuze, whose affinity with Stoic philosophy is well known, "not to be unworthy of what happens to us."<sup>90</sup> As Deleuze ingeniously points out, what we are dealing with in the Stoic subjective position is less a matter of heroically enduring or welcoming whatever fate brings, as considering whatever chance throws at one as an opportunity to become who one really is. Here, we can take up a formulation of Joë Bousquet, quoted in Deleuze: "my wound existed before me, I was born to embody it."<sup>91</sup> This is also a way to eliminate all temptation to divest the subject of his responsibility: in a sense, no misfortune is inflicted on the subject undeservedly. Quite the reverse is true. It is rather up to the subject to become worthy of his misfortunes. For regardless of the misfortune that the Other might dish out to the Other, one is always in a position to "withdraw" oneself by claiming: "I want it", "This is my will!".

"The Stoic's artifice" consists therefore in this: by one and the same gesture, the subject submits himself to fate, that is, to the will of the Other, and separates himself from it. It follows from this that no stroke of fate can shake the subject. He has already situated himself out of the reach of the Other, "taken shelter" from the Other. This is precisely the gesture that Nietzsche aims to repeat with his "eternal return" since, for Nietzsche, the liberation from the irrevocable past consists precisely in the opportunity to choose between *ressentiment* and *amor fati*. As has already been noted by Agamben, Nietzsche locates "the origin of the spirit of revenge, the worst punishment devised by men" in "the repugnance ... of will toward the past and its 'thus it was'."<sup>92</sup> In effect, "powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will

<sup>90</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester, Columbia University Press, New York 1990, p. 149.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>92</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency" in *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (eds.), Stanford University Press, Stanford 1999, p. 267.

backwards ... its fury is that time cannot go backwards. ‘What was’ – this is the stone the will cannot turn over.”<sup>93</sup> Paradoxically, it is precisely the will’s impossibility to will backwards that allows Zarathustra to teach the will to “will backwards” (*zurückwollen*) and to transform every “thus it was” into a “thus I willed it.”<sup>94</sup> In turning “thus it was” into “thus I willed it,” will rediscovers its liberation. Contrary to what we might believe, we are dealing here with a true ethics of the master, who by adding his “Yes!” aims, in the final analysis, at mastering the whims of fortune because at each stroke of fate the Nietzschean subject, just like the Stoic sage, is capable of responding: “Thus I willed it!”. Hence, the Stoic assent should not be confused with the posture of one passively resigned to the inevitable. It should rather be considered as an act of acceptance by which the subject subscribes to the will of the Other. It is an act of will that involves – contrary to what one might believe – that the subject, instead of submitting to the Other, to fate, evades the Other. We are dealing here with a will that realises itself through the separation from the Other, or, rather, a will that enjoys separation from the Other, that enjoys the subject’s withdrawal from the Other’s grip.

Could we then say that the Stoic sage wants to “subjectify” what happens to him? According to this hypothesis, the task of the Stoic sage would be to assume – in the existentialist meaning of this term – whatever happens to him. But to accept this hypothesis, attractive as it may be, would lead us astray and we would miss what is truly at stake in the will of the Stoics. For my part, I would rather claim that the Stoic position is the very opposite of subjectivation: indeed, it is a position involving a de-subjectivation, or, to be even more precise, an objectivation of the subject. Certainly, the will that wants whatever occurs changes nothing as regards that which happens to the subject. But if nothing changes at the level of facts, the acceptance nevertheless has the power of transmutation, because what is at stake here is a transformation from the past “Thus it was!” into a “Thus I willed it!”. The acceptance marks a break, insofar as the subject after this act is not the same as the one before it. We are dealing here with two literally incomparable agencies. For the Stoic is someone who wants to be worthy of what happens to him, accepting that which occurs as an opportunity for one’s rebirth.

<sup>93</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Penguin, London 1954, p. 139.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Such a status of the subject can be seen as resulting from subjective destitution, an instance affected by an incurable truth, a final, definitive truth that no longer allows the posing of questions such as: “Do I want what I desire?”. Once the subject is radically transformed, this sort of question becomes meaningless for the subject because, from now on, it is not possible for the subject to lose his way. Rather, the subject, programmed as an automaton, can only follow his “rail”. What, exactly, is the subjective position of the Stoic sage? My contention here is that this is a position that allows the subject to get rid of the Other in order to continue to function in a wholly acephalous manner, almost blindly. For the subject no longer looks for a path. He knows the way already because the path he will be following from now on is in a certain sense inscribed in his flesh as an infallible programme. This automaton is nothing other than the subject having undergone a subjective destitution, the subject turned into an object and functioning from now on blindly, headlessly, for he no longer needs his head, because he knows at any moment what he has to do. The “terminal stage” of the Stoic subject is thus nothing other than a “knowledge in the real”, just like the Galilean nature.<sup>95</sup>

There appears to be a sort of a competition between the Stoic sage and the Sadean subject as to who should take the place of the *objet a*. There is nevertheless an important difference between these two subjects: the sage qua object marks a modification in the subject’s position, a modification that results from a reconciliation between the subject and the drive and, as a consequence, involves a subjective destitution, which entails the loss of the Other’s support. Whereas the pervert, who wants to be the object of the Other, can only become this by precisely avoiding reconciliation with the drive. For this perverse operation, it is indispensable that *jouissance* be relegated to the Other. It is as a lacking, a not-whole, that the Other, from a perverse perspective, calls to the subject to make it whole, by restoring to it the lacking *jouissance* of which it was deprived. It is through such an operation that the instrumentalisation of the pervert himself – to be the *objet a* of the Other – gains some ethical dignity. The pervert knows from the outset how to produce, arouse, *jouissance* and where to

<sup>95</sup> E. Bréhier emphasises precisely this capacity of the Stoic sage to “vanish in the real.” According to Bréhier, “having attained the accordance with nature, the stoic sage ... passes out in the force of nature.” E. Bréhier, *Transformation de la philosophie française*, Flammarion, Paris 1950, p. 131.

look for it. But if he is to achieve this effect he must pay an exorbitant price: his own instrumentalisation, even though this appears to him a lesser price than the price to be paid for a true reconciliation with the drive, a reconciliation that requires a radical transformation of the subject, the birth of a new subject who is no longer looking for an alibi in the Other. In such a case, the subject is in a sense condemned to a senseless, insane jouissance, because, from that moment on, it is impossible for him to attribute this jouissance that bothers him to the will of the Other, namely that agency that is supposed to demand, command, jouissance. Stoic ethics, by contrast, implies a reconciliation with the drive/s without requiring the instrumentalisation of the subject. In the final analysis, what is demanded of the subject is nothing less than his transformation into an automaton. For the Stoics, the ultimate aim is to become like God, who cannot act otherwise than he does.<sup>96</sup> The God of the Stoics, in this respect, can be seen as an incarnation of the drives, of a programme that can only operate in the same manner, an agency, in short, in which will and necessity coincide.

Hence, when the pervert claims that it is the Other that speaks through him, it is in fact his own jouissance, yet unrecognised, unacknowledged by the pervert, of course, that speaks through this Other, a jouissance that the subject cannot or does not want to take upon himself. With respect to the Stoic, by contrast, who has nothing of the subject, it would be more appropriate to say that we are dealing here with a “non-subject”, a “post-subject”, through whom speaks that extimate Other within him, *Deus in nobis*,<sup>97</sup> evoked by Kant in his *Opus Postumum*. From this perspective, the pervert’s operation can be considered to be an “inclusive” one, because perversion consists precisely in a striving to include the Other in the closed, *auto*-erotic system of the drives, to make the Other responsible for the jouissance that troubles one. The Stoic operation is, by contrast, exclusionary insofar as it consists in an effort to expulse the Other from

<sup>96</sup> Seneca is quite explicit on this point: “Remark, too, at this point, that the gods are constrained by no external force, but that their own will is a law to them for all time. What they have determined upon, they do not change, and, consequently, it is impossible that they should appear likely to do something although it is against their will, since they have willed to persist in doing whatever it is impossible for them to cease from doing, and gods never repent of their original decision.” Seneca, *De Beneficiis, On Benefits*, VI. xxi. 4-xxiii. i.

<sup>97</sup> See Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 15 – 16: “Est deus in nobis; agitante calescimus illo; impetus hic sacrae semina mentis habet.” (There is a God within us. It is when he stirs us that our bosom warms; it is his impulse that sows the seeds of inspiration. Trans. J. G. Frazer.)

the circular, self-referential movement of the hegemonikon. But it is only by attaining this point that the hegemonikon can function “as it should, properly”; it is only at this point that will and fate coincide.

In conclusion, I would argue that the position of the sage is quite close to that of the saint, a position elaborated by Lacan in his *Television*. Designating the “saint’s business” as that of acting like trash, while “allowing the subject, the subject of the unconscious, to take him as the cause of the subject’s own desire,” the saint provides the subject, precisely “through the abjection of this cause” with “a chance to be aware of his position.” Yet this is only possible if the saint himself is “the refuse of *jouissance*.”<sup>98</sup> If the position of the sage resembles that of the saint, it is precisely to the extent that they have in common the status of the *objet a* qua dropout, yet an unsettling dropout and such precisely to the extent that it makes others “go off the rails,” since they inevitably start to ask themselves: What is it that I truly want when I desire (something)? The Stoic sage is an object whose task is precisely to “hystericise” others to the point of encouraging them to confront the most difficult question of the desiring subject: Do I really want what I desire? It is in so doing that the Stoic sage, just like a Lacanian analyst, leads them to reconcile their desire and their will. And in so doing, he brings them to an incurable truth. In this sense we could say that, just as with Lacan’s analyst-saint, the Stoic sage could be considered to be a new name for the destiny of the drive.

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<sup>98</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Television*, trans. Jefferey Mehlman, Norton, New York 1990, pp. 15-16.





Rado Riha\*

## The Second Copernican Turn of Kant's Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

What I set out to do in this essay is something modest: to put forth a broader claim concerning the possibility of bringing together the theme of our conference – *reason plus enjoyment* – and Kant's philosophy by positing three main claims as the point of departure:

1. Kant's critical philosophy is considered a paradigm case of the domination of "pure reason," reason purified of all non-rational contamination. Without challenging the legitimacy of this reading of Kant, I will opt for another reading. My first thesis hence consists in postulating the following: if we take Kant's philosophy as constituting a system of three *Critiques*, that which characterises Kant's revolution in the way of thinking, the famous "Copernican turn" in philosophy, to borrow Kant's proper term, is the recognition that a philosophical thought as such, i.e. born of "pure reason," to use Kant's expression, is in its very origins affected by some "thing," which a thought can not appropriate, despite the fact that this "thing" belongs to it.
2. While the revolution in the way of thinking starts with Kant's first *Critique*, the problem of a thought being affected by its thing requires a continuation of the revolution, which is brought to completion only in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* with what I propose to call the second Copernican turn.
3. It is only from the perspective of the second Copernican turn that Kant's philosophy becomes one of the philosophical interlocutors in dealing with the question of the relationship between reason and *jouissance*.

The first two theses are entirely inscribed within the framework of Kant's philosophy as they are warranted by two central topics of Kant's philosophy. The

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first is *ontological* and the second *logical*. While these two topics are related, both conceptually and in terms of their thematic features, Kant only succeeds in truly connecting them in the *Critique of Judgment*. In my reading, this connection results in an additional, what I call the second “Copernican turn” of Kant’s philosophy, and it is only in this second “Copernican turn” that Kant’s revolution in the way of thinking is brought to completion precisely to the extent that it solves the problem of how thought is affected by its “thing”.

The first topic is centred around Kant’s controversial “transcendental difference” between appearance and the thing itself, between *phaenomenon* and *noumenon*. According to Kant, the only objective reality to which a human being as a finite rational being has access is the phenomenal reality, the reality of appearances, which is constituted by the combined activities of the two faculties of cognition – understanding and sensibility. Having posited this, Kant nevertheless obstinately insists that our phenomenal world does not constitute the world precisely to the extent that it is in itself. Hence, while the constituted phenomenal world is in fact the only world, indeed, it is all we have, it is nevertheless not all or whole as it is always supplemented by something that does not belong to it and, hence, does not exist in it: the “thing in itself,” i.e. something that is not constituted and which I propose to call, borrowing a Lacanian term, the instance of the real.

Seen from this perspective, Kant’s “transcendental difference” signals that the phenomenal world can only exist and function as objective as long as an awareness that the given world *is not already the thing itself*, indeed, *that the thing itself is absent from it*, is somehow at work in it. By positing that our world is marked by an absence of the “thing itself,” we also posit that there is, in our world, in a specific manner, also something present that is absent, that in the world there also exists something that actually does not exist. Thus, if the phenomenal world is essentially marked by the absence of the “thing itself,” if the phenomenal world is the real world only on the condition that it does not consider itself as the “thing itself,” then for this world and its “objectivity” it is equally essential that the world itself, in one way or another, reflects in itself the absence of the “thing itself,” making it visible somehow.

But what is the ontological status of this present absence, this extraction of the “thing itself,” i.e. of the real from reality? What is that which is not part of real-

ity, i.e. an empirical object among empirical objects, nor an object that reason successfully thinks in its ideas while striving in vain to attain it in objective reality? Related to this question is another question: what logical procedures would make it possible to conceive of the ontological status of the “thing itself” that functions in objective reality as its element while being at the same time extracted from it?

This question introduces the second central topic of Kant's philosophy, namely the logical one, insofar as it articulated that which for Kant's philosophy is its “thing of thought”. The core of this topic presents the logical operations of the self-critique of reason in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*. According to Kant, reason seeks in various realms of thought and action as well as the absolute totality of All, their ultimate condition, the point of the Unconditioned. The Unconditioned, towards which reason is driven, to quote Kant, by “its unquenchable desire,” “*die nicht zu dämpfende Begierde*,”<sup>2</sup> is that which affects reason from within and which, ultimately, “makes reason think,” for this “thing of thought” is the absolute condition of reason. Indeed, it is what makes reason reason.

Pure reason, thus goes Kant's definition, “is in fact concerned with nothing but itself.”<sup>3</sup> The task assigned to the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique* is to prove that reason, in its being concerned with itself, is not necessarily caught in a delusional universe inhabited by mere creations of thought. On the contrary, if reason is *really* concerned with nothing but itself, it nevertheless succeeds in touching upon something that is irreducibly external, heterogeneous to reason. Hence, the way reason operates is appropriately presented only at the point at which reason has gone through the process of self-critique.

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By simplifying slightly, it could be said that reason starts by directly projecting its “thing of thought,” which is embodied in its ideas, from itself out into the world. Its own ideas, which are nothing but “thought-entities,” *Gedankendinge*, that is to say, products of reason's own thinking operations, the totalisation

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, [*Cpr*], B 824/A 796; transl. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Cambridge 1992.

<sup>3</sup> *Cpr*, B 708/A 680.

of appearances of the sensible and supersensible worlds, are considered by reason as if they were objects of the given world of experience. It could also be argued that reason takes, as the unstated guide to its actions, the norm of objectivity, which leads to the constitution of the reality of appearances by understanding and sensibility. In short, reason sees Something there where there is Nothing – nothing but the projections of reason’s thinking operations. In the final analysis, reason is forced to acknowledge again and again that where it saw Something there was actually Nothing. Again and again it is revealed that its functioning, compared to the functioning of understanding that is constitutive of objective reality, produces mere (thought-driven) delusions.

It is only after the self-critique of reason, as developed in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*, that the possibility arises that things might radically change. Namely, the self-critique of reason reveals a structural flaw in the functioning of reason, yet one that cannot be avoided: where there is nothing but the form of their operation of unification, the ideas of reason create an appearance of some objectivity. Hence, this recognition of its own structural flaw does not by any means change the way in which reason operates. Reason continues to spontaneously turn something merely subjective, its “thing of thought” materialised as ideas, into some objectality. It continues to effect the appearance of Something there where, strictly speaking, there is Nothing, more precisely, where there is nothing but subjective forms of reason’s activity. What changes, however, is the status of this appearance, for this appearance persists but, because it is now recognised as an appearance, it *no longer deceives*.<sup>4</sup> In the process of the self-critique, reason considers its ideas for what they are, that is to say, as logical operations, which are devoid of all objective existence, because they have no sensibly given referent, and are to that extent something that does not exist for objective reality. Due to this recognition, the appearance of objectivity, which the ideas of reason cannot but continue to produce, is divested of its power to deceive.

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<sup>4</sup> Speaking in terms of Kant: “The transcendental dialectic will therefore content itself with uncovering the illusion in transcendental judgments, while at the same time protecting us from being deceived by it; but it can never bring it about that transcendental illusion (like logical illusion) should even disappear and cease to be an illusion. For what we have to do with here is a *natural* and unavoidable *illusion*....” *Crp*, B 354/A 297.

But if the self-critique of reason results merely in a negative determination of what ideas are not, and, as we have seen, they are nothing that objectively exist, it is no more than an additional proof of the objectivity of cognition. For that reason, it is essential to not limit the achievement of the self-critique of reason in the first *Critique* to reason's ability to consider its ideas as a mere, albeit necessary, logical appearance. If, however, the self-critique of reason is something more than "censorship made in the name of theoretical understanding,"<sup>5</sup> then a negative determination of ideas, the recognition of an idea as an appearance that does not deceive, must also contain some positive, affirmative dimension that defines the functioning of the ideas of reason on the level that is determinant for reason as an autonomous faculty of cognition. That is to say, precisely on that level on which reason is concerned solely with itself. The true achievement of the self-critique of reason is not a definition of what the ideas of reason *are not*, rather it has to be sought in the outline of what, in its ontological status, the post-critical ideas of reason – which *exist* as something that is inexistent for the objective world – *are*. I posit that the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique* provides just such a basic outline.

If we were to detect in Kant's argumentation the affirmative dimension of the self-critical definition of ideas as an appearance that does not deceive, we would need to begin by asserting that in its operation of self-critique reason does not renounce the "thing of thought" and its materialisations as ideas, just as it does not renounce its original aim, namely, to realise its ideas in the world. It only renounces the belief that its "thing of thought" *directly* participates in objective reality and that its ideas are, as such, an object of the empirical world – just like any other object. Succinctly, reason renounces the *norm of objectivity* as the guide to its actions. Thus, reason is no longer concerned with the Other of objectivity, but instead limits itself to itself and is therefore truly concerned only with itself. Henceforth, it considers its ideas as its own creation and likewise considers an object to which an idea refers solely as an "object-in-the-idea". Using an expression which is not Kantian, one could say that reason henceforth treats its ideas as fictions of truth.

Throughout these fictions of truth, reason is certainly present in empirically constituted reality. For the positive, affirmative aspect of reason's self-critical

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<sup>5</sup> Gérard Lebrun, *Kant et la fin de la métaphysique*, Armand Colin, Paris 1970, p. 111.

reflection of ideas as sheer, yet undecieving appearance signals the entry of reason into the world of objectivity. In its self-limitation, that is, once it is concerned only with itself, once it finally truly operates as pure reason, it paradoxically transcends the realm of a mere speculation of thought and enters, with its ideas, the realm of objective reality. “Reason’s concern with itself” could then best be seen as a thinking act that, on the one hand, withdraws the ideas of reason from the order of objectivity while, on the other hand, affirms them in the empirical world as its integral, constitutive part. It could then be maintained that, after the accomplished self-critique, reason is *indirectly* present in objective reality through its ideas, i.e. its fictions of truth. As we know, Kant calls this indirect presence of reason in the world of objectivity the *immanent* or *empirical* use of reason.

Or, put differently, by being concerned only with itself, reason is, paradoxically, brought to the point that it steps outside itself into the realm of objective reality, there precisely where, prior to the accomplishment of its self-critique, it could not find itself. How can we explain this passage of reason from the pure inside, where it is concerned only with itself, into the external, objective world? I would argue that, for Kant, a negative definition of ideas as the appearance to which no objective existence can be ascribed, as such, already constitutes a positive articulation of the status of post-critical ideas. The fact that the ideas of reason have no objectivity does not imply that they are without objectality. And the fact that these ideas do not exist for objective reality does not imply that they are without existence. Rather, the positive achievement of the self-critique of reason can be seen in the fact that it transforms ideas from that for which objective reality *does not exist* into that which in objective reality *exists* as its *inexistent*. In the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*, the self-critique of reason is undertaken as a thinking act that succeeds in affirming, in objective reality as its constitutive part, something that is for this reality properly its inexistent.

In the context of the first *Critique*, the empirical usage of reason, which allows reason to unify the acts of understanding, consists in reason accepting that it play a secondary role in the constitution of empirical reality effected by understanding and sensibility. In defining the relationship between the Transcendental Analytic and Transcendental Dialectic in the first *Critique*, we could borrow Monique David-Ménard’s felicitous formulation, according to which “Under-

standing succeeds there where Reason fails.”<sup>6</sup> However, one should not misunderstand something that is otherwise crucial in this formulation: at first sight, it seems to be suggesting that reason depends on the success of understanding. In effect, the point is rather the opposite: the success of understanding depends on the power of reason in accomplishing its self-critique. This is because the role of reason is far from exhausted with its co-operation in the constitution of objective reality by understanding, or, as it could also be phrased, through the empirical use of reason in the service of understanding. As a matter of fact, we find hints of that which will be fully developed only in the third *Critique* already in the first *Critique*, namely, that the self-critique of reason is oriented towards that empirical use of reason that is in accordance with *reason itself*.

Indeed, a positive determination of the ideas of reason, insofar as they function in objective reality as its inexistent element, is conceptually set down in the first *Critique*. But this outline can be detected in the first *Critique* only from the perspective of the conceptual innovations introduced in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. For it is exactly these innovations that allow us to grasp that the role played by reason in the constituted objective reality is far from a simple instrumentalisation of reason in the service of understanding.

Following my first working hypothesis, which effects the shift from the first to the third *Critique*, we can turn now to the four theses advanced at the beginning of this paper:

Firstly, at the core of Kant's “Copernican turn” in philosophy lies the problem of the affection of thought with its “thing”.

Secondly, this view of Kant's revolution in the way of thinking is grounded on the connection of two central issues of his philosophy: the *ontological* issue of the “transcendental difference” between an appearance and a thing in itself, and the *logical* issue of the critique of transcendental appearance. The ontological issue requires, in turn, an answer to the following question: What is the ontological status of that which while being part of the phenomenal world is nonetheless absent from it, and which therefore has the status of a present ab-

<sup>6</sup> Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg*, Vrin, Paris 1990, p. 17.



sence? This logical issue requires in turn an answer to the question: What logical operations allow reason, in the very immanence of its concern with itself, to succeed in touching upon something that is external, heterogeneous to it?

Thirdly, we have posited that Kant truly succeeds in connecting both issues only in the third *Critique*. Indeed, in the third *Critique*, the ontological problem of an “appearance,” which simultaneously is and is not an element of the phenomenal world, becomes constitutive of the logical operation of the self-critique of reason, in which reason learns to deal with that “thing” which affects reason from within while remaining at the same time irreducible to it.

Fourthly, by joining both issues into one, i.e. into the *onto-logical issue*, not only is the second “Copernican turn” accomplished, but also the revolution in the way of thinking is completed, for the completed revolution of thought solves the problem of the affection of thought with its “thing,” that problem, namely, which involves, as has already been noted, the relationship between reason and enjoyment.

The answer of the third *Critique* offers to both crucial questions of Kant’s philosophy, the ontological and logical, can perhaps best be outlined with the help of G. Lebrun’s formulation: Kant’s philosophy “teaches us to think differently.”<sup>7</sup> For me, this different way of thinking consists in a thinking that is capable of grasping, *begreifen*, that which resists comprehension by means of a notion without annulling this resisting moment in the process. Yet this can only be achieved if this way of thinking is grounded on the universal, which is itself supplemented by a moment of an irreducible singularity.

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In what follows, I will focus on three conceptual innovations of the third *Critique* that are crucial for this way of thinking:

1. extension of the notion of the transcendental aesthetic defined in the first *Critique*;
2. comprehension of the particular in its irreducible particularity or singularity; and

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<sup>7</sup> Gérard Lebrun, op. cit., p. 13.

3. the concept of aesthetic reflecting judgment (judgment of the beautiful and the sublime).

In the first *Critique*, Kant defines the transcendental aesthetic as a science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility<sup>8</sup>. In fact, in this critique *a priori* sensibility is considered only as a function and element of *cognition*. It is considered only as a sensibility of the objective *sense*, *Sinn*. What the third *Critique* adds to the notion of *a priori* sensibility is the representation of the object, the latter being designated in the following terms: firstly, that which is *only subjective*, i.e. sensible; secondly, that which does not belong to the order of the empirical but, rather, to the order of *a priori*; and thirdly, that which has no *cognitive, objective* function, i.e. a function that is constitutive for the object.

Any relation of our representations can be objective, that is, a constitutive part of the cognition of the object as an appearance, even if the representation is in itself only subjective, such as the representation of space, which merely expresses the subjective aspect of our representations. The only thing that in our representations cannot but be subjective and cannot become an element of cognition at all is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure: "...by means of which nothing at all in the object is designated, but in which the subject feels itself that it is affected by the representation."<sup>9</sup> Under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, the representation is related entirely to the subject, indeed, to its feeling of life.<sup>10</sup>

2. The notion of the sensibility of feeling is, in the third *Critique*, closely connected with the *Critique's* second central problem. What is at stake here is the question of knowing how to make available to cognition that which by definition resists a cognitive determination: the particular in its irreducible particularity, namely its *singularity*. Kant provides a twofold response to this question – and I will allow myself a simplification here. In response to the view that cognition of the singular is not possible because singularity is, for the cognition of understanding, something that is wholly contingent, lawless, unordered,

<sup>8</sup> Cf., *Crp*, B 35/A 21.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, [*Cpj*], § 1, p. 89. Paul Guyer (ed.); transl. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Cambridge 2000.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Kant posits an oppositional thesis, which is elaborated by using the notions of the Beautiful and the Sublime. According to Kant's first response, singularity is recognised as such, that is, it is conceived of as something that is entirely contingent, lawless, unordered, and yet, precisely as such, considered to be constitutive for cognition. It is precisely at this point that we need to point out that in the third *Critique*, although based on this thesis, Kant elaborates a novel notion of the universal that is constituted as universal by including the instance of singularity that supplements the universal in its universality from the outside. This instance of singularity is what Kant calls *a case*, more precisely, a case of the Idea.

3. The main conceptual innovation of the third *Critique*, its central issue and a primary conceptual tool, is the concept of reflecting power as an independent and autonomous faculty of cognition, that is, the concept of the *reflecting power of judgement*. For it is in this concept that both of the aforementioned problems of the third *Critique* – the extension of the notion of the transcendental aesthetic and the determination of irreducible singularity – are directly connected. The connection of both tasks can be considered, at least this is my view, as a junction between the ontological and logical issue of Kant's philosophy. Kant considers it as “a direct relationship” between the *faculty of cognition* and the *sensibility of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure*, this direct relational junction of the faculty of cognition and sensibility is conceived of as that “which is precisely puzzling in the principle of the power of judgement,”<sup>11</sup> and which gives the reflecting power of judgement the stamp of its uniqueness.

As is well known, Kant distinguishes between two kinds of power of judgment. The power of judgment, in general, is the faculty for thinking the particular as being subsumed under the universal: the law, the principle, the rule, etc. The power of judgment is *determining* if the universal is already given. Put simply, coming across an unknown phenomenon in nature, culture, society, we can determine what we are dealing with here by finding a universal concept adequate to this particular of the world, by which we can determine it, and thus understand it. This is a kind of power of judgment ready-made for the globalised world in which we live. For this world, there only exists the particular, which can be subsumed under the category of the universal, in which there are oth-

<sup>11</sup> *Cpj*, Preface, p. 57.

er, similar particulars. And conversely, for this world, that which is singular, strictly speaking, does not exist.

Kant's other kind of power of judgment is more interesting: the *reflecting* power of judgment. It is at work when, as Kant puts it, only the particular is given, that is to say, something about which we are not quite certain, due to the absence of a universal concept, law, rule, etc., that would help us identify and understand the given particular. If the universal is not given – and this is Kant's main point – this is not because we are unable to find it. There is no universal at our disposal because there simply is no universal for what we see before us. The task of the reflecting power of judgment is precisely to *invent*, in the very process of judging, a universal concept for something that, because it is singular, does not fit in any cognitive category. The reflecting power of judgement must invent a universal rule for that which defies any universal rule, indeed, for that which exists as the absence of any rule, for that which is contingent *per se*, non-cognitive, briefly stated, for the particular in its irreducible particularity, that is, its singularity.

The reflecting power of judgment can thus be conceived as a thought protocol that can only become operative if it is grounded on the decision or declaration that there exists in objective reality, such as it is constructed from the universal and the particular, also that which does not exist in it, namely the singular as an example of the inexistent. Thus, to be operative, the reflecting power of judgement inevitably requires a declaration and affirmation of the existence of the inexistent.

At this point it is necessary to highlight two elements that characterise the power of judgment in its specificity. The first element concerns the specific cognition that is connected with the reflecting judgment; the second one concerns the specific object of cognition, which is characteristic of the reflecting judgment.

I will begin with the first element, namely, the orientation of the sensibility of feeling to cognition. The extension of the notion of the aesthetic is based on the fact that Kant no longer connects the sensible character of representation with the representation itself, but rather connects it with the “act of the

*power of judgment*,”<sup>12</sup> more precisely, with the act of the power of judgement, which is considered only in its *subjective dimension*. The feeling of pleasure or displeasure is produced in the act of the reflecting judgment that turns from the object to the representation of the object and to its subjective conditions of possibility. This feeling allows us to realise – in an aesthetic, i.e. sensible way – that in the representation of an object given in experience, that is, in its mere apprehension prior to any concept, there is a unity between imagination and understanding at work, the unity that is the elementary condition for any kind of effect of cognition.

Despite the fact that the aesthetic judgment is not primarily about the objective cognition of the object, the reflecting judgment does not give up on every orientation towards cognition. On the contrary, Kant attributes to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure the function of a kind of undetermined cognition, cognition without (objective) cognition, which he designates in the third *Critique* as “cognition in general”.<sup>13</sup>

The crucial point here is that the withdrawal of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure from cognition of understanding is not to be considered in terms of an affirmation of the “logic of heart” against the “logic of understanding”. The reflecting judgment is conditioned by the *general communicability* of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure produced by the judgment. And, according to Kant, only cognition can be communicated generally. The feeling of pleasure or displeasure is “cognition in general,” because with this cognition we assume that everyone else will necessarily consider in the same way what we see and feel as beautiful or sublime.<sup>14</sup>

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Let me now move to the second key element of the reflecting judgment. It should be noted that, for Kant’s philosophy, where there is cognition, although only “cognition in general,” there is necessarily also the *object* of this cognition. The feeling of pleasure or displeasure is inseparable from that which is its *case*. When we are presented with something for which there is no notion available, something, that, strictly speaking, we do not know what it is – despite the

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<sup>12</sup> *Cpj*, First Introduction, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> *Cpj*, § 9, p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> *Cpj*, § 8 and 9, pp. 99-105.

fact that what we see is a constituted object of appearance, an object of natural, cultural, historical reality: a building, canvas, sculpture, historical event, etc. – while it rouses in us a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, this feeling is expressed in the judgment proclaiming that what we see in front of us is something *exemplary*. That it is – to put it in the language of the third *Critique* – the *case, der Fall*, of the Beautiful or Sublime, today we would simply say a case of good painting, good architecture, true politics.

The aesthetic reflecting judgment is constructed as the statement of existence in the sense that it maintains that in the given object or event there exists also something other than this object itself, namely, the *case* of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. That is, something, which in this particular object is *irreducibly singular*, yet accompanied by an expectation that it is generally communicable, which is to say that it is something universally valid.

But where exactly is the *materiality*, the *objectness* of the case of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure to be found? Here we have to take seriously Kant's statement that the reflecting power of judgment is indifferent to the existence of the phenomenal object. Taking this statement seriously namely implies that the object in itself is insignificant for the act of reflecting judgment. The power of judgment judges the representation in "mere reflection". In the act of the reflecting power of judgment every determination, both material and formal, of that which is given in intuition, is suspended. Judging the representation is the act that the power of judgement exercises for itself. What matters instead is what I make of this representation, not how I depend on the existence of the object.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, the only cause of the reflecting judgment is the act of judgment itself: "but the judgment of taste is not determinable by means of concepts, it is grounded only on the subjective formal condition of a judgment in general. The subjective condition of all judgments is the faculty for judging itself, or the power of judgment."<sup>16</sup>

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In sum, and this is precisely the main issue in Kant's second Copernican turn, the reflecting judgment that turns from the object to the subjective conditions of the object's *representation* is the act that *derealises* or nullifies the object

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<sup>15</sup> *Cpj*, § 2, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> *Cpj*, § 35, p. 167.

in its material, spatio-temporal determination. For while the act of judgement may well be indifferent to the object itself, if it is to be successful, it cannot be indifferent to the indifference itself since this indifference is exactly what characterises the reflecting and not the determining power of judgement.

Stated in different terms, the indifference towards the object, the nullification of its material-formal determination, is the fundamental attitude of the reflecting judgment. Which amounts to saying that in the act of mere reflection, while something objective is after all produced, what is produced is – to be exact – the nullification, *the absence of the object as the substance of the object* of the reflecting judgment. In the reflecting judgment, the *Nothing* of the objective object immediately turns into *Something*. Not, of course, an object like all other objects of objective reality. Rather, Nothing becomes Something in the form of the specific object of the reflecting judgment – it becomes something in the form of the *case*.

The reflecting judgment does not create its object, its case “from nothing,” it is therefore not a *creatio ex nihilo*. Rather, the reflecting judgment, in its operation of the derealisation of an objective object’s spatio-temporal *determination*, situates in the place of that derealised object, this same *derealised object as the body* of the case of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. That is to say, as the body of some irreducible singularity, but one which involves the demand for the subjectively universal validity.

Thus, the case of the sensibility of feeling has a specific ontological status: it is the *existence* of the (objectively) *inexistent*. It is something irreducibly singular, which has effects in the given world of objectivity but, at the same time, does not belong to this world, just like it does not belong to the supersensible world. It exists only in the potential universality of its consequences, and not only in the given world, but also, in Kant’s words, “of all times and peoples.”<sup>17</sup>

The case of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is not an objective object of the constitution of objects by understanding, nor is it a sublime supersensible object of reason before its self-critique. Its objectness, materiality, is rather the result of this double negation. It is the *derealisation* of the objects of experiential

<sup>17</sup> *Cpj*, § 17, p. 116.

reality and the *desublimation* of the objects of pre-critical reason. Yet, precisely as such a materiality of a special kind, it exists within the constituted objective reality. In its ontological status the objectness of the case is the *material trace* of that present absence of the thing itself, which confers on the objective world of appearances its consistency and solidity. Hence, the case of feeling is as such at the same time the adequate empirical appearance of the ideas of reason, which in objective reality have no adequate empirical appearance.

In conclusion, I will advance a claim which while going beyond Kant's self-understanding strictly speaking nonetheless opens up the horizon of the second Copernican turn of his philosophy. The crucial issue here is that the existence of the case of the reflecting power of judgment is the *decided existence*, more precisely, the existence that is decided by thought. The reflecting judgment is based on the decision that the only true or real thing in every thing is the thing decided by thought, in short, the *thing of thought*. This decision is connected with another decision, namely that we truly think only when we try to bring that thing which affects our thought and which only really affirms thinking as a generic human faculty, that is, as more than a mere survival tool, to the point where it appears in empirical reality. The decision of the reflecting judgment concerning the existence of the case of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is more than a mere realisation that in the world of appearances there exists also something that is inexistent. It is a decision about the point that only the existence of the inexistent, conceived of as the existence of some universally valid singularity, gives the empirical world the stamp of the *world for all*.

The view that the subject, as Kant points out, feels himself or herself in the feeling of pleasure or displeasure entails a re-orientation in the thinking of the one who thinks; a re-orientation from the object and objectivity as the *norm* and *aim* of cognition, to the singularity of the case, which is decided by thought, as the *cause* and *driving force* or *incentive* of thinking and action. What assures thought its orientation is not the idea of reason in itself, an idea in the heaven of ideas, nor the cognitive machinery of understanding, which knows no orientation of its own. It is instead the thing of thought, the existence of the case of the singular, which can only be decided through thinking, in the act of the reflecting power of judgment, and which is affirmed in the world as something universal. Cognition in general, which presents itself in the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, does not have the status of non-objective cognition



because it withdraws itself from the constituted objective reality, but because it is a *re-constitution of this reality*. There where the power of judgment is at work the world is no longer only a realm of objectivity; rather, it becomes the scene of its re-constitution. Kant's formulation that the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is the *feeling of life* can in this regard be understood in the following way: the reflecting power of judgment is life that is endowed with an orientation. An orientation towards that which is its *Triebfeder*, its incentive or drive, towards the cause of thinking and action, more exactly, towards the thing of thought.

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## Repetition and Inscription in Europe's Dream-Land

“Stainearth,” “erasureland,” “deletion on the ground” – these are some possible translations suggested by Dany Nobus for Lacan’s neologism “Lituraterre.”<sup>1</sup> They highlight the element of erasure, (*raturation*), the coating or smearing (*enduit*) contained in *litura*, a homonym of *littera*, from which the word literature derives. Where *littera* conveys the idea of writing, letters and the alphabet, that is, of “all sorts of written work, literature, culture and instruction” as Ernout and Meillet’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Latin Language* indicates, *litrarius* is what “shows deletions.” This also calls us homonymically back to another cousin of literature, *litorarius*, the Latin for coastline, borders, from which we get the English word littoral. A “stainearth” or *litraterre* is a land that is nothing but its own constantly erasing borderline. It is the continual “landing” – as Lacan also puns with the word *atterrir*, in the sense of airplane landing – of a disembarking principle that manifests as a staining or flooding. The question I wish to consider is whether we can think of Europe’s refugee crisis in terms of a *litraterre* in this sense: a “writing-effect” tracing out an image of Europe’s unconscious. “The edge of a hole in knowledge,” Lacan writes, “isn’t this what the letter outlines?”<sup>2</sup>

In a recent collection of essays on the contemporary global crisis, Slavoj Žižek proposes that what we need is a *Wiederholung* of Europe. He explains, “through a critical engagement with the entire European tradition, one should repeat the question, ‘What is Europe?’, or, rather, ‘What does it mean for us to be Europeans?’, and, in doing so, formulate a new vision.”<sup>3</sup> Žižek’s call for a retrieval of Europe through repetition implies, perhaps counter-intuitively, that the Europe-

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<sup>1</sup> Dany Nobus, “Annotations to Litraterre,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2/2013), p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, Litraterre,” trans. Dany Nobus, *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2/2013), p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours*, Allen Lane/Penguin Random House, London 2016, p. 13.

an idea has been repressed. I say counter-intuitively because if post-war history is our guide, the idea of “Europe” has increasingly acted as a regulative Idea in Kant’s sense: an “Idea” of reason that, while unknowable in itself, nevertheless presents as a moral duty – it is a principle of practical reason that Europe has appeared in the postwar period, carrying with it the injunction to act ethically. What would constitute the European ethical maxim? It would be to act *as if* Europe were a united entity. Acting according to Europe’s regulative idea, a “European” would state, “I know very well that there is no such thing as a ‘European,’ that the inhabitants of this continent are massively and irreparably divided from one another by language, culture, customs and so forth. Nevertheless, by speaking from this impossible position as a ‘European’ I bring an inexistent ‘Europe’ into being.”

Still, it would be a misreading to conclude that Žižek envisions “Europe” as a future entity, a “Europe-to-come” that, once lifted from its technocratic error, would come into being a second time as a genuinely democratic enterprise. Rather, given Žižek’s insistence on the need for its repetition, Europe would be, to paraphrase Hegel, “a thing of the past.”<sup>4</sup> But this unquestionably does not mean that the idea of “Europe” is over and done with – as if all that one had to do to overcome our virulent Western-centrism is embrace one’s global identity as part of an “international people,” as part of a multitude. But neither would it imply that Europe is an older ideal, something we should try to aspire to by bringing back traditional values and cultural forms. As a “thing of the past,” Europe carries only the injunction of *memory*. Remember me, says this “Europe,” mimicking the ghost of old King Hamlet. “Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.” What are we remembering when we remember, perhaps justifiably hesitatingly, to repeat the European tradition? And further, what form of memory will this entail?

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Interestingly, in the volume of essays this discussion occurs in, the way “the European tradition” presents for Žižek is in the two figures of Edgar Allan Poe and Mary Shelley. Taking Shelley first, for Žižek, the scandal of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* – the profound threat it poses to what he calls one of our Leftist “taboos” – lies in Shelley’s decision to let the monster tell his own story. This would be the liberal attitude towards freedom of speech “at its most radical,” he asserts, for it forces us up against the logical conclusion that even the worst of despots must be grant-

<sup>4</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox, Clarendon, Oxford 2010, p. 11.

ed the same right to present himself as victim. “Are we [...] ready to affirm that Hitler was only an enemy because his story was not heard?”<sup>5</sup> Rather than justifying or explaining the “inner meaning” of any act, Žižek proposes, we should judge other people and ourselves solely by what one does. For “the experience that we have of our lives from within [...] is fundamentally a lie,” he asserts:

The move from the externality of an act to its “inner meaning,” the narrative by means of which the agent interprets and justifies it, is a move towards a deceitful mask.<sup>6</sup>

For Žižek, then, this gesture of internalization is the truly “monstrous” thing in *Frankenstein*.

What is left unremarked, however, is how this move into interiorization is first advanced and then rejected in favour of another trope in Shelley’s novel. This other trope, externalization, appears as a more ancient figure in the framing narrative that opens the accounts of Victor Frankenstein’s and the creature’s stories. Recall how *Frankenstein* begins with a number of letters addressed by a certain Captain R. Walton to his sister, Mrs Margaret Saville. In these, the first of a concatenating series of embedded narratives, Walton details his preparations for his voyage of discovery to the North Pole. This then leads into his account of meeting Victor Frankenstein, following which Frankenstein’s embedded narrative takes over, enveloping in its turn the creature’s own story that Žižek alludes to. It is in the first couple of letters we learn the origins of Walton’s desire to reach the pole. It turns out that the North Pole expedition comes on the heels of discovering he is a poetic failure. “You are well acquainted with my failure and how heavily I bore the disappointment,” he reminds his sister, before recalling how this failure turned him back to a prior desire, earlier than his wish to acquire a “niche” in the temple of poetry alongside Homer and Shakespeare. For the voyage of discovery, we learn, had been “the favourite dream of my early years” but these earlier visions of the pole had been superseded by the “effusions” of the poets. It is only after the collapse of the poetic dream that his thoughts were turned back to “the channel of their earlier bent.”

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<sup>5</sup> Žižek, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

To say that poetry offers the most powerful instance of the fiction of pure interiority that Žižek rejects as the first lie is not a particularly original statement. But note how, in Shelley, poetic desire comes explicitly as a secondary formation, built on top of the older trope of discovery. Moreover, it is expressly with the breakdown and rejection of this poetic “compensation,” with its various associations with “written work, literature, culture and instruction” that the older trope aligns. For although a passionate reader, as Walton describes himself, he comments how his “education was neglected.” He is “more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen.” His sole education, as he reminds his sister, consisted of his voracious reading of his Uncle Thomas’s library, which contained nothing but “the history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery.”<sup>7</sup> Older and more powerful than the centrifugal operation of literary interiority is a centripetal *pull* that exerts itself on the Shelleyan subject, emerging as an externalizing force that “conquer[s] all fear of danger or death.”

First published just a year before Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Hegel’s *The Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817), traces a similar overturning of interiorization by a principle of exteriorization. We read how, for Hegel, the Idea appears at a moment when the world is no longer available to experience. The Idea emerges in concert with the collapse of experiential knowledge founded on the interiorizing recollection (*Erinnerung*) of sense perceptions. For with thought, Hegel asserts, we are no longer dealing with a world outside. The Idea, as he explains, “is not to be taken as an idea of something or other”; “it has no existence for starting-point”<sup>8</sup>. Freed from any objective content, the Idea, as thought’s own self-representation, takes itself as its object, thus liberating itself from that world in the process. As Hegel goes on to put it in Part Three of the *Encyclopedia*, “the last negation of immediacy has implicitly required that the

<sup>7</sup> One might recall in the reference to “Uncle Thomas” an echo of Saint Thomas of Aquinas whose famous rejection of literature Lacan also references in his essay “Litturaterre”: “Sicut palea,” Aquinas is reported as saying to his disciple Reginald of Piperno when asked why he stopped writing: “everything I have written up to now seems like straw compared to what has been revealed to me.” Lacan’s translation of the Latin is even stronger than Weisheipl’s – *comme du fummier*, “like manure.”

<sup>8</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic, Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace and foreword J. N. Findlay, Clarendon, Oxford 1991, §213, p. 274.

intelligence shall itself determine its content. Thus thought, as free notion, is now also free in point of *content*.”<sup>9</sup>

What interests is the role of memory in this “path to intelligence.” In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel explains how representation entails the conjuring back up of images derived from experience. This is the first step towards some latent concept or Ideal principle even as it remains tied to the data of intuition. But in distinction to representation, thought deals not with images but with signs, Hegel explains. It thus entails another form of memory. We think in *names*, Hegel reminds us, and these have no immediate connection to what it describes: the sign “is the pyramid into which a foreign soul has been conveyed, and where it is conserved.”<sup>10</sup> To remember the names of things is thus very different from the act of recall performed by the creative imagination, which deals with images derived from intuition. This other form of memory – called *Gedächtnis* or memorization – has rather “to do with an object which is the product of intelligence itself” Hegel explains, using the metaphor of a closed book encrypted within the mind to figure this: “Such a without-book,” he writes, “remains locked up in the within-book of intelligence, and is, within intelligence, only its outward and existing side.”<sup>11</sup>

While we tend to think of reproductive memory as the higher, more intellectual activity, as for example, in the comparison Hegel makes between knowing something off by heart versus merely by rote, it turns out in Hegel’s account that it is precisely “the torture of [...] idiotic stuff,” of memorization’s “shallow, silly, and utterly accidental links” that paves the way to the Idea. This is because memorization relies on the complete emptying out of signification whose basis as he observed earlier is the sensible world. Indeed, memorization is the opposite of signification, Hegel reminds us, “A composition is [...] not thoroughly conned by rote, until one attaches no meaning to the words. [...]. [I]n this case, the mind is estranged in itself, and its action is like machinery.” This realization of mind’s own self-estrangement is the appearance of thought itself as “free notion,” intelligence that is “aware that it is determinative of the content.” From

<sup>9</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy Of Mind: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A.V. Miller and William Wallace, rev. Michael Inwood, Clarendon, Oxford 1971, §468.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, §458.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, §462.

here, mind obtains its first Idea, Life, from whose immediacy an external world once more stretches itself out before the subject.<sup>12</sup>

If initially this looks like a simple reversal – a seamless back-and-forth movement between the sensible world’s inscription on the mind, that world’s erasure by thought and the subsequent reinstatement of the world through the Idea – one should remember Hegel’s caveat that what thought finds in its “voyage of discovery,” as it were, is always itself: “As will, the mind is aware that it is the author of its own conclusions,” maintains Hegel.<sup>13</sup> There is thus a certain circularity in the process by which thinking emerges as Paul de Man, among others, has pointed out: “the subject of philosophy is a reconstruction a posteriori,” he claims, a positing that “pretends to verify its legitimacy in the sequential unfolding of its future until it reaches the point of self-recognition.”<sup>14</sup> Hegel puts it even more clearly:

Intelligence finds itself determined: this is its apparent aspect from which in its immediacy it starts. But as knowledge, intelligence consists in treating what is found as its own. Its activity has to do with the empty form – the pretense of finding reason: and its aim is to realize its concept or to be reason actual, along with which the content is realized as rational. This activity is cognition.<sup>15</sup>

What Hegel calls “the path of intelligence” surreptitiously traces the loop of thought back to itself, whose further implication is that, rather than a secondary formation built upon experience, thought must in fact be *primary*. The sensible world, the basis for the experience which thought subsequently negates, turns out to be the posterior moment, a secondary stage upon which consciousness plays out an Hegelian version of Fort/Da. Experience must be therefore a *later* memory, an *Erinnerung* taped over memorization’s originary, idiotic *Gedächtnis*.

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The reference to Freud gives a hint as to where we have encountered a similar instance of a retroactive positing of an external world. I refer of course to Freud’s own narrative of the origins of thinking in his paper, “Formulations on the Two

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, §216, pp. 279-80.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., §469.

<sup>14</sup> Paul de Man, “Hegel on the Sublime,” *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. and intro. Andrzej Warminski, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1996, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., §445.

Principles of Mental Functioning” (1911) and its further elaboration in his 1925 paper, “Negation.”<sup>16</sup> In the latter, Freud explains that what we understand as the objectivity of the world is in fact a secondary phenomenon. One’s first apprehension is of the unity of the self and the outside world, and the original division – our earliest “judgement” as Freud calls it – is not between the subjective and objective but between what is pleasurable and unpleasurable. Everything that is good “is” the pleasure-ego, and everything that is bad “is” what is alien to it. But as Freud goes on to explain, whereas initially all presentations of pleasurable sensations were immediately derived from reality, a bump soon appears on the road of the “path of intelligence”:

Experience has shown the subject that it is not only important whether a thing (an object of satisfaction for him) possesses the “good” attribute and so deserves to be taken into his ego, but also whether it is there in the external world, so that he can get hold of it whenever he needs it.<sup>17</sup>

Thus it is only when the object of satisfaction absents itself that the division between inside and outside becomes necessary. Thought originally provisions the infant with the missing object of satisfaction through a mental presentation. However, when this fantasmatic form of satisfaction fails to relieve the tension, the idea of an inside and outside is introduced:

[...] originally the mere existence of a presentation was a guarantee of the reality of what was presented. The antithesis between subjective and objective does not exist from the first. It only comes into being from the fact that thinking possesses the capacity to bring before the mind once more something that has once been perceived, by reproducing it as a presentation without the external object having still to be there.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Formulations On The Two Principles Of Mental Functioning” (1911), *The Standard Edition*, Vol. 12 (1911-1913): the case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and other works, trans. James Strachey, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1958, pp. 218-226; Freud, “Negation” (1925), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14 (1923-1925): the Ego and the Id and other works, trans. James Strachey, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London 1961, pp. 235-239.

<sup>17</sup> Freud, “Negation,” p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.



Freud's name for this inside-outside metaphor is the "reality principle," a conception of "the real circumstances in the external world."<sup>19</sup> But notably, however, this concept of the "real circumstances" remains in the service of the first division or "judgement." The division between inside and outside, that is, is a secondary formation that is built over the earlier division between pleasure and unpleasure. Freud is quite explicit on this last point. Consequently, to the extent that the psychical apparatus now has a concept of interior and exterior, the original partition, with its first, "hallucinatory" mode of presentation, still remains in place. We continue to respond to our needs in a profoundly illusory manner. What has changed is simply that whereas our "thoughts" initially presented the object of satisfaction immediately, in the second case it is through a detour into "reality" that this presentation arrives: "thinking" now seeks to alter something in the external world rather than in its own domain. As a result, we must understand "reality" as the continuation of the pleasure principle by other means, a presentation by thought that is *equally as hallucinatory* as the first except that this time it is temporarily delayed, achieving its object by way of the roundabout path that is the external world. As Freud explains, "The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality-testing is, not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *re-find* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there."<sup>20</sup>

In both Hegel's and Freud's accounts, then, the dialectic of internal and external emerges from forgetting that one of the two alternating poles is in a sense "prior." In Hegel, the Idea forgets that its source lies in an originary externalization of the mind in a senseless repetition, the voiding of signification that is memorization. The thinking subject sets out on a voyage of discovery, but the world of experience and meaning it appears to "find" is secretly self-engineered, secured as it is by the first Idea. And in Freud, the lost object of satisfaction reappears in the "real circumstances" of the external world, but this apparently "objective" world is built on top of and in support of an older partition (pleasure and unpleasure). The missing object we find "outside" ourselves is in fact "re-found": placed there in advance by a pleasure-seeking subject that recognizes no boundary other than the fundamental divide separating pleasure from unpleasure. In both cases, what we come to perceive as our seemingly "natural,"

<sup>19</sup> Freud, "Formulations On The Two Principles Of Mental Functioning" (1911), p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., p. 237.

primary division of inside and outside, of subjective and objective, is really a secondary effect. The apparent opposition of interiority and exteriority would be a retroactive projection whose alternating play obscures the fact that one of the poles secretly does double duty: as simultaneously one side of the opposition, *and* as the repressed origin of the opposition itself.

Let us turn now to the second figure of the “European tradition” mentioned in Žižek’s book: Edgar Allan Poe. In Žižek’s account, Poe’s figure of the maelstrom is enlisted to illustrate the dangerous paradox of European cultural exceptionalism. The reference occurs in his discussion of how nations such as France have sought to safeguard their cultural productions from destruction by the forces of the global market by exempting them from its free market rules. But Žižek immediately pinpoints the problem with this strategy. He compares the French policy of subsidising their national cinema to the narrator in Poe’s short story, “Descent into the Maelstrom” who, observing that large spherical objects go down first, manages to save himself by holding onto a smaller, oblong shape that keeps him afloat until he is rescued. If French subsidies potentially slow down and perhaps save the smaller French film industry, this misses the point for Žižek, who notes how the true object in danger today is not the independent film industry (nor any other national forms of cultural production). Rather, it is experience itself that is under threat insofar as it has become an object of exchange. He writes,

In today’s capitalism, culture is no longer just an exception, a kind of fragile superstructure rising above the “real” economic infrastructure, but, more and more, a central ingredient of our mainstream “real” economy. [...]. The defining feature of “postmodern” capitalism is the direct commodification of our experience itself.<sup>21</sup>

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In the global economy, life itself has become commodified as we increasingly participate in it through the mediation of manufactured and packaged “experiences.” As Žižek puts it, “I buy my bodily fitness by way of visiting fitness clubs; I buy my spiritual enlightenment by way of enrolling in courses of transcendental meditation; I buy the satisfactory self-experience of myself as ecologically

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<sup>21</sup> Žižek, p. 15.

aware by purchasing only organic fruit; and so on.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the European cultural subsidies miss their aim; in the vortex that is what Bernard Stiegler calls the “hyper-industrial” capitalist economy, it is the very distinction between life and its representation that would be in question.<sup>23</sup> To try to save one small “cylindrical” piece of national cinema diverts attention from the thorough-going erasure of the border marking off the real and the imaginary *tout court*. To use an image of Tom Cohen’s from his own discussion of Poe’s short story, it is as if, today, Poe’s maelstrom has been sliced off at the top, unleashing a figure that, as he puts it “scatters the ability to counter a unitary notion of entropy as that of a closed system with a storm of multiplying vortices.”<sup>24</sup>

It seems that in this vorticial streaming of experience, all thought, in Hegel’s sense is foreclosed. This is in fact Stiegler’s critique of what he calls today’s “herd-society,” the hypermassification emergent from contemporary cognitive technologies. For Stiegler, we suffer today not from too much narcissism as is often thought, but from a catastrophic destruction of individual and collective narcissism, to the extent that primary narcissism’s anchoring to a mark or trait guarantees what he calls one’s “singularity.”<sup>25</sup> But it is precisely this “liquidation of the exception” – with its concomitant affect of melancholia which, as Robert Sinnerbrink has so beautifully shown, emerges as the dominant “resonant mood expressing contemporary cultural-historical anxieties”<sup>26</sup> – that is at stake when experience becomes commodified through the thorough-going capture of our libidinal energies.<sup>27</sup> Stiegler is thus just as dismissive as Žižek of the French strategy of “cultural exception” which for him is merely the “sad

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Stiegler, “Suffocated Desire, Or How the Cultural Industry Destroys the Individual: Contribution to a Theory Of Mass Consumption,” trans. Johann Rossouw, *Parrhesia* 13 (2011), p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Cohen, “Anthropos Inc. and the Politics of Delayed Extinction – Notes on the Current Acceleration,” unpublished paper, draft for Sloterdijk/Stiegler conference, available [https://www.academia.edu/26296529/Tom\\_Cohen\\_Anthropos\\_Inc\\_and\\_the\\_Politics\\_of\\_Delayed\\_Extinction\\_Draft\\_for\\_Sloterdijk\\_Stiegler\\_Conference\\_](https://www.academia.edu/26296529/Tom_Cohen_Anthropos_Inc_and_the_Politics_of_Delayed_Extinction_Draft_for_Sloterdijk_Stiegler_Conference_).

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., pp. 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Sinnerbrink, “Planet Melancholia: Romanticism, Mood, and Cinematic Ethics,” *Filozofski vestnik* 37.2, International edition (2016), pp. 95-113.

<sup>27</sup> This echoes Jacques Lacan’s observation in *Television*, that capitalism dispenses with sex, requiring, as Juliet Flower MacCannell puts it, “a new relation to the object of satisfaction.” See Juliet Flower MacCannell, “Refashioning *Jouissance* for the Age of the Imaginary,” *Filozofski vestnik* 37.2, International edition (2016), pp. 167-199.

disguise” that veils the true depth of the “misery” of our libidinal situation, a condition diagnosed as a specifically *political* disarray.<sup>28</sup>

For both of these thinkers, the conceit of the “cultural exception” only augurs the all-embracing capture by the pleasure principle as the hallucinatory presentation of the real. The hyper-industrial “experience” economy would simply be the clearest demonstration of the fantasmatic underpinning of the “reality principle,” which a careful reading of Freud has shown it always to have been. Thus, rather than the maelstrom, another image from Poe better illustrates the organizing logic of our “New Age of the Imaginary” as Juliet Flower MacCannell names it, this time from his 1844 poem, “Dream-Land.”<sup>29</sup> Here Poe’s narrator recounts his visit to a Northern land, which appears a sort of half-way place between life and death. Poe calls it a “wild weird clime that lieth, sublime/Out of SPACE – Out of TIME.” What Poe names as the “ultimate dim Thule –” is a site where the oppositions that formerly oriented us on Earth such as land and sea, fire and water have no purchase. From this alien and blank site, Poe heralds the rule of another principle that would retire the old Hegelian Idea in favor of another authorizing function, an “Eidolon” that “On a black throne reigns upright.”

In ancient history, Thule was the traditional name of a place beyond the borders of the known world. It was supposed to have been discovered by Pytheas of Massilia on his famed voyage around Northwestern Europe in 325 BC and modern geographers have identified it as, possibly, Iceland, Greenland or indeed, most commonly, Norway. Notably, in the accounts of Pytheas’ journey that have come down to us, Thule appears as a place where the four elements mixed freely together. The Greek geographer Strabo records Pytheas’ description of Thule as a place where “there was neither earth, sea, nor sky, but a compound of all the three, resembling what he calls *pulmo marinus*.”<sup>30</sup> A liminal state between the elements, Thule was thought to be composed of a sort of sea sponge enveloping the Earth’s furthest northern realm, whose denaturing figures are described by Poe as,

<sup>28</sup> Stiegler, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> The poem can be found here: [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/48631](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/48631).

<sup>30</sup> “Introduction,” *The Edinburgh gazetteer: or Geographical dictionary*, Vol 1, Longman & Co., London 1827, p. xxii.

Mountains toppling evermore  
 Into seas without a shore;  
 Seas that restlessly aspire,  
 Surging, unto skies of fire;

In Strabo's account we learn that Pytheas arrived at the moment of the midday sun. However Poe's narrator evidently wanders into Thule during mid-winter, for Poe's Thule is ruled by "an Eidolon, named NIGHT." It thus suggests a place on earth where God's first command, "Let there be light," was not quite or, perhaps, not *properly* heard. In the dim northern reaches of the globe, the logos failed to fully attach to its object, freezing the originary divine positing power of this command that, turning light into the privileged object of predication, enables the sense of sight to become the first metaphor of mind. Effacing a certain history of Western metaphysics founded on the Idea, whose etymology traces back to *idein*, to see, Poe's Thule renders this speculative history still-born – or perhaps this metaphor itself is eviscerated in Thule for the very limit separating life from death, what Hegel calls life's "dialectic of corporeity,"<sup>31</sup> evidently also never took place. Inhabited by strange creatures figures occupying in-between states, in Thule's swamps, Poe's traveler "meets, aghast"

Sheeted Memories of the Past –  
 Shrouded forms that start and sigh  
 As they pass the wanderer by –  
 White-robed forms of friends long given,  
 In agony, to the Earth – and Heaven.

300 As a forerunner of today's "experience economy," Thule's anabiotic environment deflects Geneticist tropes, flattening and emptying out the horizon beneath which a certain Idea of Life has unfolded. It should not surprise, then, that it is precisely to these "everlasting ices of the north" that Frankenstein's creature and his maker retreat in their to-the-death struggle over who is to define Life, and this is not simply because these realms have long been associated with a certain natural sublime – as a site where Reason falters in its perceptual apprehension of an Outside. What is at issue, rather, is how the Polar region forces to the surface something ordinarily unremarked on in the act of signifi-

<sup>31</sup> *Hegel's Logic*, §216.

cation. It is Kant himself who reminds us in his *Reflections on Metaphysics* how the (magnetic) North and South Poles are the sole places on Earth where, as he puts it, one must “ask where to look for the east” – the Pole names the location where we no longer have any spatial orientation, because we are standing on the very point that makes such orientation possible. It is no coincidence that Kant mentions this in the context of linguistic signification – of, precisely, the limit of reason and of transcendental philosophy *tout court*. He writes,

There cannot be any question of transcendental philosophy to which the answer would be unknown to us. For if the predicate is not determined by the subject it means that the question in itself is nothing, because the predicate in this case has no meaning at all, being neither affirmative nor its contrary opposite. Just like when, being at the pole, I ask where to look for the east.<sup>32</sup>

While for Kant this is proof of transcendental philosophy's power, namely, Reason is defined by the fact that it contains in itself the answers it seeks, this nevertheless raises the interesting question of a site on Earth where the Idea failed to gain purchase. Not only is the East the direction of sunrise, it is also the intuition of divine appearing, thus to lose this orientation is to be privated from a system of signification founded on the central heliotropic metaphor. If one can talk of “experience” at the Pole, it is in the sense of an encounter without a world, of a predicate without a subject.

An instructive prototype of the kind of political model implied by the reign of the Eidolon is found in the Seastead Institute. Comprised of a number of techno-libertarians centred around Milton Friedman's grandson, Patri Friedman, and with start-up funding by Silicon Valley venture capitalist Peter Thiel, this group proposes a new way of solving the question of collectivity, which – being good libertarians – they trope as fundamentally the problem of government, which is to say, of arranging and managing the *oikos*. Political change, they maintain, is crippled today by excessively high barriers to entry – largely as a result of the State's accompanying historical monopoly of force over its geographical territo-

<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie-Ausgabe, Berlin, 1908, vol. XVIII, Reflexion 4944, 4945, cited in Helmut Mueller-Sievers, “Tidings of the Earth: Towards a History of Romantic Erdkunde,” in *Re-reading Romanticism*, ed. Martha B. Helfer, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2000, p. 57.

ry. Thus the “Seasteading” community proposes to move (select) people off the land area of the Earth to form mobile, floating platformed communities out in the ocean. Their innovation lies in how this dispenses with any conception of fixed territory, privileging instead the freedom by which each unit may engage or disengage with other platforms. Friedman accordingly envisions the following hypothetical situation. Imagine, he says,

a platform city where the government has become too repressive or inefficient. A single platform decides to disengage and anchor a mile away, forming a new government. More follow. Eventually, the entire city may have relocated to the new position, with exactly the same set of platforms, but an entirely new government.<sup>33</sup>

A new fable for our time, the Seasteading vision reads as a kind of socio-political version of Frankenstein’s monster: the dream of a purely technical solution to the problem of community and its political organization. Friedman’s literally utopic fantasy of societies dynamically creating themselves on the fly excludes the concept of an All in the sense of a collectivity greater than the sum of its parts. In the Seasteading vision, there would only be individual units coming together and moving apart like cells in a petri dish outside of history’s space and time, joined solely by momentary alignments of individual preferences. The whole would be, like Frankenstein’s monster, a disarticulated collection of parts, a literal Leviathan of the seas. Moreover, the groupings that form from such alliances implies a relation of all gain, for if loss is perceived, all one need do is rotate one’s platform away. As a first step, perhaps, towards what Tom Cohen perceives as today’s larger “species-split”<sup>34</sup> that would eventually see the Silicon Valley elites and their billionaire friends move off the Earth altogether, the Seasteaders’ conception of “dynamic geography” relies on a specific property of the ocean – its friction-free state – to create “free societies” of mobile micronations.

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We can leave aside discussion of the multiple, internal contradictions of the Seasteading project for another time. What interests me here is how this vision

<sup>33</sup> Patri Friedman, “Dynamic Geography: A Blueprint for Efficient Government,” [https://web.archive.org/web/20111226153751/http://seasteading.org/seastead.org/new\\_pages/dynamic\\_geography.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20111226153751/http://seasteading.org/seastead.org/new_pages/dynamic_geography.html)

<sup>34</sup> See Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook, “VORTICES--Note on ‘Critical Climate Change’”, unpublished paper (2016). [http://www.academia.edu/23864167/VORTICES--Note\\_on\\_Critical\\_Climate\\_Change\\_2016\\_](http://www.academia.edu/23864167/VORTICES--Note_on_Critical_Climate_Change_2016_) (Accessed 1 November, 2016).

rests explicitly on the ocean's resistance to our ability to make marks on it. It thus excludes the very property that for Hegel inaugurated the appearance of the Idea. One recalls how the Idea in Hegel emerges from the externalization of mind in the act of memory. Unlike recollection, memorization is a mechanical activity, the faculty of conning by rote a series of words, as Hegel put it.<sup>35</sup> However, as de Man notes, such conning by rote also implies a mnemonic marking. "From the moment we memorize" he comments, "we cannot do without such a trace, be it as a knot in our handkerchief, a shopping list, a table of multiplication, a psalm-odized singsong or plain chant, or any other memorandum."<sup>36</sup> In effect, what this means is that, as the product of memorization, the Idea is the sole occasion when reason leaves a material trace on the world, as de Man also observes.<sup>37</sup>

Out in the ocean, however, it makes no sense to memorize the peaks and valleys of one's watery surroundings. One cannot notate liquid to come back to it later. The ocean-city would thus literally be a site where no rational Ideas are possible, an "erasureland" that would dispense entirely with thought's dialectic of inside and outside. This is indeed precisely its value, according to Friedman, for the beauty of these "Ephemerisles," as the Seasteaders see it, is the way it enables one to literally turn one's back on a problem, voting with one's feet, as it were, or rather rudders to disembark from the platforms of any larger clusters that may have become too sclerotic ("inefficient" is Friedman's term for it). As the latter puts it, "Dynamic geography moves power downwards towards the smallest separable unit." Fluid, circulatory, untethered to any central One, the political unit emerges outside existing, "static" models as an ongoing process, redistributing power to what *moves*. From this perspective, there is a sense in which today's refugees share something in common with the Seasteading impulse. Even if one is a voluntary decision born from elite privilege and the other compelled by conditions that make it impossible to remain, both nonetheless entail an act of self-removal, a turning one's back on an existing scene of governing and of the older, "statist" borders that the latter implies. However there is also a fundamental difference between these two "turns" that reaches farther than the obviously grotesque miscategorization of the break-away billionaire class with people in flight for their lives, as Poe will shortly help us to see.

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<sup>35</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy Of Mind*, §463.

<sup>36</sup> De Man, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.



But first, let us observe how in one of his essays, Žižek mentions a peculiar feature of the refugee crisis. He notes how many of the refugees arriving in Southern Europe wish to make their way north and live in the Scandinavian countries. Žižek offers this northern dream as the paradox of utopia, the way that “precisely when people find themselves in poverty, distress and danger, [...] one would expect that they would be satisfied by a minimum of safety and well-being.” But the opposite occurs: “the absolute utopia explodes,” he observes, “the refugees want to have their cake and eat it.”

They basically expect to get the best of the Western welfare state while retaining their specific way of life, which is in some of its key features incompatible with the ideological foundations of the Western welfare state. Germany likes to emphasize the need to integrate the refugees culturally and socially; however – another taboo to be broken – how many of them really want to be integrated? What if the obstacle to integration is not only Western racism?<sup>38</sup>

For Žižek, the “hard lesson” for the refugees is that “‘there is no Norway’, even in Norway.”<sup>39</sup>

But if Norway fails to “exist,” in the sense of an ideal, privileged “Europe” – namely, the Idea of a place of democratic freedoms, shared wealth, a gentle, tolerant, just society and so forth – I would be hesitant to follow Žižek in saying that “instead of chasing [their dreams] in reality, they should focus on changing reality.” For this would presume one knows what “reality” is. Hasn’t Freud’s own “hard lesson” in fact cautioned us against this? Recall how in the wake of the absence of the object of satisfaction, the immediate presentation by the pleasure principle gives way to a “conception of the real circumstances in the external world.” Our previously hallucinatory presentation of the object in thought transforms into an attempt “to make a real alteration” in these circumstances.<sup>40</sup> However as we saw earlier, the thinking conducted by the reality principle is just as illusory as that of the pleasure principle. Rather than overcoming the pleasure principle, the reality principle continues and maintains it. As Freud puts it,

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<sup>38</sup> Žižek 2016, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, *Two Principles*, p. 218.

...the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time.<sup>41</sup>

Accordingly, to explain to the refugee communities that “Norway does not exist,” and that they should try to change reality instead is thus another, only slightly more palatable way of expressing what the West, in both its “poetic” words and its external acts, constantly tell those who seek refuge on its shores: “you must wait.” This is, moreover, the traditional advice given by all religions as apparently the one thing they all seem to be able to agree on. Freud remarks,

*[R]eligions* have been able to effect absolute renunciation of pleasure in this life by means of the promise of compensation in a future existence; but they have not by this means achieved a conquest of the pleasure principle.<sup>42</sup>

So at this point one must ask, if the idea of making an alteration in reality is thus equally as fantasmatic a solution as the refugees’ dream of Norway, should we conclude there is only the rule of the Eidolon today? What if all that remains of “the political” is the empty gesture of the inward *turn* – a sort of global “Brexiting” of all intersubjective relations that, in mimicking the churn of the maelstrom, at best slows down our capture by the pleasure principle or, at worst, initiates an unstoppable chain reaction that cannibalizes every last limit, eviscerating all thought. What does one do with an interiorization gone into overdrive? To answer, one must question why, in Žižek’s example, it should be *cinema* that is offered up as the object par excellence of the “cultural exception” whose function is to slow down the vortex of pure experience. For from one perspective, cinema figures as the Ur-site of the Eidolon whose rule appears paramount today. But is there also a sense in which cinema might disable this rule, offering with its own circular turns something other than Stiegler’s “sad disguise” that simply veils the misery of our condition? Here cinema’s link with the dream, remarked on long ago by Maxim Gorky, comes into the foreground.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Both the dream and cinema present an experience that has no correlate in “reality,” proffering a subjective “experience” removed from any limit imposed by an objective world. Each suggests an “experience,” that is, without a world in which to “have” it, if by world we understand with Kant and Hegel a totality governed by the laws of necessity, contingency, and its limitation by time and space. In this, it also shares something with trauma which, as Cathy Caruth and others have commented, similarly presents as a paradoxical form of “unclaimed experience,” of something that exceeds subjectivization and therefore historicization.<sup>43</sup> It was trauma, in the form of the repeating dreams of returned soldiers, that led Freud to postulate the existence of something beyond the reign of the pleasure principle. In the so-called war neuroses, with their seeming resistance to the fundamental action of the dream as wish fulfilment, Freud was brought to the idea of a compulsion to repeat.

In his 1920 essay, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud spells out a strange story speculating about the origin of consciousness. Using the figure of the most minimal living substance – “undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation” – Freud hypothesizes that the constant barrage of stimulation must result in a protective function, some sort of crust or indeed “inorganic” matter that forms a membrane resistant to stimuli from the outside but nevertheless allows stimuli from the inside to traverse it. This permeable crust, as the “origin” of consciousness, enables the act of projection. When internal stimuli become excessive and, hence, unpleasurable, they can be thrown outward, in this way forming the original judgment or division of the subject and world. But Freud hypothesizes that in certain cases, this “crust” fails in its protective function. Excessive stimuli force their way in without the defence offered by this primitive “consciousness” in a manner that could be analogized with trauma – in such cases, consciousness is taken wholly unaware and unprepared. From here, Freud hypothesizes that the compulsion to repeat may be the organism’s attempt to build a level of protective anxiety around the excessive stimuli which broke through, that is, to begin to *anticipate* the encounter, and in this way re-begin the process of its subjectivization.

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<sup>43</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2010.

Thus Freud makes the intriguing suggestion that our abstract idea of time may constitute “another way of providing a shield against stimuli.”<sup>44</sup> Time, along with its accompanying concepts of finitude or death, would be *defensive* concepts, instituted by and in the service of the Perceptual-Consciousness system although holding no sway in the Unconscious. “As a result of certain psycho-analytic discoveries,” he writes,

we are to-day in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are “necessary forms of thought.” We have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves “timeless.” This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, he speculates, the notion of death as the necessity of all living things may be a careless assumption, whose power over us may have been “strengthened in our thought by the writing of our poets.” Perhaps we have adopted the belief, he writes, “because there is some comfort in it.”

If we are to die ourselves, and first to lose in death those who are dearest to us, it is easier to submit to a remorseless law of nature, to the sublime, than to a chance which might perhaps have been escaped.<sup>46</sup>

From this point of view, “the poets” offer merely the muted solace of mourning in the face of “a remorseless law of nature.” Cinema, on the other hand, initiates a fundamental disruption of thought and, potentially, a re-working of the “natural” laws governing the Idea of Life. To understand this, one should note how in his *Cinema* books, Gilles Deleuze reminds us how the camera is not limited to the constraints of the Perceptual-Consciousness system or, in his Bergsonian phrasing, the sensory-motor scheme.<sup>47</sup> Arising from a regime of sight that is mechanical in nature, cinema produces images that, non-human in their origin,

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<sup>44</sup> Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 18: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and other works (1920-1922)*, The Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, London 1955, p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1989.

need no longer to be organized through the rules governing perception and experience. In montage, cinema presents images that are “irrational” or “incommensurable” with experiential time. In this sense, their formal structure is comparable to trauma, as that which lies beyond the reign of the pleasure principle and its wish-fulfilment dream.

A “new relation,” as Deleuze puts it, is therefore established between thought and sight in cinematic representation, which is no longer tied to any phenomenality initiated by divine positing through which the Idea of Life has traditionally appeared. Cinema, as Jon Roffe explains, produces problematic objects, in Kant’s sense of an object “outside” experience that can only be represented without being able to be “directly determined.”<sup>48</sup> Crucially, the problematic object accordingly does away with the inside-outside metaphor that governed experience until now. The example Deleuze offers from cinema is the “living problem” that is Pasolini’s film *Teorema*. Deleuze remarks how the film’s leitmotif of “a question to which I cannot reply” puts into relief something that remains unthought by Reason.<sup>49</sup> In *Teorema*, Pasolini invokes a question that is rationally posed but whose answer is “unknown” to any transcendental philosophy that would found itself upon the exception, whether cultural or otherwise. In this way he poses a challenge to Kant’s own fundamental theorem of transcendental philosophy as what contains all its answers within itself. Deleuze calls the problematic Idea the “unthought” of Reason but a more precise formulation would be *the thinking of the not-all*, of what Lacan names the *pas-tout*. The logic of the *pas-tout* implies a being or *jouissance* that is not fully submitted to the signifier’s Law whose first instituting cut carved out the contours of an inside and an outside “world.” With this posing of a rational question to which there is no answer, the carefully paved path to intelligence curves back around itself, taking away “all its interiority to excavate an outside in it, an irreducible reverse-side, which consumes its substance,” as Deleuze beautifully expresses it.<sup>50</sup> Such indeterminacy of the object, he continues in *Difference and Repetition*, is “a perfectly positive, objective structure which acts as a focus or horizon

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<sup>48</sup> Jon Roffe, “Notes on a Deleuzian Theory of Melancholia,” *Crisis & Critique* 3 (2/2016), p. 157.

<sup>49</sup> Op. cit. p. 175.

<sup>50</sup> Op. cit., Deleuze, *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, p. 175.

within perception.”<sup>51</sup> And as such, it puts into play another way of rationalizing experience.

We saw how the Idea sought to bridge the distance between the mind and a world that thinking initiated, a shaky construction that has required a long history of aesthetics to help buttress it in place. Yet to the extent that all Ideas are, as Kant reminds us, “essentially problematic,” they also inscribe “a dimension of objectivity as such” which is occupied, Deleuze says, by every subjective act.<sup>52</sup> Representable only in problematic form, the Idea wraps itself around itself like a Klein bottle or Möbius strip – or, indeed, as a concatenating series of embedded narratives, a “without-book locked up in the within-book of intelligence” in Hegel’s terms – referencing a secret that a certain rationality has always sought to cover up, namely, the irreducible “reverse-sidedness” in the relation (if one can still call it that) of mind and world, and subject and object.

Now, in his Pasolini example, Deleuze maintains that with this recognition of a rational problem to which, citing Kant, “there is no solution,”<sup>53</sup> thought’s interiority becomes overtaken by the exteriority of a “belief,” even if this is a belief that has been evacuated from all religious content and given back to “rigorous thought.” However Poe will theorize this understanding through an image that dispenses with the fundamental analogy between poetic and divine creation that has persisted in the Idea until now. Non-coincidentally, this takes the form of a memory, but of a very unusual kind:

By each spot the most unholy –  
 In each nook most melancholy, –  
 There the traveller meets, aghast,  
 Sheeted Memories of the Past –

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A sheeted memory facilitates a cover-up, a hole in memory. It conjures the memory of a ghost, which is in fact no “memory” at all if memory entails the recollection of an experience that occurred in space and time. A sheeted memory proposes to recall what never “took place,” presenting as a spectral intervention in

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<sup>51</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, Continuum, London 2001, p. 169.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

the order of time instituted by the Perceptual-Conscious system. Furthermore, with his figure of a blank memory/memory of a blank, Poe irreversibly displaces the ocularcentric model through which the Idea has been traditionally fed. If, in Shelley, the moment of life emerges as the event whereby an eye opens (“by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open”), this light metaphor comes to operate as the inaugurating figure for the living being’s cognitive system. Accordingly, for Frankenstein’s creature, the light of reason figures as the “almost imperceptible chink through which the eye could just penetrate,” giving him access to the “visible, whitewashed and clean” space in which his sensible and aesthetic education can begin. However, in Poe’s “Dream-Land,” its King forbids precisely the “uplifting of the fring’d lid,” the opening of the eye: “And thus the sad Soul that here passes/Beholds it but through darkened glasses.” The eye in Poe peers “through” a closed eyelid shuttered by darkened glasses, instituting a double blinding that becomes impossible to recover for any sort of speculative programme.

Indeed where sight is enlisted for metaphorical transfer in Thule, it is prosthetically as a glass eye or proto-camera eye – the eye not as illuminating bridge between self and world but as what shutters the senses from observing cinema’s full-scale attack on a phenomenal order as the poetic mourning for a lost object. Concatenating a ghost memory around a memory of the Past in a way that invites comparison with how Deleuze characterizes the problematic Idea, Poe ineluctably inverts the order of time, inviting us to remember something or someone before it or they could be “conceived.” Where have we encountered something like this before? When Freud, in his narrative of the path to intelligence stipulates that the inside-outside metaphor is founded on an earlier division between pleasure and unpleasure, he indicates that this original judgment is formed in order to reject unpleasure. Everything that “is” the subject is what is pleasurable, whereas unpleasure is originarily ejected as not belonging to it. This then gives us an image of an unpleasure that never had any kind of subject attached to it, a sort of inverse of trauma in the outside world. An originarily *unexperienced* unpleasure circulates as a ghost, a “spectre in the screen” of the pleasure principle, as Alan Cholodenko calls it,<sup>54</sup> terrorizing its palliative care nurse, the reality principle. Regardless whether we call this, with Lacan,

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<sup>54</sup> Alan Cholodenko, “The Spectre in the Screen,” *Filozofski vestnik* 37.2, International edition (2016), pp. 79-94.

*jouissance*, or with Freud, that which lies beyond the pleasure principle, such an originarily unexperienced unpleasure is associated with something “older” than the loss of the object.

It is older even than “the Past” itself, in the sense of an unpleasure that was never submitted to the regime of *eidos* that gave birth to our concept of time, the object of so many effusions by the “poets.” Here Captain Walton’s “illiteracy” comes to mind as a model for a problematic literature that would break with the established order of time and its existing hierarchies of sense. Cohen has noted that Poe has never successfully been accommodated to any of the standard histories of poetry.<sup>55</sup> His poetry empties out inherited protocols of signification in favor of chance rhymes haunting the interior niches of the temple of Homer and Shakespeare, a poe-try forged from the ill-iterations of language, near unintelligible try-outs of sheer sound. An “auriginary” figure for another “European” tradition, Poe’s writing has always jeopardized the regime of sight through which the Enlightenment has historically been given for, unlike the eye which can be closed, the ear is open to all comers. As Lacan says in Seminar 23, the ear is an organ that “cannot be stopped.”<sup>56</sup> Characterized by the repetitive “idiotic,” “shallow,” “silly” and “utterly accidental” links Hegel found so tortuous in the mechanical act of *Gedächtnis*, Poe’s poetry in fact performs the self-estrangement of mind necessary for the formation of the Idea. It does so by *conning* us with the silliness of its rhyme that imprints itself indelibly on our mind, with the result that we *cannot help but memorize it*. The end-stopped rhymes of Poe’s “Dream Land” thus interfere against one’s conscious will, threading the symbolic fabric of the poem with a certain hallmark stroke around which the poem’s rhyme scheme repeatedly turns: *lonely, only, newly, chilly, lily, unholy, melancholy*. The famous stutter or babble of idiotic rhyme that Poe’s poetry produces when read aloud – the illegitimate “microverbal soundscrip,” as Cohen describes it – resolves in “Dream Land” around the word Thule which, by Poe’s force of repetition, finds itself cornered into a pronunciation it would never ordinarily yield in everyday speech:

<sup>55</sup> Tom Cohen, “Poe’s Foot d’Or: ruinous rhyme and Nietzschean recurrence (sound),” *Anti-Mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p.107.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 23: Joyce and the Sinthome* (1975-1976), lesson of 18 November, 1975, p. 10



By a route obscure and lonely,  
 Haunted by ill angels only,  
 Where an Eidolon, named NIGHT,  
 On a black throne reigns upright,  
 I have wandered home but newly  
 From this ultimate dim Thule.

Poe's illegitimate rhyme, newly/Thul[i]e, recalls nothing so much as one of Mallarmé's "weird foam-chimera-syllables," as Justin Clemens calls them:<sup>57</sup> a syllable that appears and vanishes at once, brought into being from the sheer power of repetition itself. An articulation of a writing that is simultaneously a self-erasure, Poe's surplus syllable gives the fundamental *lie* to the representational *illusion*, even as it produces *ex nihilo* a tiny, new piece of linguistic territory – a "real atom" as Clemens, citing Badiou explains – from which a new Idea might emerge.

So in closing, a question: can one read the extraordinary images of a humanity in flight Northwards as the form of repetition from which the "new vision" of Europe that Žižek's envisages could emerge? If "Europe" has always been a screen memory, the dream of the pleasure principle on its inimitable path back towards death, perhaps we can see in the smearing of Europe's boundaries in the refugee crisis the *Lituraterre* of a writing that dispenses both with the exceptional regime of the poets *and* its liquidation today in the regime of the Eidolon, along with its accompanying evacuation of thought in the catastrophic loss of world? Can we see in this unprecedented Northern "landing," a "*pas-tout*" in the sense of an "all afoot" advance guard of what Cohen has been predicting for some time now as the "coming wars of reinscription"? Out of the unsuspected forms now emerging from the melting regions of the far North, one questions if a new *polar-tickle* Idea of Life might be close at hand?

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<sup>57</sup> Justin Clemens, "Syllable as Syntax: Stéphane Mallarmé's Un Coup de dés," *Filozofski vestnik* 37.2, International edition (2016), pp. 131-149.

A.J. Bartlett\*

## “The orphaned fervour...”<sup>1</sup> Or: the truth of knowledge<sup>2</sup>

This essay has nothing to do with Jacques Rancière, but this sentiment, “the orphaned fervour...,” which occasionally does the rounds, can stand as epithet for what I am going to say about what is said. It’s not a description or a polemic: at least not anymore. It is the embedded real of what passes as critical in what used to be called “the human sciences.” In another register, this real is what we might call the *jouissance* of university discourse. Thus it is a register of how self-reflexive critical academics – and the enlightened bosses of such creatures – give the cover of a radical desire to the servicing of a monotonous, relentless and ultimately self-satisfying demand. The bad taste in the mouth is the small price to be paid for being paid.

I’m going to speak somewhat elliptically but nevertheless directly of the love that dare not speak its name: that between Plato and Lacan, that between truth and subject. The name of this love which is almost nowhere is education.

### Apology/Analyticon

What I am making the coincidence or the double-site of this non-rapport made flesh is the *Apology*, where, with Socrates being the exemplar, truth is on trial and *Analyticon*, one of the appendices to Seminar 17, from 1969 – Serge and Jane’s *année érotique* after all – where Lacan, speaking at Vincennes, the so-called “experimental university” – which he calls “vein scene” – is heckled by comrade-students as he tries to speak about his four discourses, specifically university discourse which, as you know, puts knowledge, which is not truth, in

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<sup>1</sup> ... of denouncing the system with the disenchanting certitude of its perpetuity.” J. Rancière, “L’éthique de la sociologie,” *L’empire du sociologue*, Collectif Revoltes Logiques, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 1984, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> This is an edited version of a paper given at *Reason + Enjoyment*, UNSW, July 11-14. I have kept the sense of it being spoken, given it deals with Socrates and Lacan.

the place of the master, the place of getting things going and to which everything owes its significance.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of the impromptu, Lacan says that the experiment of this university – the university as such having “deep roots” – is exemplary and given it is an experiment asks “what use are you,” the student? That is, what use are you to the deep roots such that the university can find a new way to go on making use of you, like a language. He tells them he will draw this diagram, which is the four discourses, which maintain at a certain point an incommensurability with each other. This point being the impasse of all thought, like it or not. Hence, what he has to transmit is not a body of knowledge but a discourse: effect of an impasse or an impossible position.

“Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things” (Apol. 24b)<sup>4</sup>: Corruption and impiety are the crimes against the “university.” And nowhere is this exemplified more clearly than in his own famous diagram wherein mathematically plotting the diagonal of the square marks the rational demonstration of incommensurability as such: thus as “integrally transmissible”; Lacan’s own teaching desire. This dialogue, the *Meno*, treats the question of knowledge and its transmissibility, of knowability as such, and going all the way, Socrates forces knowledge to confront what it will not know as knowledge.

Socrates treats with a slave – not a student to be sure, not even a citizen and so a sort of irrational figure relative to the state but one involved precisely in producing something that is *never his own*. Dealing with the irrational or inexpressible rigorously, thus mathematically, treating a slave as capable of thought and, later in the dialogue, humiliating the education of that good citizen Anytus all over again, Socrates corrupts and as this corruption strikes at the core of Athenian pride, its knowledge, he *must* go down.

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar 17: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, (ed.) Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, W.W. Norton, New York 2007, pp. 197-208 (227-240).

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Apology*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, *Complete Works*, (ed.), John M. Cooper & associate ed. D. S. Hutchinson, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis 1997, pp. 17-36.

Lacan is accused of backsliding, reaction and liberalism, of fiddling about with diagrams and discourse inside, while outside the revolutionaries are going to burn it all down. In a way, Lacan is given a sort of trial – or we can say, as with Socrates, what is true of knowledge, which Lacan is trying to show, is tried in this reverse of the seminar. The irony, as in the *Apology* with the accusation against Socrates of oratory, is that what Lacan is trying to articulate in *Analyticon* as an effect of structure is what the comrade students assume themselves to be protesting. The point of the discourse for Lacan, as he points out, as he wants to not stop writing for the kids who interrupt him, is to place the place wherein the fire can be set that will have the desired effect.

If you don't light the spark at this point, if you go off everywhere at once, so to speak, your desire shows itself to the state for which it can only register as *its* enjoyment. This because ultimately the state cannot think and so "you will get a new master." To set fire to the state within the state but at a point of which the state is ignorant, that's the trick. One must un-know what the state does. "Lacan," a comrade asks, "is psychoanalysis revolutionary? Now there is a good question," he retorts (A. 200).

Socrates points out the history of his own dis-placement within the city-state: Meletus, Anytus and Lycon who bring the charges *and* are vexed on behalf of the poets, the businessmen and the politicians, and the orators or men of the law, have "all their life" Socrates says, been schooled by the state in these accusations of corruption of the youth and impiety. The means of this corruption, Socrates forces them to confirm is that he is the sole non-educator in the entire state (Apol. 23de -24e). He is the single un-knower: if you like, the mark of lack. He remains over, singularly unproductive for the university, without the stamp of the "credit points" – which the comrade students – ancient and contemporary – as Lacan says, not only consent to but which they also applaud (A. 201).

Hence Lacan's famous and damning turn: "The regime is putting you on display. It says, "Look at them enjoying!" – enjoying what? The university discourse; which of course, is not where they thought it would be ... it's on the board, Lacan says (A. 201-208)! Which is what Socrates says to the jury: "Remember what I asked you when I began, not to create a disturbance if I proceed in my usual manner" (Apol. 27b).

## Reason/Enjoyment

This connection between the knowledge of the state – let’s call it reason but in the sense of sense (so, religious) – and the register of its affects as enjoyment and thus as the obverse of what the subject supposes of his knowledge is most compelling because as both Lacan and Socrates insist – Socrates on trial for non-educating and Lacan for precisely zeroing in on the disjunctive relation between knowledge as it is bought and sold for the master via credit points and truth as it is obfuscated and deployed in this process – education is the medium of this determination.

The determination in fine comes down to this: that the knowledge of the state is all there is to know and that what is not known as state knowledge is what must not be known. Nothing not of the state must exist. Reason and enjoyment form a one-all at the limit we might say; a double act – the reasoned state of the situation and its affective object objection. “But,” as Lacan says in 1973, adding science to the three impossible “professions,” “the experts are not expert enough to know that their position is untenable.”<sup>5</sup>

These terms, reason and enjoyment, so often supposed to mark an irreducible dichotomy, on one reading or on another the limits of an equally irreducible relation, are worth considering here as affective of states or universities qua *its* discourse or *as a* discourse: that insidious type of discourse which, following what Lacan doesn’t say explicitly but teaches, lacks at once the indifference of the master, the conviction of the hysteric and the courage of the analyst, insofar as it exists only insofar as it holds out. Indeed, it is the sum total of these lacks that makes the university so able to sell itself as every-bodies friend: conserver for the conservatives; liberaliser for the liberals – the comrade students, Lacan suggests, will not be able to see them off but will at best be wedged between them.

Thus as we see in both *Analyticon* and the *Apology*, speaking of this discourse is spoken about in terms of coming in and out of this discourse and coming into it in order to go out of it and also of a-voiding it *all together*, and I mean here of

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan, “There can be no crisis of psychoanalysis,” *Panorama*, 1974. <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1668-there-can-be-no-crisis-of-psychoanalysis-jacques-lacan-interviewed-in-1974> trans. Jordan Skinner.

rendering this discourse void, one way or another, from within but critically, at the site of its own impasse which for the state is not. "It is after all on the cutting edge of anxiety that we have to maintain ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

Like nowhere else, universities – the social bond as social body – serve at the pleasure of the master and do so very well: the desire of the university is always at the pleasure of the master. It creates after all, the means of the surplus the master requires: graduates, who make the correct accusations (sometimes called critique), which is to say, they correctly enjoy. The universities protestations of autonomy, often named, with full conceit, "academic freedom" is merely the university itself being put on display. It is what must be professed such that it looks like reason; that, as Lacan remarks in *Ecrits*, a Good Housekeeping version of democracy reigns.<sup>7</sup>

This desire is unstable given that in slaving away like this the university retains – more and more despite itself – an access to what is not what it reproduces and thus what terrifies it: this would be the truth of this knowledge which it produces for the master in its place. "To fear death is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know..." (Apol. 29a). What is terrifying about truth is that it goes about the city without qualification – it is the de-limit of reason. Socrates, for Plato at least, names this terrorist singularity.

## Truth/Knowledge

I'm not saying universities are capable of truth. I'm saying that despite themselves and like anywhere at all, and so not at all especially, it is nevertheless there that truths are not-impossible, there where knowledge reproduces itself, and is produced in excess, and as such also "what it is not" – which this knowledge determines not to be. This is why the accusation in the *Apology* over the question of education directs Plato's entire corpus to think the form of it's true Republic – the city nowhere visible but not impossible whereby sophistry has

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Seminar X, *Anxiety*, 1962-63," trans. Cormac Gallagher from unedited French typescripts, 14/11/62.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink with Heloise Fink and Russell Grigg, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2006, pp. 332 & 685.

come to lack. And why Lacan considers analysis what comes onto the scene in order to overhaul the *function* of knowledge in the formation of the subject.

Putting truth in its place is what we might call the knowledge of affect – to which Lacan has a specific and not at all ambiguous relation. But and this is a question you can only ask of knowledge, “whose knowledge is this”? Hence Lacan says: “I did not take the dogmatic path of giving a general theory of affects ... we are not psychologists, we are psychoanalysts. I am not developing for you a logic [...] of this ‘unreal reality’ which is called the *psyche* but a praxis which merits a name: erotology. Desire is what is involved, and the affect by which we are urged perhaps to make emerge everything that it involves as a universal, not general, consequence on the theory of affects, is anxiety.”<sup>8</sup>

That’s to say, without truth, without the real of its non-place being attested, the theory of affect only has two places to go: back to bodies as such, such that every body has its very own knowledge – which, as Socrates points out, is what the prime and richest sophist Protagoras already argued for as *Truth*: hence “man being the measure – of things as they are and as they are not” and so on: thus as many truths as bodies, then. For better, as Protagoras says, or worse.<sup>9</sup>

Or to language, which must appear, then, as *the* transcendental guaranteeing existent all bodily affects: such that individual bodily affects speak in and through language alone, which represents them. We have the infinite paradigm or *dispositif* – language *and* the finite multiple iterations that give it cause – bodies: a logic of sense squares their circle. Total.

Language itself remains off limits to thought given that in its own terms we’d be opting for a meta-language, which is impossible, and affects are known to us but only via language which makes them first knowable and secondly transmissible or at least discursive or bound. Such that the speech of affects effects a discourse that causes affect to come to be known. What we have in this schema is a neat logic, not very original but coherent and yet, finally inconsistent because of the very totality it cannot not construct. “Thus you have only one thing

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<sup>8</sup> Lacan, *Anxiety*, 14/11/62.

<sup>9</sup> See Plato, *Theatetus*, in *Complete Works*, trans. M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, pp. 157-234, 167ab.

to do," Lacan says to the students, which is to "weave yourselves into it along with those who work that is with those who teach you, under the banner of the means of production and, consequently, of surplus value" (A. 204).

A body is the locus of an affect or affects if you like: it is not, as Lacan reminds everyone, either "Being given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some sort of raw form."<sup>10</sup> But this doesn't mean that all affects are the same. Certainly language itself, given that it operates as discernment and judgment – that is, determines from what is, what has the currency of existence – discriminates here, privileging one over another dependent on the terms dominating its procedure at any given time: what it always excludes, no matter the criteria is what it cannot know, what it cannot construct or what is indiscernible or in exception to it; call it the unconscious if you like, call it what Socrates' divine sign warns him *not* to follow. (The negation is critical.) As Lacan notes we "see that the style of approach of such a theme: 'anxiety is an affect' is proposed to us from the point of view of the teacher."<sup>11</sup>

Alain Badiou names the indiscernible in its affirmative sense the *generic* – that which cannot be captured in a knowledge but which exists despite it. Ontology, "science of being qua being," provides the formal demonstration of this unknowable existence. In Badiou's terms this *inexistence* is the locus of a truth. Thus the single not-impossible possibility left over – but as exception and not surplus, thus anxiety. To make what is indiscernible belong to the situation in which it exists as nothing: that's the role of the subject for Badiou – what I call the "subject of education." Of course we get this from Plato, whose Socrates names what sophistry lacks as education *and* from Lacan whose teaching is to know-ones-credit. As with Plato, Badiou avers, Lacan is himself forced to know, at the point of his own exhaustion, that it is "mathematics alone which touches the real."<sup>12</sup>

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Hence, then, the affect of a truth, which is subjective through and through, without being partial, except insofar as what is "for all," is *generically* and thus universally, against all partiality. Truth affects its subject without being inscribed in a body as cause; conversely, a truth effects a body, capable of being its support.

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<sup>10</sup> Lacan, *Anxiety*, 14/11/62.

<sup>11</sup> Lacan, *Anxiety*, 21/11/62.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Continuum, London 2008, p. 243.



The truth, the matter of the subject, effects that, in the world as it is, which will be its material support.

The truth of the dead Socrates will be registered as the affect of the Platonic corpus which this truth effects. Plato gives the truth of Socrates, the only thing the man himself ever concerned himself with, the new and necessary form; a corpus or a body of truths and he registers its affect in the varia of discourses he treats. Affects, thus, are downstream of the subject they support, thus the affect of a truth is not at all the same as the knowledge of affect. The former is hazardous, truly; the latter secures itself in conformity to a rule. In some recent work Badiou will call the one happiness, the other satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

Between truth and knowledge, or thought and opinion, the analyst and the university, happiness and satisfaction, there is a minimal difference that makes all the difference: “I am an orator yes, but not after their pattern” (Apol. 17a) as Socrates says, or for Lacan, “I am, like everybody else is, a liberal only to the extent that I am anti-progressive” insofar as psychoanalysis is progressive which liberalism is not (A. 208). In other words, for Socrates and Lacan truth is not impossible, even if the all of it is. Which is to say, *there is* that which all knowledge cannot know but not, not produce. This is what is in exception to it. “If I have obtained it, it’s through not giving the appearance of having laid a finger on it,” Lacan says.<sup>14</sup> In other words, what is held too is that the exception can be thought without knowledge as such, as the impasse of language, which presents it.

What does Lacan say? Something like, “we are the animal that gets along without truth very well ...” But the truth is we don’t get along without truth very well at all and thus as Lacan notes about getting out from under the “vein scene” (or even the ARCEne):<sup>15</sup> it is *not to present something to make someone important, but in order to say something structurally rigorous*:<sup>16</sup> which in the end is the beginning of being able to say something of the subject not reduced to structure; the subject in doubt we might say, thinkable but unknown.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Happiness*, trans. A. J. Bartlett & Justin Clemens, Bloomsbury, London 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Lacan, *Sem. 17*, p. 190.

<sup>15</sup> ARC refers to the Australian Research Council to which academics in Australia go begging every year thus following the Homeric maxim which Socrates subverts in the *Republic*. See Book VI, 489bc.

<sup>16</sup> Lacan, *Sem. 17*, p. 191.

It is not then to oppose one to the other as such, truth and knowledge are not incompatible, Lacan says. It's not as if the thought of enjoyment one might find in Lacan is the diametric opposite of the form of truth one might find in Plato. So a *diagonal* can be made of the two, passing through the much misrecognised Descartes, the matchmaker or relay of Plato/Lacan, since for Descartes the dualism puts mind and matter on the one side and what is in exception to this One-All on the other. Plato and Lacan, by way of such a traverse, are contemporaries; bound by what is incommensurable to knowledge known as such. They are thinkable together via, if you like, as Lacan says, the sign that one found in the other or in Platonic terms, they share what is shared absolutely, the capacity for thought – that what is not known as knowledge can be thought and as thought, not knowledge, and so as what will have been true. For both (and you can read this as endlessly said in Plato as in Lacan) education to be so can only be so if it hitches its wagon to the long detour of the non-impossibility of truth: that it be *that* detour and hence what cannot just follow the signs. In *Ou Pire*, Lacan says Plato was already Lacan.

### **Void/Lack**

The crux of things is that if you can think what knowledge professes *not to be*, on the basis of its un-knowability, then knowledge, such as it is, is undone. You have, as Lacan said, punched a hole in it. Of course, ontologically speaking there is already a hole there at the level of its conceit: that it knows what must not be knowledge; that it “overdetermines the undetermined” or worse, leaves the undetermined to be the last word. So we could say that thought, the thought of the generic, finds in knowledge the hole that knowledge necessarily produces as its own.

Socrates announces this not as not teaching but knowing nothing, and then begins the work of working through, of making manifest what is truly unknown. This gives us the subject who wasn't there before; certainly not as affect, representation's representative, and not as an effect of language – even if in Lacan, the latter, in anxiety – the affect that is different from all the others – provides it access. The speaking being, we might say, is at best half-said as subject, which is as far as Aristotle and the Aristotelians got or get in the subversion of Plato.

Socrates cannot enjoy what is enjoyed in the state: the existence of this lack voids the imperative; which is in turn the beginning of having done with the structure that supports it. *Jouissance* is what serves no purpose, Lacan says. With regard to the pedagogy of the state, Socrates's speaking the truth which is nothing more than the others desire serves no purpose. He is in a state of law whose speech he doesn't know. His *jouissance* is tested so as to impose on it its proper limit but Socrates goes on; there is the death of the body and still he goes on; not limited by knowledge to enjoyment as affect. For Socrates what is not limited by knowledge is where truth comes in. What Socrates has in truth is the pure joy of avoiding enjoyment, insofar as he acts it out every day. But he lacks the enjoyment of the state, of what is in effect *university discourse* which, after all, is what Lacan writes out for us: that in producing over and again what is of value to it, the university produces this lack as its own. The necessity of not lacking the state; the semblant of a true affect.

Which is how they both come to end: Socrates dies and the analyst disappears necessarily, having subtracted thought from the enjoyment of submitting to the limits of knowledge. Socrates says: "I go to die, you go to live. This perhaps had to happen, and I think it is as it should be... but which of us goes to the good (Apol.42a) and Lacan says simply, "good-bye for today. Bye. It's over" (A. 208).

And as over, always, it remains to recommence: should something happen.

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**Sussman, Henry** Around the turn of the millennium, Henry Sussman’s ongoing interests in critical theory, Romanticism, modernism, post-modernism, and psychoanalysis took a systematic turn. Much of the writing since then (*The Task of the Critic*, 2005; *Around the Book*, 2011; *Playful Intelligence*, 2014) has explored the systematic and cyber-

netic underpinnings of a wide range of cultural artifacts, with Kafka, Benjamin, Borges, Derrida, Deleuze/Guattari, and psychoanalysis persistent favorites. He currently co-edits (with Bruce Clarke) the “Meaning Systems” series at Fordham University Press; and, on a platform of indispensable encouragement and support furnished by Sigi Jöttkandt and David Ottina, founded and co-edits “Feedback,” a theory-driven weblog publication out of Open Humanities Press ([www.openhumanitiespress.org/feedback](http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/feedback)).

## Abstracts | Povzetki

Joan Copjec

### **The Imaginal World and Modern Oblivion: Kiarostami's Zig-Zag**

Key words: cinema, Lacanian psychoanalysis, image, icon, Abbas Kiarostami, Ibn'Arabi, touch

This paper attempts to give an account of the imaginal world, a central concept of Avicenna and his philosophical followers in Iran in order to demonstrate the ways in which the imaginal continues to operate in the cinema of Abbas Kiarostami. As its name implies, the imaginal concerns the image, but more precisely the image insofar as it is conceived as participating in a political economy of the divine, or within an apparatus that relates the temporal, political order of men to the withdrawn instance of the divine. If the works of the falsafa were anathema to Islamic theology, this had everything to do with the retreat of the divine, which operated in the political order only insofar as it was absent. Kiarostami's film, *Close Up*, demonstrates the concept of the imaginary a contrario.

Joan Copjec

### **Imaginalni svet in sodobna pozaba: Kiarostamijev cik-cak**

Gljučne besede: film, lacanovska psihonaliza, podoba, ikona, Abbas Kiarostami, Ibn'Arabi, dotik

Prispevek predstavi imaginalni svet [*imaginal world*], osrednji Avicenov koncept kot tudi njegovih iranskih filozofskih privržencev, zato da bi prikazal načine, kako imaginalno še naprej deluje v filmih Abbasa Kiarostamija. Kot implicira že njegovo ime, imaginalno zadeva podoba, natančneje povedano, podoba, kolikor je dojeta kot udeležena v politični ekonomiji božanskega oziroma znotraj aparata, ki povezuje časovni, politični red ljudi z odmaknjeno instanco božanskega. Če so bila dela falsafe anathema islamske teologije, je bilo to v celoti povezano z umikom božanskega, ki je delovalo v političnem redu zgolj na način odsotnosti. Kiarostamijev film *Close Up* prikazuje koncept imaginalnega a contrario.

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Carol Jacobs

### **A Tripp to the London National Gallery**

Key words: W.G. Sebald, Jan Peter Tripp, Jan van Eyck, image, narrative, time

"A Tripp to the London National Gallery" takes up W. G. Sebald's 1993 "Like Day and Night: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp." This is a piece of writing by a wildly popular



“novelist” that normally escapes the notice of his readers. At the end of the essay Sebald reproduces Tripp’s large painting “Déclaration de guerre,” and declares it of a visual complexity not to be described in words, an exemplum, then of the incommensurability between language and objects of sight. The joke is, in an essay as riddled with jokes as it is with puzzles, that the answers to the riddles he poses materialize only when the large canvas, “Déclaration de guerre,” is cited by Tripp in another painting. The essay on Jan Peter Tripp gathers together in something of a jumble, a dizzying series of questions on the work of art: as preserving life, as recording history, as a reminder of its own materiality, and yet again as a bit of a prank, all under the guise of commentary. This is one of the most profoundly literary performances in Sebald’s works, despite its pretensions to be something else, and one of the most subtle theoretically.

Carol Jacobs

### **Tripp v londonski Narodni galeriji**

Ključne besede: W.G. Sebald, Jan Peter Tripp, Jan van Eyck, podoba, pripoved, čas

»Tripp v londonski Narodni galeriji« povzema delo W. G. Sebald »Kot noč in dan: k slikah Jana Petra Trippa« iz leta 1993 – delo izjemno priljubljenega »romanopisca«, ki pa ponavadi med bralci ostaja neopaženo. Na koncu eseja Sebald reproducira Trippovo veliko sliko »Déclaration de guerre« [Vojna napoved], in ji pripiše vizualno kompleksnost, ki ne more biti opisana z besedami in služi kot primer nezdružljivosti jezika in vizualnih objektov. Vic eseja, prepletene tako s vici kot ugankami, je v tem, da se ponujeni odgovor na podane uganke pokaže, šele ko Tripp veliko platno »Déclaration de gurra« »citira« na drugi sliki. Esej o Janu Petru Trippu zbere skupaj nekakšno zmešnjavo vrtoglavih serij vprašanj, ki zadevajo umetniško delo: kot ohranjanje življenja, kot beleženje zgodovine, kot opomnik lastne materialnosti, in ponovno kot nekakšen vic, vse to v obliki komentarja. Tak postopek je navkljub pretenzijam, da bi bilo nekaj drugega, eno najbolj izrazito literarnih in iz teoretske perspektive najbolj subtilnih izvedb v Sebaldovih delih.

Alan Cholodenko

### **The Spectre in the Screen**

Key words: cinema, animation, uncanny, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan

In accord with the author’s larger project to bring to the fore the crucial nature of animation for the thinking of not only all forms but all aspects of film, this paper seeks to elaborate a theory of spectatorship “proper to” animation, which is to say, to cinema, to film, to film “as such,” as a form of animation – film animation. Drawing upon what

the author calls the Cryptic Complex of film animation – informed by his treatment of Maxim Gorky's characterization of cinema as "Kingdom of Shadows" and composed for him of the uncanny, the return of death as spectre, endless mourning and melancholia and cryptic incorporation – the essay extends his notion of spectatorship as spectreship, as at once haunting and being haunted, at once cryptically incorporating and being cryptically incorporated. To wit, to this animatic, Derridean-indebted theory of film animation as of the order of the spectre, the hauntological, and the author's call for not merely a psycho- but a psyché-analysis of film animation – an analysis of the spectres (Homeric) at play in and of film animation – the essay brings the work of Jacques Lacan. It not only incorporates the animatic work of Lacan in film animation, and vice versa, it discovers that work as already so in play there – there in that haunted house, that crypt, where Derrida and Lacan animatically haunt, encrypt, each other, even as another such spectre, Jean Baudrillard, shadows them, animatically so.

Alan Cholodenko

### **Prikazen na platnu**

Ključne besede: film, animacija, *unheimlich*, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan

V skladu z avtorjevim širšim projektom prikazati ključno vlogo animacije za mišljenje ne le vseh oblik, pač pa tudi vseh vidikov filma, skuša prispevek razdelati teorijo gledalstva »lastno« animaciji, se pravi, kinu, filmu, filmu »kot takemu«, kot obliki animacije – filmske animacije. Prispevek se opira na to, kar avtor imenuje »skrivna zgradba filmske animacije«, izhajajoč pri tem iz avtorjeve obravnave Gorkijeve označitve kina kot »kraljestva senc«, ki ga tvorijo nedomačnost, vrnitev smrti kot prikazni, neskončno žalovanje, melanholija in skrivna inkorporacija. Prispevek razširja njegov pojem gledalstva [spectatorship] v prikaznost [spectreship]. To prikaznost razume kot nekaj kar hkrati preganja in je preganjano, skrivnostna inkorporacija in skrivnostno inkorporirano. Prispevek tako povezuje delo Jacquesa Lacana s to animatično derridajevsko teorijo filmske animacije kot vrste prikazni, prikaznološkosti [hauntological], in avtorjev poziv ne le k psihoanalizi, pač pa tudi k analizi psihe filmske animacije – analizi (homerične) prikazni, ki nastopa v filmski animaciji in kot filmska animacija. Tako prispevek ne povezuje le Lacanovega animatičnega dela s področjem filmske animacije, in narobe, temveč kaže, da je to delo vselej že prisotno, tu v tisti hiši prikazni, tisti grobnici, kjer Derrida in Lacan drug drugega animatično, šifrirano preganjata, četudi jima druga takšna prikazen, Jean Baudrillard, animatično sledi kot senca.

Robert Sinnerbrink

### **Planet *Melancholia*: Romanticism, Mood, and Cinematic Ethics**

Key words: *Melancholia*, von Trier, film-philosophy, film aesthetics, mood

Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* offers a fascinating exploration of cinematic romanticism and the aesthetics of cinematic moods. It presents a devastating portrait of melancholia, dramatizing the main character Justine's [Kirsten Dunst's] experience of a catastrophic "loss of world" that finds its objective correlative in a sublime cinematic fantasy of world-annihilation. In this article, I analyse some of the aesthetic and philosophical strands of *Melancholia*, exploring in particular its use of romanticism and presentation of cinematic mood. Von Trier explores not only the aesthetics of melancholia but its ethical dimensions, creating an art disaster movie whose sublime depiction of world-destruction has the paradoxical effect of revealing the fragility and finitude of life on Earth.

Robert Sinnerbrink

### **Planet *Melanholija*: Romantika, razpoloženje in filmska etika**

Ključne besede: *Melanholija*, von Trier, filmska filozofija, filmska estetika, razpoloženje

Lars von Trierjeva *Melanholija* ponudi fascinirajoče raziskovanje filmske romantike in estetike filmskih razpoloženj. S pomočjo dramatizacije katastrofične izkušnje »izgube sveta« glavne junakinje Justine [Kirsten Dunst's], nam predstavi uničujočo podobo melanholije, ki najde ustreznega konec v sublimni filmski fantaziji izničenja sveta. V pričujočem članku analiziram nekatere estetske in filozofske sklope *Melanholije*, še posebej Von Trierjevo raziskovanje uporabe romantike in predstavitve filmskega razpoloženja. Von Trierer ne raziskuje namreč zgolj estetike melanholije, temveč tudi njene etične razsežnosti, s čimer ustvari umetniški film katastrofe, katerega sublimna upodobitev uničenja sveta ima paradoksalni učinek razkritja ranljivosti in končnosti življenja na Zemlji.

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Knox Peden

### **Cube-Shaped Planet**

Key words: Anthropocene, Paul Bowles, Immanuel Kant, space, time, aesthetics

References to the Anthropocene and the ontological shifts it has putatively wrought abound in humanities scholarship today. This essay looks at several works of fiction and criticism – chiefly Paul Bowles's 1949 novel, *The Sheltering Sky* – in order to advance a series of claims about the difficulty of representing the relationship between nature as a domain of causality beholden to natural laws and another, nominally human or rational domain comprising actions, intentions, and variously justifiable or unjustifiable reasons. It is mainly interested in exploring the desires that motivate efforts to represent this rela-

tionship in contrastive ways and insists in the end on the central place of representation in rendering such dilemmas intelligible and their presuppositions contestable.

Knox Peden

### **Planet v obliki kocke**

Ključne besede: Antropocen, Paul Bowles, Immanuel Kant, prostor, čas, estetika

V današnjih humanističnih vedah ne manjka sklicevanj na antropocen in ontološke premike, ki naj bi jih ta domnevno sprožil. Esej se osredotoči na več fiktivnih in kritičnih del – predvsem na roman Paula Bowlesa *The Sheltering Sky* iz leta 1949 – zato da bi podal vrsto trditev glede težavnosti predstavljanja razmerja med naravo kot področjem kavzalnosti, ki se podreja naravnim zakonom, na eni strani ter nominalno človeškim ali razumskim področjem, kamor sodijo dejanja, namere in različni upravičeni ali neupravičeni razlogi, na drugi strani. Predvsem pa ga zanima raziskovanje želja, ki motivirajo prizadevanja po kontrastnih načinih reprezentiranja tega razmerja in na koncu vztraja na ključni vlogi reprezentacije, ki naredi upodabljanje takšnih dilem razumljivo, njihove predpostavke pa problematične.

Justin Clemens

### **Syllable as Syntax: Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés***

Key words: Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de dés*, Aristotle, Alain Badiou, Edgar Allan Poe, counting

*Un Coup de dés* is one of the masterworks of modern literature, and a kind of summa of Stéphane Mallarmé's lifework. It could not have been better served by writers and thinkers: on the one hand, it immediately transformed the field for working poets as different as Paul Valéry and Christopher Brennan, as for so many more thereafter; on the other, a strong lineage of European philosophy registered the poem as an event for thought, encompassing Maurice Blanchot, J.-P. Sartre, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, J.-C. Milner, Quentin Meillassoux, and many others. Confronted by this sequence of commentaries by poets and philosophers, a contemporary reader could be forgiven for experiencing a methodological and intellectual impasse. How could one add to this sequence of readings except as a supernumerary number that could always be another? Yet how could one also not feel that the sequence itself demands another numbering or enumeration of the operations of the poem? This paper sketches out a sequence of hypotheses regarding the foundations of Mallarmé's poem in a new relation that he forges between syllables and syntax.

Justin Clemens

## Zlog kot skladnja: Mallarméjev *Met kock*

Ključne besede: Stéphane Mallarmé, Met kock, Aristotel, Alain Badiou, Edgar Allan Poe, štetje

*Met kock* je mojstrovina moderne literature in nekakšen povzetek življenjskega dela Stéphana Mallarméja. Delo ne bi moralo bolje služiti pisateljem in mislecem: na eni strani je v trenutku spremenilo področje takrat delujočih pesnikov – še tako različnih, kot sta Paul Valéry in Christopher Brennan, kot tudi njunih številnih naslednikov; na drugi strani pa je močna struja evropske filozofije – kot so Maurice Blanchot, J.-P. Sartre, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, J.-C. Milner, Quentin Meillassoux in številni drugi pesnitev označila za miselni dogodek. Soočen z zaporedjem pesniških in filozofskih komentarjev, se sodobni bralec upravičeno znajde v metodološki in intelektualni zagati. Kakšen bi bil lahko prispevek k danemu zaporedju branj, ki ne bi tudi sam postal nadštevno število, ki bi zmerom lahko bilo drugo? Toda kako se lahko izognemo občutku, da samo zaporedje zahteva dodatno štetje oziroma naštevanje operacij te pesnitve? Prispevek oriše nekaj hipotez glede temeljev Mallarméjeve pesnitve z vidika novega razmerja med zlogom in skladnjo, kot ga vpelje Mallarmé.

Henry Sussman

## Digital Parables

Key words: Anthony Wilden, Douglas R. Hofstadter, system, melancholia, Zen kōans, intelligence

One pivotal landmark of contemporary culture already in play by 2005 but by no means at its current scale or profundity was an all-absorbing involvement in and dependency on digital technologies. There was simply no way of anticipating the full degree to which cybernetic devices and ontology would not only overwhelm communications and the synthesis, archiving, formatting, and recall of information but also dominate socio-economic relations and interactions, cognition, and even psycho-motor capability. It turns out, in the hindsight afforded by 2015, that the geeks who, already in the 1970's and 1980's discerned the lineaments and metaphysics of the cybernetic universe, were not so far removed along the academic corridor from those wild and invariably subversive critical theorists as we might think. For one, the Anthony Wilden, whose 1972 *System and Structure* established definitive benchmarks for the interaction between analog and digital organization, is the same critic whose translations, e.g., of *Language of the Self*, introduced the English-speaking audience to the thought of Jacques Lacan. Douglas R. Hofstadter, in composing a Computer Science textbook for the general public (*Gödel, Escher Bach*, 1979), synthesized a work as literarily playful as scientifically methodical. His

characterization of the advances, above all by Kurt Gödel, that enabled complex strings of numbers to become operational (as in computer programs), demonstrates striking parallels to the “jumping” of theoretical levels made possible by Jacques Derrida’s inaugural, profoundly influential deconstructions (whether of presence, propriety, or Being). The university itself, in 2015, is, by dint of its own systematic digitization, embroiled in seismic, open-ended transformation. Many of the university’s operational fundamentals as of 2005 are nothing if not up for grabs a decade later. It is in this sense that a “digital unconscious” entrenching and expanding itself at an inconceivable rate of acceleration presents cultural critics both with a daunting challenge and a creative opportunity. Neither high-mindedly distancing ourselves from these phenomena and their epiphenomena nor unreservedly espousing the technologies will quite do. This paper unpacks several of the memorable parables through which the avatars of the digital age prepared the public both for the technology’s creative leaps and its embedded double-binds.

Henry Sussman

### Digitalne parabole

Ključne besede: Anthony Wilden, Douglas R. Hofstadter, sistem, melanholija, zenonovski koani, razumevanje

Eden izmed mejnikov sodobne kulture, prisotnih že od leta 2005 naprej, čeprav še zdaleč ne v današnjem obsegu in globini, je bila vseobsegajoča vključenost v digitalnih tehnologij in odvisnost od njih. Nikakor nismo mogli pričakovati, da bodo kibernetične naprave in ontologija v tako veliki meri ne zgolj prevzele komunikacije in sinteze, arhiviranja, oblikovanja ter priklice informacij, temveč tudi prevladale nad družbenoekonomskimi razmerji in interakcijami, spoznanjem in celo psihično-motoričnimi zmožnostmi. Iz perspektive leta 2015 lahko za nazaj vidimo, da »geeki«, ki so že v 70ih in 80ih letih prejšnjega stoletja zaznali razvoj in metafiziko kibernetičnega univerzuma, skupaj z akademsko sfero niso bili tako oddaljeni od tistih divjih in vselej subverzivnih kritičnih teoretikov, kot smo mislili. Tako je npr. Anthony Wilden, čigar delo *System and Structure* iz leta 1972 je načrtovalo merila interakcije med analogno in digitalno organizacijo, isti kritik katerega prevod *Language of the Self*, je širšemu angleško govorečemu občinstvu predstavilo misel Jacquesa Lacana. Douglas R. Hofstadter je pri oblikovanju računalniškega znanstvenega učbenika, namenjenega širši javnosti (*Gödel, Escher Bach*, 1979), ustvaril tako literarno igrivo kot znanstveno metodično delo. Njegova opredelitev dosežkov, predvsem Kurta Gödela, ki je operacionaliziral kompleksne nize števil (kot v računalniških programih), nam prikažejo presenetljive vzporednice s »preskokovanjem« teoretičnih nivoj, ki ga je omogočila prvotna, zelo vplivna dekonstrukcija (pa naj gre za prezenco, lastnost ali bit) Jacquesa Derridaja. Univerza se je leta 2015 pod vplivom lastne sistematične digitalizacije zapletla v seizmično transformacijo brez konca. Desetletje pozneje nam je tako na voljo veliko univerzitetnih operativnih osnov iz leta 2005. »Digitalno nezavedno«, ki se utrjuje

in širi ob neizmerno pospešeni hitrosti, predstavlja za kulturne kritike hkrati zastrašujoč izziv in kreativno priložnost. Vendar pa niti vzvišena distanca od omenjenih fenomenov in njihovih epifenomenov niti nekritično zagovarjanje tehnologije nista povsem ustrezna. Pričujoči prispevek razgrne več nepozabnih parabol, s pomočjo katerih so avatarji digitalne dobe javnost pripravili tako na kreativne tehnološke skoke kot tudi na njim vgrajene double-binds.

Juliet Flower MacCannell

### **Refashioning Jouissance for the Age of the Imaginary**

Key words: Fashion, jouissance, image, feminism, Sigmund Freud, Lacanian psychoanalysis, imaginary

Using contemporary fashion (both “high” and “low”) as my focus for analysis, I apply Lacan’s insight that sexual difference (feminine/masculine) is an effect of divergent psychological and bodily logics that guide a subject’s relation to jouissance. I point out Lacan’s growing reliance on Freud’s 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (which demonstrated the pressure for group conformity in dress, and overcoming gender distinctions) for his understanding of sexual difference in relation to social order. I point out that Lacan used Freud’s vision of an ego-based rather than a subject-based society for his analysis of capitalist/university discourse in his 1969 *Seminar XVII*; and I argue that Freud’s text also inspired Lacan’s subsequent exploration of the logic of femininity (a heretofore neglected topic) in *Seminar XX 1972-3* and in *Télévision* in 1975. Late Lacan thus grounds my argument that postmodern/capitalist culture is dominated in its management of enjoyment – its ethos, its economics and its fashions – by only the masculine model for jouissance. I ask that we consider entertaining ideas about what forming our culture on the feminine model of jouissance might be like.

Juliet Flower MacCannell

### **Posodabljanje užitka za dobo imaginarnega**

Ključne besede: moda, užitek, podoba, feminizem, Sigmund Freud, lacanovska psihoanaliza, imaginarno

V svoji analizi, osredotočeni na sodobno modo (tako »visoko« kot »nizko«), se opiram na Lacanov uvid, da je seksualna razlika (ženska/moški) posledica razhajajočih se psihičnih in telesnih logik, ki usmerjajo subjektov odnos do užitka. V prispevku ponazorim vpliv Freudovega dela »Množična psihologija in analiza jaza« (ki je prikazalo pritisk k skupinsko konformnem načinu oblačenja in preseganju spolne razlike) na Lacanovo razumevanje seksualne razlike v razmerju do družbenega reda. Pri tem opozarjam, da se je Lacan v *Seminarju XVII* iz leta 1969 pri svoji analizi kapitalističnega/univerzitetnega dis-

kurza, opiral na Freudovo videnje družbe, ki se je bolj opiralo na jaz kakor na subjekta. V tej zvezi trdim, da je Freudov tekst navdihnil tudi kasnejša Lacanova raziskovanja ženske logike (dotlej zanemarjeno tematiko) v Seminarju XX iz leta 1972-3 in *Televiziji* iz leta 1975. Moj argument, da postmoderno/kapitalistično kulturo pri upravljanju z užitkom določa zgolj moški model užitka: njegov ethos, ekonomija in moda, se torej opira na poznega Lacana. V premislek želim predlagati, da si poskusimo zamisliti, kako bi bilo videti formiranje naše kulture iz perspektive ženskega modela užitka.

Julian Murphet

### **Rosa Plus Emma: Political Pleasure and the Enjoyment of Reason**

Key words: Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, pleasure, jouissance, Marxism, leftist rationalism

Today we face broadly the return of an old tension internal to Left politics: a prodigious and rather pleasureless theoretical resurgence of Marxian categories and economic analyses, alongside a febrile activist political culture of occupations, flash mobs and riots. Rather than look to the tired pantheon of usual suspects in conflict (Marx vs Bakunin, Lenin vs Gesell, etc), this essay excavates a pseudo-couple of the far more enabling Deleuzian “and...and...” type, Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman, to see what their juxtaposition might have to offer contemporary debates and disagreements. In focus will be the distinctive part reserved for pleasure—physical, aesthetic, sexual, and sensual—in both their writings, and the structural relationship between it and revolutionary politics as a way of life. The essay seeks to imagine a sustainable left resource of “reason plus enjoyment” that can think against capital whilst persevering with the unconditional demands of a generalized libidinal insurgency. Rosa + Emma = death to Left Puritanism!

Julian Murphet

### **Rosa plus Emma: politično ugodje in užitek uma**

Ključne besede: Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, ugodje, užitek, marksizem, levičarski racionalizem

Danes smo priča nenavadni vsesplošni vrnitvi stare napetosti znotraj levičarskih politik: neznanskemu teoretskemu preporodu marksističnih kategorij in ekonomskih analiz, a brez vsakršnega ugodja, ki ga spremlja vročična aktivistična politična kultura zasedb, “flash mobov” in nemirov. Raje kot da bi se oziral k zaprašenemu panteonu običajnih osumljencev in njihovih konfliktov (Marx vs. Bakunin, Lenin vs. Gessel itn.), bo pričujoči esej na površje pripeljal bolj produktiven deleuzovski »in...in...« pсевdopar, Rosa Luxemburg in Emma Goldman, zato da bi ugotovil, kaj lahko njuno sopostavljanje ponudi sodobnim razpravam in nesoglasijem. V središču pozornosti bo razpravljanje o ugod-



ju – fizičnemu, estetskemu, seksualnemu – kot ga lahko razberemo v njenem pisanju, kot tudi strukturnemu razmerju med le-tem in revolucionarnimi politikami kot načinom življenja. Esej si poskuša zamisliti trajnostni levičarski vir »uma plus užitka«, ki zmore misliti proti kapitalu, hkrati s tem, ko ohranja brezpogojne zahteve posplošenega libidinalnega upora. Rosa + Emma = smrt levemu puritanizmu!

Laurence Simmons

### **Reasoning the Disaster**

Key words: time, catastrophe, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida

How do we think the disaster? Think towards or against the coming disaster? Natural disaster, industrial and technological disaster, moral disaster, and now economic and financial disaster. This paper starts from the issue of our relationship with catastrophes that have not yet happened and it is based on the work of cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek and French philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy. The essence of catastrophe has become normal for what Žižek calls our Western administered world – we now govern according to scenarios of war, terror, ecological disasters etc; the normal run of our societies is continually threatened by these things. However, since he insists that catastrophe involves the notion of “luck” can it be reasoned? It would appear not because we can only answer when we learn the outcome of some event. So are we justified in taking preventative action against global warming? If we do the catastrophe might not occur? But can we be sure that it would have anyway? And if we don’t take action will it occur? We know that the catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not believe it will really happen. Can we make a rational choice before the apocalypse? If we are to confront the threat of a catastrophe Dupuy believes we need to break out of a historical, linear notion of time. The new notion of time (what Dupuy calls “the time of a project”) is not a line between past and future; it is a closed circuit. The future is casually produced by our actions in the past *but* the way we act is determined by how we anticipate the future, and how we react to this anticipation. As he thinks through the relationship between the crisis of the sacred and our inability to imagine and avoid a catastrophic future, Dupuy develops the idea of an enlightened catastrophism as an alternative to the principle of reasoned precaution.

Laurance Simmons

### **Mišljenje katastrofe**

Ključne besede: čas, katastrofa, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida

Kako mislimo katastrofo? Bi morali misliti v smeri prihajajoče katastrofe ali proti njej? Naravna katastrofa, industrijska in tehnološka katastrofa, moralna katastrofa, in sedaj

ekonomska ter finančna katastrofa. Pričujoči prispevek se opira na delo kulturnega teoretika Slavuja Žižka in francoskega filozofa Jeana-Pierra Dupuyja in izhaja iz problema našega odnosa do katastrof, ki se še niso zgodile. Bistvo katastrofe je postalo nekaj normalnega za naš, rečeno z Žižkom, zahodni upravljani svet, ki ga trenutno upravljajo po scenarijih vojne, terorja, ekološke katastrofe itn., ki nenehno motijo normalno delovanje naše družbe. Glede na to, da avtor vztraja, da katastrofa vključuje pojem »sreče«, ali lahko katastrofo sploh mislimo? Zdi se, da tega ne moremo, saj lahko svoj odgovor damo šele, ko poznamo izid določenega dogodka. Smo torej upravičeni do sprejemanja preventivnih ukrepov proti globalnemu segrevanju? Ali to pomeni, da v primeru, da jih sprejmemo, do katastrofe ne bo prišlo? Lahko z gotovostjo povemo, da bo do katastrofe vseeno prišlo? In, ali bo v primeru, da ne ukrepamo, do nje prišlo? Vemo, da je katastrofa možna, celo verjetna, vendar pa ne verjamemo, da se bo zares zgodila. Ali lahko sprejmemo racionalno odločitev pred apokalipso? Če naj se soočimo z grožnjo katastrofe, moramo, kot verjame Dupuy, izstopiti iz našega historičnega, linearnega pojmovanja časa. Novo pojmovanje časa (tisto, čemur Dupuy pravi »čas projektov«) ni črta med preteklostjo in prihodnostjo, temveč zaprti krog. Prihodnost je naključno proizvedena z našimi preteklimi dejanji, način kako delujemo, *pa* je določen z načinom, kako anticipiramo prihodnost in kako se odzovemo na to anticipacijo. S tem, ko Dupuy misli razmerje med krizo svetega in našo nezmožnostjo predstaviti si in izogniti se katastrofični prihodnosti, razvije idejo razsvetljenega katastrofizma kot alternative načelu razionalne previdnosti.

Jelica Šumič Riha

### ***Est Deus in nobis* or the Will to Enjoy**

Key words: Sade, Epictetus, desire, will, prohairesis, reason, jouissance

In "Kant with Sade", Lacan stages two incompatible couples, incompatible precisely to the extent that they bring together reason and jouissance: Kant and Sade on the one hand and Sade with Epictetus on the other. If Sade is coupled with Kant in order to reveal a hidden driving force behind Kant's moral law, Epictetus' joining Sade is revelatory of Sade's deficiency as a desiring subject. Following Lacan's indications concerning the radical change of the status of the subject resulting from the establishment of an unheard of relationship between desire and will at the end of analysis, this essay examines two modalities of the subject's confrontation with the Other's will to enjoy: Sade's and Stoics'. Insisting on a few crucial points of convergence and divergence of these two modalities of the subject's coming to terms with the will to jouissance, the author aims to explore the conditions of possibility of an ethics without the Other, an ethics of the drive, to be precise, that allows for a non-perverse transgression of the pleasure principle.

Jelica Šumič Riha

### ***Est deus in nobis* ali volja do užitka**

Ključne besede: Sade, Epiktet, želja, volja, prohairesis, um, užitek

V »Kantu s Sadom« Lacan uprizori dva nezdržljiva para, nezdržljiva natanko v tisti meri, v kateri združujeta um in užitek: na eni strani Kanta s Sadom, na drugi strani Sada z Epiktetom. Če je Sade sparjen s Kantom, zato da bi se pokazala skrita gonilna sila Kantovega moralnega zakona, pa nam združitev Epikteta in Sada razodene Sadovo manjkavost kot želječega subjekta. Sledeč Lacanovim opazkam glede radikalne spremembe subjektovega statusa na koncu analize, ki je posledica vzpostavitve novega razmerja med željo in voljo, bo pričujoči prispevek preiskoval dve modalnosti subjektovega soočenja z voljo Drugega do užitka: Sadovo in stoiško. Opirajoč se na nekatere ključne točke zблиževanja in razhajanja omenjenih dveh modalnosti subjektovega soočanja z voljo do užitka, bo avtorica raziskala pogoje možnosti etike brez Drugega, natančneje povedano, etike gona, ki omogoča neperverzno prekoračitev načela ugodja.

Rado Riha

### **The Second Copernican Turn of Kant's Philosophy**

Key words: Copernican turn, "transcendental difference", self-critique of reason, a thought's thing, reflecting judgement, universal, singularity

What is at issue in this article is the thorny question of the relationship between reason and enjoyment such as it can be elaborated from the perspective of Kant's philosophy being considered to be the very epitome of "pure reason". According to the central thesis advanced in this essay, the revolution in the way of thinking inaugurated by the famous Kantian "Copernican turn" in philosophy, which consists in the recognition of thought's affection by a thing that at one and the same time belongs to thought as it makes it think, and evades its grasp, requires for its completion an additional, "second" Copernican turn. With the second Copernican turn, accomplished only in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant takes up the "transcendental difference" between appearance and the thing-in-itself, introduced in the first *Critique*, and advances the problem of thought's affection beyond the result of the first *Critique*. The author argues that in order to tackle the ontological status of the thing itself, which functions, in objective reality, as an element that is excluded from it, further conditions are required than those provided by the critique of speculative reason. The making visible, in objective reality, of the material traces of this presence of the absence, implies a reflection upon the presence of the ideas of reason in empirical reality, a reflection capable of attributing to empirically given contingent particularities the status of the cases of the ideas of reason. At stake in these cases is the peculiar way that reason's ideas manifest their presence in the world, and, consequently,

the possibility of conceiving a new kind of the universal that can only be effected through the reflecting power of judgement. In affirming the existence of the cases of the Idea, i.e., the existence of the universal within the given objective reality, the reflecting power of judgement endows thought with an orientation, thus rendering the re-constitution of this reality possible.

Rado Riha

### **Drugi kopernikanski obrat v Kantovi filozofiji**

Ključne besede: kopernikanski obrat, »transcendentalna razlika«, samokritika uma, stvar misli, reflektirajoča sodba, univerzalno, singularnost

Prispevek preiskuje težavno vprašanje razmerja med umom in užitkom, kot ga lahko opredelimo iz perspektive Kantove filozofije, ki nastopa kot sinonim »čistega uma«. Temeljna teza pričujočega članka se osredinja na revolucijo v načinu mišljenja, ki je v filozofiji nastopilo s slovitim Kantovim »kopernikanskim obratom«. Slednji izhaja iz priznanja aficiranosti misli s stvarjo, ki sicer sodi k misli pripada, saj jo sili misliti, a si je ta vseeno ne more prisvojiti. Teza pričujočega članka je, da to zahteva »drugi« kopernikanski obrat. Z drugim kopernikanskim obratom, dovršenim šele v *Kritiki razsodne moči*, Kant povzame »transcendentalno razliko« med videzom in stvarjo-na-sebi, podano že v prvi *Kritiki*, vendar problem aficiranosti misli seže onkraj dognanj prve *Kritike*. Da bi se lahko lotili ontološkega statusa stvari na sebi, ki znotraj objektivne realnosti deluje kot iz nje izključeni element, ugotavlja avtor, morajo biti izpolnjeni dodatni pogoji poleg tistih, že podanih s kritiko spekulativnega uma. Zato da bi naredili vidne materialne sledi prisotne odsotnosti znotraj objektivne realnosti, moramo reflektirati prisotnost idej uma v empirični realnosti. Gre torej za refleksijo, ki je zmožna empirično danim kontingentnim partikularnostim pripisati status primerov idej uma. Ključno vprašanje pri tem pa se nanaša na specifičen način, kako ideje uma manifestirajo svojo prisotnost v svetu, in, posledično, na možnost zasnovanja nove vrste univerzalnega, do katerega lahko pride-mo zgolj s pomočjo reflektirajoče razsodne moči. Z zatrevanjem obstoja primerov idej, tj. obstoja univerzalnega znotraj dane objektivne realnosti, reflektirajoča razsodna moč misli določi orientacijo, s čimer omogoči ponovno vzpostavitev dane realnosti.

Sigi Jöttkandt

### **Repetition and Inscription in Europe's Dream-Land**

Key words: Slavoj Žižek, refugees, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Jacques Lacan, Lituraterre

In *Against the Double Blackmail*, his recent collection of essays on the contemporary global crisis, Slavoj Žižek argues that what we need is a Wiederholung of Europe. He writes, "through a critical engagement with the entire European tradition, one should repeat

the question, 'What is Europe?,' or, rather, 'What does it mean for us to be Europeans?,' and, in doing so, formulate a new vision." In this paper, I explore how such a retrieval-through-repetition of "Europe" is already taking place in the set of traits, marks and other traces carved by the footsteps of refugees and asylum seekers in their passage from the south to the north. If, in Žižek's book, the "European tradition" is synecdochically presented as the twin figures of Edgar Allan Poe and Mary Shelley, this is because, foreclosing in advance all possibility of escape, these writers staged the original Northern fantasy to which today's refugees assert their rights. It turns out that "Dream-Land" or Ultima Thule was, from the outset, a logic of inscription. From this perspective, the act of seeking refuge would be a form of "thinking through one's feet," as Lacan once scandalously put it, with the text being emplotted as "Europe" the unconscious of that thought.

Sigi Jöttkandt

### **Ponavljanje in vpis v »Sanjsko deželo« Evropo**

Ključne besede: Slavoj Žižek, begunci, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Jacques Lacan, Lituraterre

V najnovejšem zborniku spisov o sodobni globalni krizi, *Against the Double Blackmail*, Slavoj Žižek trdi, da potrebujemo Wiederholung Evrope. Tako, denimo, zapiše: »na podlagi kritičnega soočanja s celotno evropsko tradicijo moramo ponoviti vprašanje 'kaj je Evropa?' ali, raje, 'kaj za nas pomeni biti evropejci?' in na tej podlagi zgraditi novo vizijo«. V danem prispevku raziskujem, kako se takšno ponovno prisvajanje »Evrope« skozi ponavljanje že dogaja, kot to nakazuje niz potez, znamenj in drugih sledi, izdolbenih s stopinjami beguncev in prosilcev za azil med njihovo potjo od juga proti severu. Če je v Žižkovi knjigi »evropska tradicija« sinekdohalno predstavljena kot dvojna figura Edgara Allana Poeja in Mary Shelley, je to zato, ker sta pisatelja z vnaprejšnjo izključitvijo vseh možnosti izhoda, uprizorila izvirno fantazmo severa, na podlagi katere se današnji begunci sklicujejo svoje pravice. Izkazalo se je, da je bila »sanjska dežela« ali Ultima Thule, od samega začetka logika vpisa. Iz te perspektive bi bilo dejanje iskanja zatočišča način »mišljenja s stopali«, kot je nekoč škandalozno zatrdil Lacan, pri čemer bi bilo besedilo, stkano kot »Evropa«, nezavedno te misli.

A.J. Bartlett

### **"The orphaned fervour"... Or: the truth of knowledge**

Key words: Plato, Socrates, Jacques Lacan, Alain Badiou, education, universities

Plato's Apology stages a scene reminiscent of Lacan's impromptu at Vincennes whereat Lacan famously tells the protesting students that the "regime is putting you on display," saying "look at them enjoying." The effect, he says, will be to deliver yourselves over to

the master, once again. In Plato's case, three figures Meletus, Anytus and Lycon, representing respectively, the poets-teachers, businessmen-politicians and orators of the law and thus the state as such – accuse Socrates of failing to enjoy in the prescribed way. Socrates is accused of harbouring and of practicing an impossible desire for thought. To think is to corrupt; to pass through enjoyment as its radical impossibility. Plato's entire problematic in the dialogues, exemplified in the *Apology*, is to think the question of educational corruption against these ubiquitous and determinative performances of pedagogical enjoyment. This essay stages these several points and connections and draws some consequences for the thought of education today.

A.J. Barlett

### **»Osirotela vnema« ... ali: resnica znanja**

Ključne besede: Platon, Sokrat, Jacques Lacan, Alain Badiou, vzgoja, univerze

Platonova Apologija ponazarja prizor, ki spominja na Lacanovo intervencijo v Vincennesu, ko protestirajočim študentom zaluča: »režim vas postavlja na ogled« rekoč: »poglej, kako uživajo«. Rezultat bo ta, je dejal, da se boste ponovno vdali gospodarju. V Platonovem primeru so tri, retrospektivno prikazane figure, Meletos, Anitos in Likon, pesnik-učitelj, poslovnež-politik in govorec v imenu zakona in s tem države kot take, obtožile Sokrata, da mu je spodletelo uživati na predpisani način. Sokrat je bil obtožen gojenja in prakticiranja nemogoče želje po mišljenju. Misлити pomeni sprijati; iti skozi užitek kot njegovi radikalni nemožnosti. Celotna Platonova problematika v dialogih, kot je ponazorjena v *Apologiji*, je posvečena premisleku vprašanja vzgojnega sprijanja v nasprotju z vsepričujočim in določitvenim udejanjenjem pedagoškega užitka. Pričujoči esej izpostavi več točk in povezav ter oriše nekatere posledice za vzgojno misel danes.

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3. Granger, *op. cit.*, str. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, str. 49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), str. 153.

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3. Granger, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
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