



The Art of the Concept: <http://artofconcept.mi2.hr/>

21st Century Materialism: <http://materialism.mi2.hr/>

**21st Century Materialism**  
Miran Božovič, Martin Hägglund, Peter Hallward, Graham Harman

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To Have Done with Life: <http://donewithlife.mi2.hr/>

**To Have Done with Life - Vitalism and Antivitalism in Contemporary Philosophy**

Ray Brassier, Nathan Brown, Martin Hägglund, Adrian Johnston, Alexi Kukuljevic, Catherine Malabou, Benjamin Noys, Jason Smith, Stephanie Wakefield, Evan Calder Williams

Aesthetic Education Expanded: <http://www.aestheticeducation.net/>

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# The Art of the Concept

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**Nathan Brown**

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et me begin to approach the topic of this symposium with the name of a concept: the Eternal Return. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari give us a theory of philosophy defined as the creation of concepts. And if ever there were a concept that were truly created, surely it is the Eternal Return. Nietzsche invented it. He produced it. And indeed, the concept presents itself to us as a test of our capacity to recognize its originality, its

singular novelty: to approach it merely as Nietzsche's engagement with pre-Socratic philosophy or the fatalism of the Stoics is to fail to think its conceptual specificity. This concept is specific, or rather singular, because all of Nietzsche's oeuvre, his corpus, prepares its ground by creating the peculiar conditions of a problem to which the doctrine of the Eternal Return becomes an enigmatic solution. For example, the terms "perspectivism" and "will to power" exercise a demand to be made relationally consistent within the Nietzschean text, a demand which partially articulates the complex conditions of under which the Eternal Return will have to be thought. These conditions of consistency compose a fragmentary demand for a synthetic doctrine, thereby creating the singularity of a specifically *Nietzschean* concept of eternal recurrence, a concept that undergoes an uneven genesis in Nietzsche's letters and notes after 1881, shadowing its inchoate development in his published books.

But we know, because Nietzsche tells us and because Pierre Klossowski reconstructs this telling, that "the Eternal Return" is also the name of an experience. It is something that *happens* to Nietzsche. Something that "overtakes" him. It emerges, as a concept, through a mood or *Stimmung* that gives way onto the experience of a thought, the experience of thinking itself – perhaps even an experience of the identity of thinking and being. Thus, while we can say that Nietzsche "creates" the concept of the Eternal Return we can also say that he discovers it, that he happens upon it, since it happens to *him*. And because it happens to him, *Nietzsche* becomes the name of this discovery, of its Event: the event of the conceptual occurrence of the Eternal Return. "Nietzsche" is the name of the taking-place of a concept in the

history of philosophy, just as it is the name of he who creates the concept by articulating the conditions of its consistency.

But *when* does the Eternal Return take place. And where? We are in a position to respond to these questions with answers that are at once exact and ambiguous, answers which are “clear-confused” or “distinct-obscure,” as Deleuze might say. We could say, first of all, that the event-concept of the Eternal Return takes place, in and through Nietzsche, in August of 1881 at Sils-Maria. Here Nietzsche undergoes an experience which “puts him in advance of other men,” he says. The intensity of this experience makes him shudder and laugh and weep with joy – and it gives rise to the idea, he says, that he is living an extremely dangerous life, because he is “one of those machines which can EXPLODE.” At Sils-Maria, in 1881, the experience of the Eternal Return brings Nietzsche to the brink of an explosion which he does not yet undergo. And thus he remains Nietzsche, the thinker who now fears and desires the creation of a concept, and who begins to outline its contours, if only in the most elliptical fashion. He is the author of *Zarathustra*, for example.

But we could also respond to these questions – when does the Eternal Return take place, and where? – by saying January of 1889, in Turin. That is when and where the experience of the Eternal Return *truly* overtook Nietzsche, where it well and truly occurred, and it is because this finally happened that he was no longer able to remain “Nietzsche.” Then and there, he became an other, unknown to himself and to us, dissolved into the insoluble labyrinth of a concept he could not find his way out of. Or, to return to a different metaphor, the machine had exploded.

So the problem of the Eternal Return, the eventual taking-place of the concept, is displaced in both space and time. It has the structure of a trauma, dislocated between two events that destabilize and dislodge the principle of identity according to which we could assign the creator of the concept a name: Nietzsche. The discovery or creation of the concept is the disjunctive synthesis through which Nietzsche at once becomes who he is and who he is not, through which he becomes who he cannot be. The condition of thinking the concept is the destruction of its thinker. The incoherence of the thinker is the condition of the coherence of the concept: this is a paradox which Nietzsche recognized as soon as he began to think the Eternal Return.

For the philosopher named Nietzsche, thinker of the Eternal Return, this was first of all a pedagogical problem – a problem of *transmission* which was also the rhetorical mime of a real danger: that of psychosis. Nietzsche could not really *teach* the doctrine of the Eternal Return, and indeed he could only speak of it in hushed tones, hiding its real consequences for thought even as he tried to convey them. In other words, philosophy could not quite include the concept of the Eternal Return. Only in Klossowski’s extraordinary book do we begin to find a proper determination of the concept, and this is not quite a work of philosophy but rather one of commentary. Here we are not concerned with the “creation of concepts” but rather with commentary upon a concept already created or discovered. So again we are confronted with a paradoxical situation: a commentary upon the concept precedes its production. It is the torque of this paradox that lends Klossowski’s book its incredible force, which is hard to assign a genre. To be sure, Nietzsche’s oeuvre constructs the conditions of possibility for Klossowski’s articulation, for his strange book whose true topic is not Nietzsche’s *philosophy*, but, as he tells us, Nietzsche’s *brain*. The thought of the Eternal Return traversed a physiology and found itself lodged within an organ that could not ultimately

accommodate its visitation. Nietzsche's body becomes the unstable host of a dangerous parasite: the concept of the Eternal Return. In this case, then, the paradoxical condition of conceptual production is that the corpus of the philosopher must "create" the parasite of which it is the host. And this is what Nietzsche could not quite do – although, nevertheless, it somehow seems to have *happened*.

The concept is a parasite upon the corpus of philosophy. This is what the history of the concept of the Eternal Return, written by Klossowski, makes clear. The philosopher can only create the concept on the paradoxical condition of already having become its host. Isn't this what Hegel is telling us about the relation of *art* to the concept, when, in his Lectures on Aesthetics, he describes the work of art as "a development of the Concept out of itself, a shift in the Concept from its own ground to that of sense," through which the Concept becomes "the power and activity of canceling again the estrangement in which it gets involved."

So: is philosophy the only medium that can host the concept, which can host its creation? In the case of the Eternal Return, the brain proves too fragile a medium to sustain this creation. And the language of philosophy proves an inadequate medium for its transmission. The doctrine of the Eternal Return could not be *transcribed*, in philosophy; it could only be related as a kind of history, *histoire*, a story, told by Klossowski. The conceptual *doctrine* gives way to narration, philosophical commentary in the mode of detective fiction, or perhaps that of a cautionary fairy tale called *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*.

To return to art, to the art of the concept, perhaps it is possible that the story of this concept can be told in a different way, given other names and even assigned another protagonist. This is what happens in Bela Tarr's final cinematic masterpiece: *The Turin Horse*. The title already gives us a clue as to how the film will handle what Deleuze calls *conceptual personae*. The title of the film seems to present a subject and a predicate – a horse from Turin – but it turns out that this is not really the case. All the descriptions of the film say: in 1889, Nietzsche saw a horse being beaten in Turin, broke down in tears, flung his arms around the horse, and subsequently went mad. And now Bela Tarr has made a film not about Nietzsche, but about the horse! But then it turns out that the people in this film are speaking Hungarian, not Italian. This is the Turin Horse, but it is not a horse from Turin. Indeed, the house and the stable in which the bulk of the film takes place was built by the crew. Which is just to say that, after all, we are watching a movie.

So *The Turin Horse* is not really the name or the description of a horse. It is the name of an episode: the famous story of something that *happened*, both to a horse and to Nietzsche. It is the name of an event which has been related to us as a story: the story of the consummation of the thought of the Eternal Return in human madness, which is also the story of the beating of an animal by the driver of a handsome cab – an iconic bourgeois conveyance – in the streets of a Northern Italian industrial city. Abstracting from *this* horse, or *this* city, perhaps we could say that it is a story about the incommensurability of the city and the animal, the incommensurability of capitalism and the animal, of modernity and the animal – an incommensurability mediated not only by money but by man and his destiny, madness. The eponymous episode of 1889 is precisely contemporaneous with the first commercial production of the automobile, which will replace the horse and buggy. And it is precisely contemporaneous with the inaugural films shot with a motion picture camera. The episode situates us on the cusp of the

twentieth century as its proleptic thinker, Nietzsche, is undone by a spectacle of cruelty that somehow manages to be at once transhistorical and characteristically modern.

How does Tarr relate what he draws from this episode? Frame by frame, first of all, as cinema must: a concatenation of still images thrown into time and *projected*: the formal iterability of difference and repetition. Film, not philosophy, becomes the veritable medium of the Eternal Return, the circular temporality of which it cuts up, selects, distributes, draws out on a line and coils into a reel, split, staggered, and synthesized. The film begins with a virtuosic long take: a horse running, whipped, pulling a wagon carrying a man. The horse gnaws at a metal bit and it wears blinders, so that if it looks to either side it sees black. This is how cinema charges through time.

In addition to the horse, the film has two main characters, a man and a woman, who live in a simple stone house. The virtually wordless representation of their daily gestures is punctuated by a single monologue: that of a visitor who offers a pessimistic commentary upon the animal called "man": a worthless creature dominated by greed and vanity, who degrades everything he touches. In other words, the sort of commentary upon man we might find in Nietzsche's oeuvre. Man, animal, and money, the last term determining the relation between the the first term and the second: this is the implicit system of a scenario (a man who owns a cab drawn by a horse) which implicates us in two stories: first, the cruel exploitation of the animal by man; second, the cruelty, stupidity and meaninglessness of capitalist modernity, which comes to determine man's differentiation from the animal as a *disaster*.

These are the two stories conjugated by the episode called *The Turin Horse* – of which Nietzsche was at once the witness and the protagonist. Their conjunction is what he *encounters* in Turin. The affirmation of this encounter – of every event which leads to it and follows from it – is what would have to be affirmed in order to affirm the Eternal Return: the differentiation of man and animal, which opens onto *thought*, and the nihilism of capitalism modernity, which ends in catastrophe. Did Nietzsche go mad because he achieved this affirmation, or because he was incapable of it at the decisive moment? This is admittedly a ridiculous question which can never be answered and should probably not be asked – which is why we have to return not to "Nietzsche," the philosopher, but to "the Turin Horse," the Event.

This is the return performed by Tarr's film, which does not narrate the event but rather its implications. The narrative moves across a number of days, each one given its own inter-title: The First Day, The Second Day, The Third Day, The Fourth Day, The Fifth Day. And the film gives us a lesson in *perspectivism*. Each day, we watch two people eat two potatoes at a table with four sides, and the camera moves around the sides of the table, one each day, until we have viewed the figures eating from all four angles – plus one, a repetition. The cameral is a perspectival machine, and this differential repetition of the same scene across five days from four different angles, plus one return to the same angle, is a unitary structural principle through which it is emphasized that these five days are included in one film or one form, and that the "day" is merely a narrative fiction of the medium, of its content. And indeed, by the end of the film it seems that the sun has burnt out, or at least, it is no longer shining. Sometime during The Fourth Day, darkness falls once and for all. The word "day" names a cyclical relation of the earth to the sun. But from the perspective of the sun, after all, there is only one "day," and now

that day is over. And *sub species aeternitatis*, the cyclical division of time has no significance at all. The film ends in darkness, since not even the lamps will light. The laws of nature have changed, the horse has stopped eating, the well has run dry, and there is no longer any fire with which to boil the potatoes. Now the temporal repetition of one frame after another returns us to the same image, which is not really an image nor the negation of an image, but the sensible absence of an image: black, black, black, black, like horse trying to look sideways through blinders. This is how the film ends.

Having traversed Nietzsche's brain – a machine that can explode – the inchoate concept of the Eternal Return is transferred, after the explosion, onto celluloid and transmitted as a complex image. Just as Deleuze says, philosophy is the creation of concepts and art is the creation of percepts and affects, of sensations. Except that the Eternal Return – precisely the concept which Deleuze, after Nietzsche, tried to think – shows us that philosophy is not quite sufficient to create the concept, but somehow both hosts and inaugurates its concatenated historical production.

It would be going too far to say that the thought of the Eternal Return, or its explosion in Turin, is a proleptic anticipation of cinema. But it would not be going too far to say that the production of that dangerous machine, Nietzsche's brain, and of the cinematic apparatus share the same historical conditions of possibility, and that the destruction of one and the creation of the other converge around 1889. It is also the impossibly complex affirmation of all the conditions of possibility which produced *this* convergence which would have to be thought in the name of the Eternal Return. It goes without saying that no single apparatus, organic or mechanical, philosophical or cinematic, is capable of that. And this is the impossibility which Nietzsche suffered.

It is *The Turin Horse*, Tarr's film, which tells something like the story of this impossibility in the most occluded fashion, just as Nietzsche whispers his doctrine to those who can barely hear it and who mistake it for what it is not. When Hegel tells us that art is conceptual, and that philosophy and art are indeed opposed, but only insofar as they are two differential grounds upon which the Concept pursues its productive articulation through the sublation of their opposition, he is telling us that the Concept produces *itself* as thought and sensation, though it is differentially *included* in art and philosophy.

To think the art of the concept is to think the problem of this differential inclusion and to understand its ground – which is the necessary insufficiency of any discrete apparatus to include the whole of the concept: an insufficiency which Hegel's philosophy also runs up against and which the concept of the Eternal Return makes clear.

Luckily for us, that insufficiency allows us pursue the productive coarticulation of philosophy, literature, music, film, and visual art – and to do so in what I am sure will be very different ways over the course of this weekend.







# The Lost Gesture

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**Michel Chion**

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Translated from French by Ksenija Stevanović

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**S** *i parva licet componere magnis*, wrote the latin poet Virgil in his *Georgics*, comparing the work of bees to that of the Cyclopes, giants with only one eye: “if one dares to compare the small with the great,” he says. This comparison of the large and the small is one way of proceeding poetically. It reaffirms and expresses admiration for the unity of the world, beyond differences in scale. The verb “componere,” translated as “compare,” means “put beside.”

In other words, cinema has the means, by altering the scale of the shot, of placing side by side the very small and the very large. It is possible – for those concerned with what I call “the cinematographic real” – to confront within successive shots certain objects and orders of scale that are completely different. Some of the most famous effects of match cut in cinema are based on scale jumps: the substitution of a bone thrown by an ape at the end of Prologue of Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* for an orbiting satellite; or before that, Peter O’Toole blowing out a match at the beginning of David Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia*, which “becomes” the sun rising over the desert. The shock which these match cuts produce stems not from the fact that the very small “becomes” the very large, but from fact that cinema allows them to be brought together at a common material scale – that of their dimensions in the shot, in the frame, thus in the cinematographic real – all the while preserving their incommensurability of scale in the story, the “diegesis”, thus in the “diagetical real”.

Cinema is an art with many connections to poetry. Many of my friends in France didn't know what to think of *The Tree of Life*, by Terrence Malick; I told them to consider it as a poem. This reassured them; they felt authorized to like the film. But one should recall that many great poems are narratives: *Yevgeny Onegin* by Pushkin, *La Légende des siècles* by Hugo, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, *The Lusiads* by Camoes, and of course *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. *The Tree of Life* is a poem, but it is a narrative poem.

Why, in a film about a twentieth century family, is the life of one ordinary family linked with something that happened, long ago, to a dinosaur? Is this just a simple poetic effect?

Already famous, and also very brief, the dinosaur sequence toward the beginning of the *The Tree of Life* shows us one of these beasts (by "one" I mean: a particular individual of the species, the one we see on the screen), which brutally puts its paw on the head of another, smaller beast (weakened, dying?), as if stamping on it, before releasing its grip and going away. And one can only guess what has taken place. It would have happened once, in one precise moment, without either clocks or calendars, on the bank of the river that no one has yet named – and it would remain there without a trace, lost for all time. Were it not in a film.

This scene – I find it marvelous not because of the particulars of its production (it is made with the means of the moment, with digital images, where thirty years ago Malick would have used model creatures and stop motion) but because of the idea it contains and which it dares to incarnate: it seems to me to produce – not as foundational or inaugural, but as a solitary event lost in the night of time – one miniscule, puntual episode, absolute, such as cinema allows us to construct, and constructs it during an era we relegate to the era of the non-event, since it took place before man.

Now (perhaps in the same place?), some millions of years later, the film also tells us about a mediocre and obscure American played by Brad Pitt, overlooked by History, father of an unhappy family, who has a certain tick that is suffered by his three boys: at every opportunity he ruffles their hair or puts his hand on their shoulder, especially when the music of Brahms, which he forces his family to listen to at meals, puts him in a physical mood. This creates around him an almost unbearable tension. So, I see – or better, I sense – a relation to the gesture of dinosaur, and I admire the poetic power of cinema to build bridges over millions of years, and to place side by side – to *compare* a dinosaur and the father of a family. There is nothing symbolic here.

If you watch the film closely, you will find in it innumerable hands – those of adults but also the hands of children which, repeating these clasping gestures upon one another, can also play at them, play with them, a play between brothers, releasing their negative energy by stretching their hands towards the sun, towards the air, dancing their tension away.

Everyone knows there is an animal in us, that our hands are predatory and at the same time full of love. But, if there is also some love in us, that love through which we illuminate our representation of the universe, why not put love into the history of the evolution of the species? Can one not represent the scene with the dinosaur – just as he puts down his paw and takes it back – as a first unconscious flash of love toward other animal, which hadn't been witnessed by anyone? Might there have been here something like an evolutionary instance of love? Love as a gesture of letting go.

You might smile. But I think this idea (at least as I understand it) of putting dinosaurs into a love story should not be attributed to a national

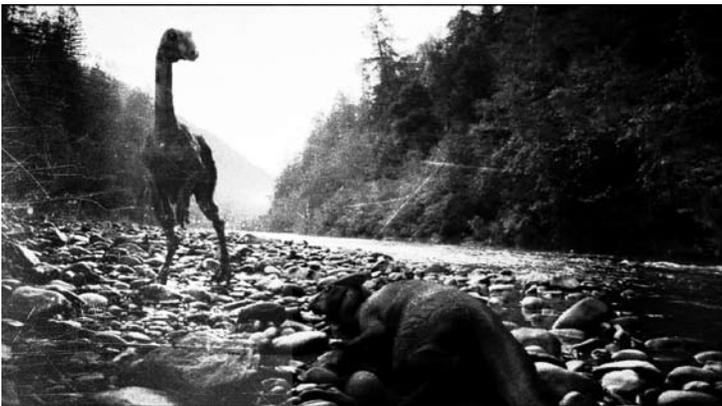
religiosity that Americans inherit by birth and education. It is also their country, its geography, which suggests drawing this line between immeasurably distant eras. In fact, in the majority of the territory of the USA, just two centuries ago, apart from very localized tribes of Native Americans who were massacred or expropriated, there was effectively no one, just animal life. And then there are those magnificent sites where it seems we can see with the naked eye the colossal age of Earth: like the Grand Canyon, the very place where Christian fundamentalists, whom one might judge mad (they probably are) take their followers to prove that the Earth is of recent origin, while Malick shows that it is very old, immense, without measure, but that love is the only emotion on the scale of this enormity. And then, if one wants a poetic reference, one should open or reopen *The Book of Job*, cited many times in Malick's film, that incredible biblical text in which everything is mixed up, especially every scale.

We have compared the dinosaur sequence, for good reason, with the scene involving the bone and satellite in the Kubrick's 2001: *Space Odyssey*. Recall that Kubrick's film begins very long ago, at "the Dawn of Man." During a battle between clans of apes, the leader of a clan, having received an "illumination," uses a bone to hit an adversary, and others imitate him ... as if this were the first tool. In a triumphant gesture, after his victory, he throws the bone into the air. And this bone, turning and slowing down in the daytime sky, is replaced, upon the background of an interplanetary night, by an elongated spacecraft. This vision is linked to series of shots of objects circling around the Earth and its satellite. One of these, in the form of an arrow, is heading towards an orbiting space station shaped like a wheel. We understand that we are in 2001, even though the date only figures in the title of the film and is never evoked in dialogue or in images. The bone thrown in the air is presented as a distant, pre-historic event; but at the same time, through editing, the satellite is presented as its consequence.

The match cut is thus that of an object which *runs up against* an object that *does not fall down*: it is the triumph of Icarus, a myth dear to the director. The victory over gravity, shown in this way, recalls the intoxication we attach to that course of experience through which a little human being stands up for the first time, and walks.

Gravity, forgotten in the two following interplanetary episodes, returns at the end of the film: if, at the apex of its flight, the fall of the bone went unseen, the glass brushed by Dave in the room where he grows old falls and breaks. A trajectory is closed, and the magical match cut has not conjured away the cycle of decline. But in the meantime, the match cut has nevertheless made it so that part of what was thrown has not come down. The ellipsis of the match cut is not only that of millions of years of evolution, but also that of the insignificant event of the bone's inevitable fall: this ellipsis renders eternal, beyond man, a moment of triumph.

Formally, Kubrick's match cut is pure "parataxis." In linguistics, parataxis is the juxtaposition of different elements without relational terms which create between them a relation of temporality, of causality, of logic. Hypotaxis, on the other hand, involves the placing into relation of different elements united by an explicitly causal relation, or one of subordination, etc. A good part of contemporary literature and cinema involves the use and abuse of "parataxis": there is this, and at the same time, or just after, there is that, and it is for the spectator to worry about whether he wants to create a relation.



THE  
DINOSAUR

But here, in Kubrick's case, the link is suggested by the montage, as a relation of cause to consequence. The montage relates the bone to the satellite. In Malick's film, the dinosaur sequence is "isolated" from the rest of the story: we don't hear any voice, any word, we just see the large dinosaur move away. His gesture of "releasing the grip" lasted only three seconds, and what follows shows no trace of the event. The gesture of throwing the bone in the air was a gesture of pride and triumph, it is the dream of Icarus; but the gesture of "releasing the grip", one of the most courageous and capacious gestures of which a human being is capable, has no other consequence than itself.

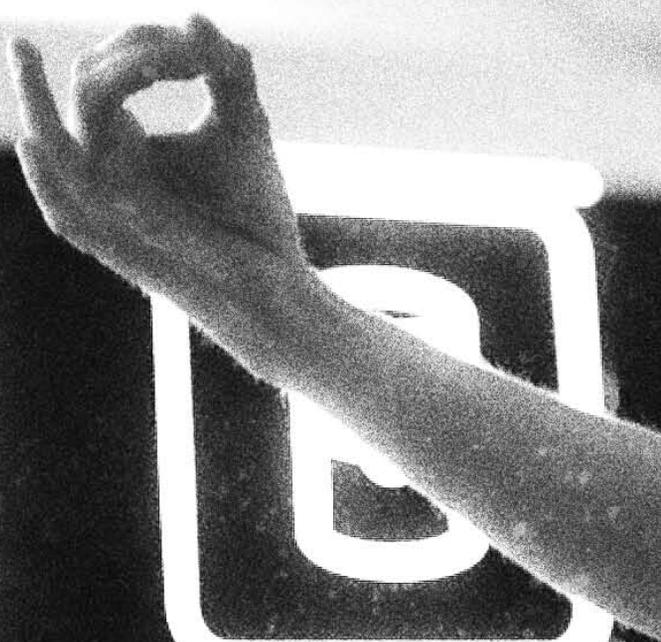
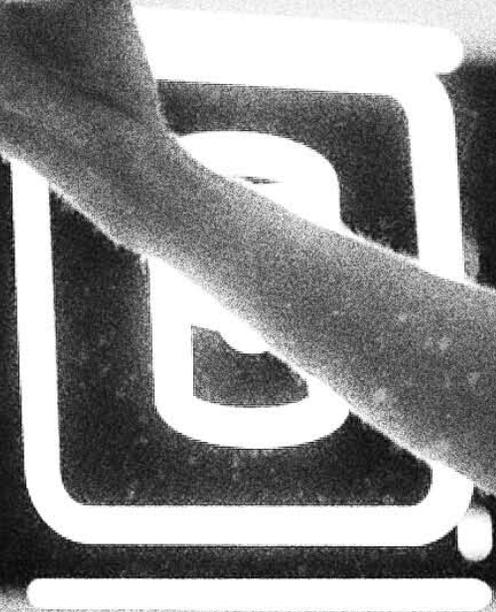
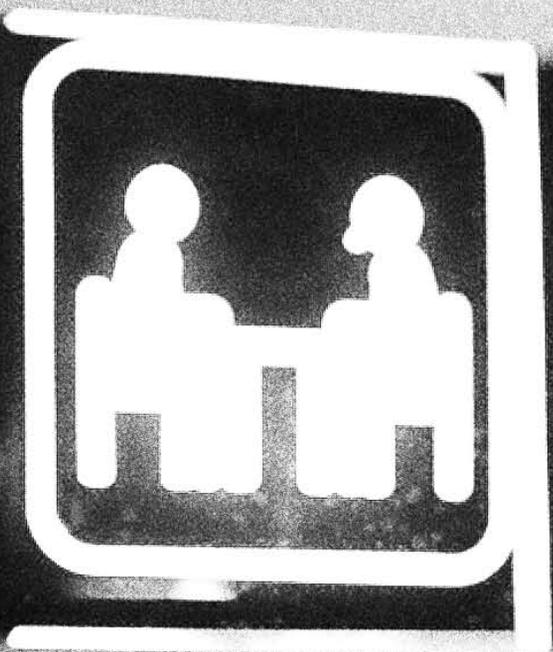
In this sense, Terrence Malick's films are in themselves paratactic, but in a very personal way, which is not only, as is too often the case, the mechanical application of a procedure. These films take up the capacity of cinema to witness that which leaves no trace. And Malick's first three films also treat the question of memory, of the trace (we can't forget that all three of them take place in the past).

In *Badlands*, the first film, over and over again we see how Kit, a serial killer played by Martin Sheen, wants to leave traces of his strange and bloody adventure, beginning with a recording of his voice on a "Voice-O-Graph" record. This record is supposed to mislead the police by announcing his suicide and that of Holly, but he leaves it in his father's house before burning it down (without foreseeing that the recording will burn with it). Later, in the rich man's house, he holds forth upon various topics into the microphone of a taperecorder. Later still, while they are on the run, there are those objects he buries so they can be "found centuries later." Finally, don't forget the poor heap of stones he erects, a very provisional "cairn" he sets up at the place where the police finally stop him, before raising his arms in the air – as if he believes that this simple monument might endure. Malick told *Positif*, with regard to the film: "The feeling of sadness that emanates from the film in the end comes in one part from the fact that the girl, its best historian, lives another life, so well so that her story sinks to the bottom, without a trace." That which is belied by the film itself, trace of the without-a-trace.

In *Days of Heaven*, his second film, the traces that remain of the period recounted are given in the opening credits and they do return afterwards: these are old photographs over which we hear the music of Saint-Saëns, and in which we see people from another time, entirely anonymous and radiating some strange emotion. These are people who have lived, suffered, ordinary people, people from the streets, among whom intrudes a fictional character, the confused "narrator" played by Linda Manz. A female narrator —hallucinating – whom we doubt is capable of constructing a coherent and reliable story of those events of which she was, for the most part, a witness. And of course, after Richard Gere's character, Bill, is killed by his pursuers, we do not witness even a single scene in which the survivors are interrogated. It seems that Bill's story is buried without a single newspaper article to serve as a homage, and afterwards, neither of the two women who survive ever evoke in words what has happened.

In many films by other directors, photos are taken by characters or by a professional photographer, materializing the trace, however fragile, of what has been seen. In Malick's third film, *The Thin Red Line*, an episode of the war in the Pacific, there is no chronicler, no photographer, no camera – when the soldiers pass away no one evokes the memory of the dead; everything takes place as though, beyond any material and verbal monument, the life of the dead has transmitted its spark to the living.







# Dying for Time: T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

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Martin Hägglund

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**T**he debate between philosophy and poetry begins over the question of desire. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates main charge against Homer is that his poetry leaves us in the grip of the desire for mortal life. The dramatic pathos in the *Iliad* is generated when the heroes cling to what they will lose and cannot accept the death that awaits them. Even the bravest heroes, such as Hector and Achilles, lament the fact that their lives will have been so short.

When this pathos is transferred to the audience, it opens a channel that allows the spectators to come into contact with their own grief. "You know," says Socrates, "that even when the very best of us hear Homer imitating one of the heroes who is in grief, and is delivering a long tirade in his lamentations, that we then feel pleasure and abandon ourselves and accompany the representation with sympathy and eagerness." To be taken in by poetry is thus to be overtaken by the vulnerability and the desire for mortal life that the philosopher should overcome. Indeed, Socrates argues that the problem with poetry is that "it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up" (606d). The philosopher should not let himself be "disturbed" by the loss of mortal beings; he should rather turn his desire toward the immutable presence of the eternal.

The issue of desire is the deepest motivation for Socrates' demarcation of poetry from philosophy. Poetry engages the desire for a mortal life that can always be lost. In contrast, the task of philosophy is to convert the desire for the mortal into a desire for the immortal that can never be lost. To be sure, Plato's denigration of poetry has been subjected to centuries of critique. Yet, defenders of poetry have traditionally not pursued Plato's insight into the link between the affective power of poetry and the investment in mortal life. Rather, epiphanies of poetic experience tend to be explained in terms of an intimation of eternity and – as I show in my new book *Dying for Time* – even modernist literature continues to be read in terms of a desire for immortality. In the case of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* this desire is part of the explicit self-conception of the author. *Four Quartets* was written after Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism and the poem is dominantly read as oriented

toward what Eliot calls “the still point of the turning world,” which supposedly enables an experience of timeless presence.

The Platonic heritage of Eliot’s “still point” has often been emphasized and one may point to the famous argument in the *Symposium*, where desire is said to be oriented toward an eternity that “neither comes into being nor passes away.” My aim, however, is not to provide an historical account of the persistence of Platonism in poetics. Rather, I am interested in the persistence of a certain Platonic axiom, namely, that the goal of desire is to repose in a state of being where nothing can be lost. To subscribe to this axiom one does not have to believe in the *existence* of a timeless state of being. One may recognize that the fullness of timeless being is an illusion, while still holding that there is a constitutive *desire* to attain such fullness and that our temporal being is a lack of being. The fundamental drama of desire is thus located in the conflict between the mortal, temporal being that we are and the immortal, timeless being that we desire to be. In contrast, I develop a model for reading the drama of desire – what I call “chronolibidinal reading,” developing a notion of “chronolibido” – which locates the fundamental conflict in the attachment to temporal life itself. The point of such reading is not to dismiss the declared desire for immortality but to open a perspective that allows one to read it against itself from within.

To this end, I distinguish between immortality and survival. This distinction can be traced already in the most canonical source for the conception of desire as a desire for immortality, namely, Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, to which I have already alluded. When Diotima sets out to prove that we are driven by the “passion for immortality” (208b), all her examples concern the survival of temporal life. According to Diotima, the desire to have children, to be famous, or to be commemorated is an expression of the desire for immortality. Yet, following her own description, we find that none of these achievements have immortality as their aim. To live on thanks to one’s children or one’s reputation is not to be exempt from death; it is to live on through others who in turn are exposed to death. The children that resemble one or the admirers that remember one are themselves mortal and offer no safe haven from oblivion. Furthermore, Diotima demonstrates that this temporality of survival is operative not only in the passage from one generation to another but also in the passage from one moment to another in the life of the same temporal being. As Diotima puts it, mortal nature can only sustain itself through reproduction (*génésis*) and this condition “applies even in the period in which each living creature is described as alive and the same.” Indeed, “for all we call [someone] the same,” Diotima points out, “every bit of him is different, and every day he is becoming a new man, while the old man is ceasing to exist,” in a process of temporal change that Diotima extends to the soul as well as the body. “This is how every mortal creature perpetuates itself,” she emphasizes, “It cannot, like the divine, always be the same in every respect; it can only leave new life to fill the vacancy that is left behind.”

With remarkable precision, Diotima thus defines a “mortal creature” not primarily in terms of organic death but in terms of the temporality of survival, which entails a structural relation to loss even in the persistence of the “same” being across time. Every moment of living on necessarily involves a relation to what does *not* live on and this negativity already constitutes a minimal relation to death. If one survived wholly intact – unscathed by the alteration of time – one would not be surviving; one would “always be the same in every respect.” A temporal being, however, ceases to be from the

beginning and can only perpetuate itself by leaving traces of the past for the future. This tracing of time is the movement of survival that transcends a particular moment of finitude and yet is bound to finitude as a general condition.

Diotima's discourse thus allows us to articulate the distinction between survival and immortality, which is central to the notion of *chronolibido*. To survive is to live on in a temporal process that entails alteration and loss even in the persistence of the "same" being. In contrast, to be immortal is to repose in a state of being that is eternally the same. While Diotima holds that the latter state (immortality) is the desired end of the former (survival), her own account allows us to call into question this teleology. According to her own analysis, proper immortality would require a state of being that is "always the same in every respect" (208a) and "neither comes into being nor passes away" (211a). As is clear from this definition, the timeless state of immortality would eliminate the condition of survival. In a state where nothing comes into being or passes away *nothing survives*. The so-called desire for immortality is thus marked by an internal contradiction. It is because one is invested in the persistence of temporal life that one seeks to save anything from death. Yet the state of immortality cannot answer to the survival that is desired. Rather than redeeming death, the state of immortality would *bring about* death, since it would terminate the time of life.

The desire for survival, then, should not be understood exclusively or primarily in terms of a biological drive for self-preservation but includes all "spiritual" commitments to living on in time. This becomes particularly apparent if we consider how Diotima analyzes the desire to live on not only in terms of the biological procreation of *génésis* but also in terms of the spiritual posterity of *kléos*. The latter term is often translated as "fame" but is better understood as a general "renown" that allows the memory of an individual to live on. As Jesper Svenbro has shown in his classic study of reading and writing in Ancient Greece, the problem of *kléos* is brought to the fore in funerary inscriptions. To commemorate oneself or a beloved, a name is inscribed in order to remain when the one who is named is no longer there. Yet, the letters themselves are dead and can only be reanimated through the voice of a reader, which is why *kléos* has an irreducible acoustic dimension; it is always a "sonorous renown." As Svenbro demonstrates, these issues become matters of life and death not only in funerary inscriptions but also in poetic address. Through the act of writing, the poet deposits his or her voice in dead letters and thereby depends on a future reader who can breathe life into the poem by reading it aloud. Svenbro elucidates how the awareness of this temporal distance between writer and reader is reflected in Greek poetry, with a range of erotic intonations. On the one hand, the prospect of one's poem being read in the future can give rise to a fantasy of "penetrating" the reader, when he will lend his body to the resonance of one's words and thereby submit to one's power. On the other hand, the prospect of being read also involves the prospect of a future in which one is absent and it can therefore be a source of anxiety just as well as pleasure. Thus, in a remarkable reading of Sappho, Svenbro shows how she expresses jealousy toward the reader who will enjoy her poem when she is no longer there. While the poem may allow Sappho to live on – to let her *kléos* resound across time – the very possibility that the poem may outlive her also underlines the threat of her own death and the agonizing thought of her own absence.

The desire for *kléos* is thus marked by a double bind, since the future that opens the chance of living on also opens the threat of ceasing to be. What I want to emphasize, however, is not only that the temporal finitude of survival is an inescapable condition but also that it animates and inspires the very desire for *kléos*. Without the sense of one's life or the beloved passing away there would be no desire to reproduce it as a memory or to care for its sustenance. Indeed, the notion of chronolibido seeks to elucidate that it is *because* of temporal finitude that one cares about life in the first place. If life were fully present in itself – if it were not haunted by past and future, by what has been and what may be – there would be no reason to care about life, since nothing could happen to it. I analyze the structure of such care in terms of the co-implication of *chronophobia* and *chronophilia*. The fear of time and death (*chronophobia*) does not stem from a metaphysical desire to transcend time. On the contrary, it is generated by the investment in temporal life (*chronophilia*).

In my first book in Swedish, I developed a model for reading how this condition of chronolibido is intensified by the temporality of poetic address. The starting point is the way in which poetic address – whether through the figuration of voice, the inscription of a specific time and place, or the insistence on a particular experience – marks the passing away of the moment precisely by insisting on its presence. The modernist poets I study, who seek to mark a unique here-and-now through the act of writing, thus run into the same temporality as the Greek poets. To inscribe the moment is to mark it as a *memory for the future*, which opens both the possibility of repetition and the threat of erasure. Eliot's *Four Quartets* are here an exemplary case study, since they lay claim to the supposedly highest vocation of poetic presence: to reconcile the temporal and the timeless in a "still point of the turning world." Yet, such a still point is incompatible with the temporality of poetic address. When the moment is inscribed as a memory it is marked as being no longer ("every poem an epitaph" as Eliot says in a passage to which I will return) and can thus only be read after its inscription, through a relation to the future that temporalizes it from the beginning.

By insisting on the presence of the moment, the implied speaker of the poem therefore has to dramatize how the here-and-now of speaking or writing is subject to time. As Eliot formulates it in the first of his quartets: "Words move, music moves/ Only in time; but that which is only living/ Can only die" (19). As a direct echo of these lines, the last quartet underlines that "every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning" (58), since the very articulation of the poet's voice marks that it is passing away. "In my beginning is my end," we thus read, and this phrase (together with its exact inversion: "In my end is my beginning") is the most recurrent phrase in the quartets, indicating the problem of succession that haunts the entire poem. The opening of the second quartet declares that "In my beginning is my end. In succession/ Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended/ Are removed, destroyed, restored" (23). The destruction and loss that is inherent in succession is then shown to inhabit the smallest movements of time-bound consciousness. The latter tries to hold on to what is passing away, but memory itself is threatened by destruction and anticipation cannot predict what will happen.

The *Four Quartets* thus evoke how the passage of time pervades all levels of life, from the rhythms of nature to collective and individual memory, all the way down to the most immediate moment, which is ceasing to be as

soon as it comes to be. The question, however, is how we should read the emphasis on death as intrinsic to the very movement of life. The standard reading of this motif in *Four Quartets* is to align it with the Christian notion of *vanitas*. The characteristic strategy of a *vanitas*-motif is to evoke the transience of life in order to emphasize that it is devoid of meaning without the backdrop of the eternal. The prospect of how everything we cherish will turn into dust and ashes is intended to underline the vanity of life and encourage us to let go of our attachments in favor of the eternal presence of God. Thus, in a striking passage, Eliot invokes the ambition of religious mysticism "to purify the soul/ Emptying the sensual with deprivation/ Cleansing affection from the temporal" (17). In contrast to how "Men's curiosity searches past and future/ And clings to that dimension" (44) Eliot apparently promotes the path of "Detachment/ From self and from things and from persons" in order to achieve "liberation/ From the future as well as the past" (55).

For the one who wants to extract a metaphysical, religious worldview from *Four Quartets* there is thus ample material and much of the scholarship has followed this lead, from early authorities such as Hugh Kenner and Helen Gardner, via M.H. Abrams and Northrop Frye, to David Moody and Craig Raine. Amplifying the religious reading, there are also dozens of books on how *Four Quartets* distills the essential wisdom of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism to provide a path to spiritual peace. Fortunately, however, *Four Quartets* is not a religious or philosophical treatise but a *poem*, which is to say that its meaning cannot be reduced to propositions but is *rendered* through an aesthetic form. To be sure, one of the most striking features of this aesthetic form is the apparent unity of voice achieved in *Four Quartets*. As I will seek to show, however, it is precisely through the insistence on the presence of the voice that *Four Quartets* reveals how the voice is divided against itself, and we will see the importance of attending to the alterations of *tone* in the voice that is speaking.

Let me emphasize, however, that the speaker of the poem should *not* be conflated with the writer. Regardless of its relation to Eliot's biographical situation at the time of writing, *Four Quartets* provides a dramatic context for the speaker of the poem. This context is essential for understanding not only the propositions that are put forward but also the subtle and shifting inflections of the voice that is speaking. One of the things we learn is that the speaker has reached old age and is looking back on his life, trying to make sense of what has happened and what it all means. Furthermore, the issue of aging and approaching death is explicitly linked to the question of voice, of who is speaking and what is said. "Do not let me hear/ Of the wisdom of old men" (26) – we read in the second quartet – "but rather of their folly,/ Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,/ Of belonging to another" (26-27). It is safe to say that the secondary literature on *Four Quartets* has tended not to heed this plea, instead recounting the received wisdom of men who speak of serenity and peace, from Buddha and Krishna to Jesus Christ and the old Eliot himself. Yet the second quartet emphatically questions the serene tone and pacific discourse of wisdom. "Had they deceived us/ Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,/ Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?/ The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,/ The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets/ Useless in the darkness into which they peered/ Or from which they turned their eyes" (26).

Now, the claim I want to pursue is that these lines provide an important clue for how to read *Four Quartets*. Beneath the quiet-voiced, pious



poem here anticipates how his words will resonate in the reader, thereby calling attention to how the present is becoming past in being addressed to the future. Nevertheless, "time present and time past" – as per lines 1 and 2 – are only "*perhaps* present in time future." Insofar as the past and present of the poem has a future it will depend on a reader who can animate the dead letters, but by the same token there is a structural possibility that the poem will remain unread indefinitely or be erased irrevocably. In either case, however, "time future [is] contained in time past" (as per line 3). That something is past means that it has been overtaken by a future and whatever happens *will have been*, in a future anterior that marks the becoming of every event.

This general condition of temporality is underlined by the rewriting (at lines 4-5) of a famous sentence from the analysis of time in book eleven of Augustine's *Confessions*. As Augustine observes, "if the present were always present and did not go by into the past, it would not be time at all, but eternity." The temporal present is rather ceasing to be from the beginning. As Augustine makes clear, the past is no longer, the future is not yet, and the present itself can come into being only by becoming past. When Eliot at line 4 makes time (rather than the timeless) "eternally present" it is consequently temporal finitude that becomes ubiquitous and "unredeemable" (at line 5), pointing to the "end" of death that is "always present" (at line 10). "The time of death is every moment," as we read later on, in the third quartet.

Nevertheless, there is a programmatic, religious strand of *Four Quartets* that seeks to transform the "end" of death into the teleological End of divine consummation and to sublimate the ever-presence of time into the eternal presence of God. As we will see, however, this move reveals a deeper incompatibility between two different motivational structures in the poem. Thus, as we transition to the second movement of the first quartet, we encounter "the still point of the turning world" (15), which is said to provide "release from action and suffering" (16), liberating us from "the enchainment of past and future" (16) in favor of timeless presence. Yet, throughout *Four Quartets*, the stillness of eternal presence turns out to be inseparable from the stillness of death. As Eliot makes clear in the last movement of the last quartet, the "condition of complete simplicity" that the mystic aims for is "costing not less than everything" (59). That is why it is consistent to emphasize (as Eliot does) that detachment is a necessary condition for attaining the stillness of timeless presence. Only by "cleansing" oneself from affection for the temporal can one embrace the state of eternity.

By the same token, however, the condition of complete simplicity aimed for by the mystic or the saint would in fact eliminate everything one cares about if one is invested in temporal life. As Eliot puts it in the third quartet, "to apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time, is an occupation for the saint," whereas "For most of us, there is only the unattended/ Moment, the moment in and out of time,/ The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,/ The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning/ Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply/ That it is not heard at all, but you are the music/ While the music lasts" (44). The standard reading of the relation between these two types of moments is that the experience "most of us" have is an imperfect version of the still point of eternity attained by the saint. Yet the logic of the poem makes clear that we are rather dealing with two different motivational structures. If I am deeply immersed in the experience of music, the very experience is shot through with memory and anticipation, retaining the notes that have passed away and linking them to

what will come. This sense of time is not just a necessary condition for the experience of music but inseparable from what makes it valuable, since without the contrast between memory and anticipation the musical experience would have no drama and no possible significance. Similarly, if I am invested in the memories that are awakened in “shafts of sunlight,” or seized by the majestic sight of “winter lightning” or “the waterfall,” these experiences depend for their meaning on the sense of temporal and spatial limits. Thus, if I am invested in these experiences the problem is not that the stillness of eternity is unattainable; the point is rather that I am *not oriented* toward the simplicity and absoluteness of eternity. Far from consummating my temporal experience, the state of eternity would eliminate it, along with the memory and anticipation that is integral to everything I value and desire.

The remarkable thing, then, is that we can follow the investment in living on throughout *Four Quartets* and trace how it contradicts the declared desire for eternity from within. The first thing to note here is how *Four Quartets* renders the poignancy of lived, temporal moments with extraordinary precision. The pathos of this preoccupation with “the moment” is not an aspiration toward timeless presence. On the contrary, the pathos depends on the investment in time-bound experience, evoking “the uncertain hour before the morning/ Near the ending of interminable night” (52), or the “transitory blossom/ Of snow, a bloom more sudden/ Than that of summer” (49). Furthermore, the investment in time-bound consciousness and time-bound perception is often underlined by an explicit reference to the “Now” of the speaker of the poem, who seeks to trace a certain time in writing and preserve a memory of the present that is passing away. “Now the light falls,” we thus read in the second quartet, “Across the open field, leaving the deep lane/ Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon” (23).

The motivational structure at work in these evocations of temporal moments is not a search for eternal repose, but rather an investment in living on, which is animated both by a chronophilic attachment to what is passing away and a chronophobic resistance to death. This investment is further highlighted by the dramatic context of *Four Quartets*, which is organized around the experience of survival. The respective titles of the quartets (“Burnt Norton,” “East Coker,” “The Dry Salvages,” and “Little Gidding”) all designate spatial locations or communities to which the speaker of the poem returns, haunted by the time that has passed and the experience of living on after others have died. In direct connection to this experience of survival, the “Burnt Norton” of the first title also resonates with how the rose-garden and the house to which it belongs turn out to have burned down, reduced to ashes and dust that are stirred up throughout the poem. As we learn in the last quartet: “the ash the burnt roses leave/ Dust in the air suspended/ Marks the place where a story ended./ Dust inbreathed was a house – ” (51). This destruction of the past – and the attendant experience of survival – is further intertwined with the experience of aging, where “As we grow older/ The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated/ Of dead and living” (31). Indeed, Eliot makes clear that what is at stake is “Not the intense moment/ Isolated, with no before and after/ But a lifetime *burning* in every moment” (31, emphasis added).

At the same time, however, there is a parallel attempt to transform the fire and the rose into religious symbols. While the fire that burns throughout *Four Quartets* is a figure of time, there is also the fire of purgatory that is supposed to redeem us from the fire of time, and the empirical-temporal rose-garden is supposed to be an intimation of the transcendent Rose of

divine Love. Yet while these symbols are visible in the poem and have been traced by many of Eliot's interpreters, the symbolic transactions that take place are repeatedly interrupted and diverted by the actual articulation of the poem. Consider here the last section of "Burnt Norton," which returns to the memory of the rose-garden with which the quartet began:

The detail of the pattern is movement,  
As in the figure of the ten stairs.  
Desire itself is movement  
Not in itself desirable;  
Love is itself unmoving,  
Only the cause and end of movement,  
Timeless, and undesiring  
Except in the aspect of time  
Caught in the form of limitation  
Between un-being and being.  
Sudden in a shaft of sunlight  
Even while the dust moves  
There rises the hidden laughter  
Of children in the foliage  
Quick now, here, now, always –  
Ridiculous the waste sad time  
Stretching before and after.

As in the opening lines of the quartet, we here move from an apparently abstract philosophical reflection to a display of intense personal concern. As many commentators have noted, the initial metaphor of the stairs is a reference to St. John of the Cross, where it signifies the soul's ascent – step by step – toward God. On such a reading, the movement of time would be (in classic Platonic fashion) the image of an "unmoving" and "timeless" eternity, which is the aim of desire while itself being "undesiring." This reading would also seem to be confirmed by the description of time as a "form of limitation" and by the final judgment on "the waste sad time/ Stretching before and after" as being "ridiculous."

Yet already the choice of word here should make us wary of the proposed reading. *Ridiculous*? Who says that? If the erudite references to Plato and St. John of the Cross would have us believe that we are listening to the "wisdom" of an old man, we now hear his fear and frenzy, his grief and resentment over the time that is lost: "Ridiculous the waste sad time." What has happened in between these two different inflections of voice is the re-emergence of the memory of the rose-garden that haunts all of the quartets, its dust and ashes whirling in shafts of sunlight as the past is recollected. The transition is here marked by the word "Sudden" at line eleven, with the dust appearing in a shaft of sunlight as the speaker is visited by the memory of the vanished garden. Far from being divine or timeless, the moments that emerge through this experience are thoroughly temporal, as emphasized by the adverbs that underline the urgency of time that was there already in the garden itself: "Quick now, here, now, always." Furthermore, the remembered laughter that is evoked here recurs as "the laughter in the garden" in the second quartet, where it is said to be "pointing to the agony/ Of death and birth" (28). This is precisely the agony that plagues the speaker who blurts out "Ridiculous the waste sad time," his chronophobic resentment betraying the chronophilic attachment that intensifies the agony of loss.



The question, however, is how the Incarnation should be understood. For the religious interpretation, the becoming-temporal of the timeless and the becoming-mortal of the immortal is only an intermediary stage on the way to redemption. God descends into time in order to redeem us from temporality and He descends into mortality in order to redeem us from death. The logic of this move was brought out most clearly by Augustine, who argued that the root of all sin is "the love of those things which a man can lose against his will." If one did not love the things that one loses – if one were not invested in caring for their sustenance – one would never feel anger or resentment at their loss and one would never have recourse to violence, since one would never feel threatened by any prospect of loss. Consequently, Augustine argues that the root of sinful action is the investment in mortal life. If Christ redeems us from sin by dying on the cross it is accordingly because he – by allowing himself to be crucified – embraces death rather than offering a vain resistance to it, thereby showing us how mortality can be redeemed. The logic of the Incarnation would thus be consistent with the ascetic logic of detachment that we have traced in *Four Quartets*, where the liberation from time is achieved by cleansing oneself from affection for the temporal.

Yet the figure of the Incarnation has always left itself open to what I would call a chronolibidinal or radical atheist reading. On such a reading, God has to become mortal not in order to redeem us from death but in order to be an object of love and desire in the first place. Recall here the extraordinary sequence in the Gospel of John, where Christ on the cross says "I thirst," is given to drink, then says "It is consummated" and dies, with a soldier subsequently thrusting a lance into his side, water and blood pouring out. The Christian move is to distinguish this body that is subject to need, dissolution, and decomposition from the "glorious" body of resurrection that is exempt from death. Yet the moment of consummation – of fulfillment of scripture – is here the moment when the body of the beloved is shown to be a body of flesh and blood. If this body is "resurrected" it is not because it ascends to heaven or is transformed into an incorruptible body, but because it is commemorated by those who love him, compelled to do so precisely because he died and thereby allowing him to live on, but in a process of communion that itself is subject to dissolution and death.

I call attention to this possible reading of the Incarnation, since the Gospel of John resonates throughout *Four Quartets* and in particular in the last movement of the last quartet, where the motif of resurrection opens itself to be read in terms of survival rather than immortality. While the dictum "In the beginning was the Word" is temporalized already in the second quartet – with the repeated declarations "In my beginning is my end," "In my end is my beginning" – the full consequences of such temporalization are now dramatized:

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,  
Every poem an epitaph. And any action  
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat  
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.  
We die with the dying:  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead:  
See, they return, and bring us with them.

The major motif of how “any action” of life is a step toward death (the executioner’s “block”) is here recapitulated, all the way down to the articulation of “every phrase and every sentence,” which is marked by ending from the beginning. Yet the response to the apparent *vanitas* motif is not detachment but an expression of *attachment*; an acknowledgment of belonging to the mourning of the deceased and of what is ceasing to be: “We die with the dying:/ See, they depart, and we go with them.” To be sure, one can try to recuperate even these lines for the redemptive, Christian schema. Thus, David Moody recapitulates a standard interpretation for which “We die with the dying” and “We are born with the dead” signifies that the individual dies to the world in order to be re-born in communion with God (253), thereby confirming the refrain of the last quartet, namely, that “all shall be well and/ All manner of thing shall be well” (57, 59) through the purgatory of suffering that purifies us from sin.

I would argue, however, that next to the gravity of the lines we are considering, the purgatory motif with its redemptive refrain (“all shall be well”) resonates as a hollow assertion, a self-deception of quiet-voiced elders who avert their eyes before the dark descent into the mourning of mortal life that gives rise to the pathos of the passage we are considering. All the four elements that structure the four quartets are here connected to death (one is buried in the earth under an “illegible stone,” one drowns in the water of “the sea’s throat,” one is consumed by the “fire” of time), but the same elements are also connected to life, since it is with this process of dying that we begin (“that is where we start”). And if one wonders where the first element is, one will find that the air is inscribed as the invisible but indispensable element of breathing and speaking. The air is the very element of survival, both for the speaker of the poem – who deposits his dying voice in the dead letters (“every poem an epitaph”) – and for the reader who breathes life back into the letters, thereby making the dead “return.” This is a “resurrection” that takes place in every reading of the poem, but one that is animated by a breath that itself is bound to expire and presupposes a material inscription that itself is inanimate, the “illegible stone” here recalling the “old stones that cannot be deciphered” (31) in the second quartet and now explicitly aligned with the poem as a funerary inscription, an epitaph. The twice repeated, demonstrative “See” (“See, they depart,” “See, they return,”) thereby points to the process that takes places both in every reading of the poem *and* in anyone who mourns the beloved, visited by ghosts of the dead from whom he or she does not want to part. The pathos of such resurrection depends on beings who are not dying for God but *dying for time*, that is, who are animated by a desire to live on in time but also agonized by the loss it entails and who, insofar as they are dying for anything, insofar as they give their lives for anything, it is for someone else or something else to have the time to go on.

My analysis of *Four Quartets* here reaches a point that recurs in different versions in my readings of major modernist writers who are reckoning with the problem of time. On the one hand, the pathos of the writing is generated by how life is entangled with death and thus depends on the temporality of survival for its affective and aesthetic effects. On the other hand, moments of supreme affective and aesthetic value are repeatedly linked to a timeless state of immortality. The question is *why* there is a conflict or contradiction between these two levels. By emphasizing that the desire for immortality dissimulates a desire for living on, it may seem as though I deny or seek to rationalize the *dream* of immortality. In contrast, one may want to grant the

deep attraction of this dream, while recognizing that it is a *fantasy* to be traversed, an *illusion* to be overcome. On such a reading, the invocations of timeless being in *Four Quartets* would be the expression of a fundamental fantasy and the impossibility of ever fulfilling it – the impossibility of ever transcending the temporal finitude of survival in favor of immortality – would be the repressed “truth” of the drama of desire. The problem with such a reading, however, is that it stops short of questioning the *structure* of the traditional conception of desire. The fullness of timeless being is deemed to be an illusion but the *desire* for such fullness is itself taken to be self-evident. Even while debunking the promise of fulfillment, such a reading thus conforms to the logic of lack that has been handed down to us from the metaphysical and religious tradition to which Eliot appeals: we are temporal, mortal beings but desire to repose in the timeless state of immortality.

In contrast, chronolibidinal reading seeks to show that the lack of immortality is not the repressed truth of desire. On the contrary, the supposed lack of immortality *is itself a repression* of how the bond to mortal life is the condition for *both* what one desires *and* what one fears. As we have seen in *Four Quartets*, this double bind can be traced even in the ascetic strategies that seek to transcend it. Because every bond to pleasure exposes one to pain – and every attachment to life exposes one to death – ascetic sages preach *detachment*. Chronolibidinal reading does not deny that one can come to embrace such a strategy of detachment, but it seeks to show that it is an *effect of* and a *response to* the investment in living on, thereby enabling one to read how the ideal of detachment dissimulates a preceding attachment. The fundamental drama of libidinal being is not that we seek a pure joy that is frustrated by pain or a pure repose that is compromised by loss. Rather, the fundamental drama of libidinal being is that *pain and loss are part of what we desire*, pain and loss being integral to what makes anything desirable in the first place. The notion of chronolibido thereby seeks to capture both the terror and the beauty of being a *temporal* being, namely, a being who can suffer, can lose things, and can die, but who for that very reason has a sense of what it means for something to be precious, to be valuable, to be worth caring for.

The notion of chronolibido thus returns us to the problem that Socrates analyzes in Homer. If one is bound to mortal life, the positive can never be released from the negative. Indeed, as Socrates points out, the investment in mortal life leads one to hold “contrary opinions at the same time about the same things” so that there is “division and strife of the man with himself” (603c-d). This internal division articulates the double bind of chronolibido. The same bond that binds one to pleasure binds one to pain and the same bond that binds one to life binds one to death. It follows that there is chronophobia at the heart of every chronophilia and chronophilia at the heart of every chronophobia. The theory of chronolibido seeks to provide the framework for thinking this double bind and thereby open a new way of reading the dramas of desire as they are staged in both philosophy and poetry.







# Judging in Art\*

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very judgement, Gilles Deleuze claims in a late essay, has a preventive effect. It is designed to prevent something new from emerging and new forms of life from constituting themselves. This is why, instead of things being judged and assessed, they should be called into existence, and values should be created: "If it is so disgusting to judge, it is not because everything is of equal value, but on the contrary because what has value

can be made or distinguished only by defying judgement."<sup>01</sup> The one who judges always appears as some kind of "priest"<sup>02</sup>. In order to judge something, he must relate beings to infinity, turn them into finite entities that stand in a relationship of dependence, as if they owed a debt to a higher instance and, for this reason, had to be judged. The world of judgements is a world of domination to which subjects and objects are equally submitted, and no "process of liberation"<sup>03</sup> can ever take place within it. Hence judgements curtail the new and in doing so suffocate life. A judgement, Deleuze states, is invariably directed against "liveliness"<sup>04</sup>. However, in an earlier text, in which he reconstructs Kant's critical philosophy as a whole, he refers to the "liveliness"<sup>05</sup> of judgements. Both "determining" and "reflecting", cognitive and aesthetic judgements are rooted in liveliness, yet only "reflecting" judgements "manifest and release" it without further mediation, as only these judgements express the pleasure that the free and harmonious play of the faculties triggers. In truth, if one follows Deleuze's understanding of Kant's argument, one must concede that "reflecting" or aesthetic judgements are the only true judgements,<sup>06</sup> precisely because they "manifest and release" the "liveliness" that serves as a common ground to all judgements. In his lectures on cinema, held in the beginning of the eighties and the source of the two books which he then published on the same topic, Deleuze discusses the relationship between movement, time, and image, and once again mentions "reflecting" judgements in Kant. He talks about a temporal experience that he conceives of in terms of the dynamically sublime, not of the beautiful, and points to the "intensity"<sup>07</sup> of the instant as something that can be sensed when time reveals itself to be out of joint, when its order vanishes into an abyss, and the future becomes "something imminent", the past "something immemorial". This sublime temporal experience, this premonition that something is already happening and that what has just happened belongs already to a remote past, is meant to manifest and reveal light, the "soul of light". It is, as Deleuze stresses, a "lived"<sup>08</sup> intensity. Hence not every judgement can be said to be directed against "liveliness" and prevent the appearance of the new. For at least the aesthetic judgement, the assessment of the beautiful and the sublime, must be considered exceptions.

From a Kantian perspective, the reflecting judgements, "This is beautiful" and "This is sublime", have several features in common: they both

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01 Gilles Deleuze, "Pour en finir avec le jugement", in: *Critique et clinique*, Paris: Minuit 1993, p. 168.

02 Ibid., p. 159.

03 Ibid., p. 160.

04 Ibid., p. 168.

05 Gilles Deleuze, *La philosophie critique de Kant*, Paris: PUF 1963, p. 87.

06 Here, Deleuze is in agreement with Hannah Arendt.

07 Gilles Deleuze, *Cine II. Los signos del movimiento y del tiempo*, Buenos Aires: Cactus 2011, p. 481. In his book, Deleuze still alludes to the "instant" (Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma. L'image mouvement*, Paris: Minuit 1983, p. 74) but no longer treats it as a crucial point in his line of reasoning.

08 Ibid., p. 488.

express a pleasure, a positive and a negative one, and they both comport an expectation of universal agreement that is inseparable from this expression of pleasure, even from the feeling itself. When I say “This is beautiful”, I convey that I feel a positive pleasure, and I expect that all others will agree with me, will confirm my judgement and share my pleasure. Kant contends that in the feeling of pleasure expressed by the pure aesthetic judgement, it is the “feeling of life”<sup>09</sup> that comes to the fore. In this sense, the aesthetic judgement is an expression of a felt intensity, an expression which does not simply render the feeling of an individual but rather the feeling of an individual as the feeling of all individuals, as the “feeling of life” itself. “This is beautiful” means “I feel enlivened”<sup>10</sup>, and also “I feel myself and this is how life feels”. I relate to an artwork, for example, by expressing a felt intensity that extends beyond myself. This shows in the rather familiar experience that each time one feels enlivened by a book, a painting, a film, a piece of music, a play, or a performance, each time one feels that art touches upon something, one feels the need to communicate the intensity one feels to others, and perhaps even to turn it into an opportunity for reflecting upon art, or into a stimulus for engaging in an artistic creation. When I experience such an intensity, my experience is already more than just my own experience. It is no longer a merely private experience that I may or may not keep to myself; my judgement ceases to a “private judgement”<sup>11</sup>. Even in the case when I say to myself “This is beautiful”, and what I mean is the feeling of a singularly anonymous intensity, a different voice than my own speaks. A “universal voice”<sup>12</sup> speaks in, or through, my voice, not as a real, factual, existing voice, but as an ideal, postulated voice, as the “as-if” of a voice or as the voice of the “as-if”. This is why, in an essay on the *Critique of Judgement*, Stanley Cavell states that the problem of aesthetic judgement, of the explication of the judgement, “This is beautiful”, in art criticism, lies in how the critic “includes”<sup>13</sup> his subjectivity in the universality of what is at stake, not in how he discounts or suspends it, not in how he “overcome[s] it in agreement”, even though, as someone who judges aesthetically and expects others to “concur”<sup>14</sup>, it is agreement he must also seek. “Subjective universality”, the kind of universality claimed by the aesthetic judgement, does not amount to an infinite quest for objectivity in art. The expectation that others should agree arises straight away, and cannot be subtracted from the judgement by being fulfilled. Only if another voice does *not* agree is it put to the test and prove to be all the more urgent, an expectation truly experienced, an expectation that at times can be almost unbearable. Only when there is disagreement does the inclusion of subjectivity become an explicit question or problem; only then does the critic’s endeavour appear visibly as a task and an achievement.

Inasmuch as the intensity of the beautiful is experienced on the occasion of a disinterested contemplation of the artwork, or a disinterested participation in art, and inasmuch as it cannot be causally inferred from such participation, each time a non-factual “universal voice” speaks in or through my voice it is as if my judgement expressed not something about the work of art itself but something upon which the work of art has touched. The artwork touches upon a sense or a meaningfulness that cannot be captured in terms of a cognition or a concept. It does so as a sensuous appearance that exposes itself to thinking and that in fact consists in such an exposure. But if the artwork keeps its sensuous appearance open to thinking, then the fact that it provides “a lot to think about” and cannot be grasped conceptually, the fact that it cannot be reduced to a single thought or idea and that it keeps thinking itself open, as it were, indicates the difference between knowledge

09 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1977, p. 115.

10 In his “Aesthetics of Liveliness”, Jan Völker draws the reader’s attention to the fact that, in his third *Critique*, Kant “avails” himself of the notions of liveliness, life, and enlivening so as to distinguish them from the notion of animation, which pertains to the object, not to the “subjective feeling”. “The ‘feeling of life’”, Völker notes, “designates a feeling that cannot be equated with the sensation of life in the biological sense.” (Jan Völker, *Ästhetik der Lebendigkeit*, München: Wilhelm Fink 2011, S. 204) On this point, see also the essay by Béatrice Longuenesse quoted below.

11 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, p. 280.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

13 Stanley Cavell, “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy”, in: *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976, p. 94.

14 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, p. 130.

- 15 Béatrice Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread", in: *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, ed. R. Kukla, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 200. "Kant does grant that all pleasure or displeasure is the feeling of a living entity in the biological sense: a conscious corporeal being [...] It seems quite apt to say that in aesthetic pleasure, the mind is cause and effect of nothing but itself [...] Nevertheless, the term 'life' has at the same time its most usual sense (the capacity of a corporeal being to be cause and effect of its own activity), since there would be no feeling of pleasure unless the representational capacities were those of a living thing in the ordinary sense of this term." (ibid., p. 199 f. – my emphasis, AGD. On this point, see also the book by Jan Völker referred to above, *Ästhetik der Lebendigkeit*, p. 241.) In a passage where Kant mentions the "feeling of life" and its affections, he asserts that gratification and pain "are always in the last resort corporeal" (Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, p. 205). Without "the feeling of a bodily organ" life is "merely a consciousness of one's existence, and could not include any feeling of well-being or the reverse, that is of the furtherance or hindrance of the vital forces." The "negative pleasure" of the sublime comprises an "inhibition of the vital forces" (ibid., p. 165), so that one also needs a body in order to feel pleasure and displeasure.

- 16 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, p. 138.

- 17 Martin Heidegger, *Feldweg-Gespräche*, in: *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 77, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 1995, p. 96.

- 18 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, p. 163.

and art, cognition and intensity. It indicates this difference in relation to both the artistic production and the assessment of art through judgement. In the "feeling of life", which is not only a bodily feeling but also and especially, as Béatrice Longuenesse shows, a "feeling of the life of the mind"<sup>15</sup>, the aesthetic judgement, the expression of an intensity as expression of a spiritual, or intellectual, quickening, communicates with the aesthetic idea of the artwork, with the representations of the imagination that provide "a lot to think about" without these thoughts ever achieving a conceptual unity.

What conditions must be fulfilled for the aesthetic judgement to be the subjectively universal expression of a quickening, of an intensity felt in the mind? On the one hand, the reflecting subject, the subject who reflects on the work of art and its pleasure, must strive to "linger"<sup>16</sup> in the "contemplation of the beautiful". Kant claims that this contemplation even "reinforces and reproduces" itself, and hence implies that it is determined by an interest. Yet this interest must in turn be determined by a disinterestedness. Perhaps one could turn to Heidegger here and say that in the contemplation of art we surrender ourselves to lingering as something that lasts, that "takes us in, as if it were the lingering that makes us linger"<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, however, there is also a risk that comes with lingering, with the self-strengthening and self-reproduction of an intensity felt, namely the risk that the feeling wears off, that it becomes "something stiff and regular", and that it produces the "boredom" of "what takes too long"<sup>18</sup>, to quote Kant one more time. This is why something new is required if the felt intensity is not to decrease, if it is to renew itself and increase yet again. The feeling of intensity, the liveliness that the aesthetic judgement expresses, needs both a continuation and an interruption. It needs an interrupting continuation, an approximation of the intensity to a zero-degree. Where art achieves interrupting continuations, whether because new artworks are created or because new aspects of an artwork are discovered that elicit further thoughts, the aesthetic judgement does not have a preventive effect. For then it testifies to the appearance of the new just as much as to the fact that organisation and classification have not as yet erased the trace of life – a fact that cannot be separated from the appearance of the new. Aesthetic judgements do not tie things down, they rather set them free, or release them. They are not judgements about good or bad art but expressions of an intensity that must be channelled into a critical development. In a way, aesthetic judgements actually consist in such developments since they come with an expectation of universal assent.

Bad art withdraws from aesthetic judgements as it is not really art. Yet a work of art that does nothing but succeed and in this sense proves to be good art, is a limit case. In the presence of such a work, one bounces off and the aesthetic judgement runs empty at full speed, as it were. Some of Beckett's plays may serve as examples here. Ultimately, the aesthetic judgement refers to art as the achievement of a failure. Or, to put it differently, in art failure is inherent to success and still threatens it. The intensity expressed by an aesthetic judgement feeds off a haunting lack of intensity. This is why it is not clear that a work of art or art itself can be located and identified. Aesthetic judgements are also symptoms of this difficulty. Perhaps, however, the fully successful work of art that provides too much and therefore too little food for thought, at least in the present moment, has a temporal index. With time, it may reveal a different aspect, one that will allow the judging subject to participate in it.

But what about liveliness and newness in the production of art itself? Doubtless, to answer this question, one can refer once again to the *Critique of*

*Judgement*, to the doctrine of genius, which, according to Jacques Rancière, entails a “separation between the reasons of art and the reasons of beauty”<sup>19</sup>, and thus provides the grounds for art “as such”, allowing it to create its “own world”. This separation ultimately signifies two things. It signifies that intensity as the intensity of an artwork or of beauty, as an intensity universally shared and incompatible with the sensation of the merely agreeable, cannot be brought about willfully: no will to the new can ever suffice for something new to be created. But the same separation also signifies that renouncing an intentional activity in art, or purposeful deliberation on the side of the artist, equally amounts to a relinquishing of liveliness. Yet it is Hölderlin, not Kant, who in a philosophical fragment on “becoming in dissolution” which treats of liveliness and newness in the production of art, uses the notion of a “feeling of life” at a decisive point of his argument. According to Hölderlin, the new that belongs to art’s “free imitation”, appears when “being” dissolves into “non-being” and “non-being” becomes “being”. It appears in a “state”<sup>20</sup> that the poet describes as a “dream”, as an idealisation of the real and a realisation of the ideal, or the possible. Heidegger paraphrases this idea when he writes: “The dream offers the wealth of the possible that has not been appropriated yet, and guards the transfigured memory of the real.”<sup>21</sup> It is meant to be both a “terrible” and a “divine” dream. That Hölderlin speaks of a “free imitation in art”, suggests, on the one hand, that the artist proceeds neither arbitrarily nor conventionally. It suggests that, in Kantian terminology, he receives the rules of his creation from nature while at the same time cultivating his judgement by dint of practice and adjustment, or that, in the terminology of Kantian critic Clement Greenberg, the artist proves to be a “reluctant innovator”. That Hölderlin calls the “dream” of the new a “terrible yet divine dream”, suggests, on the other hand, that this “dream” is not simply a human phenomenon, and that it tears the dreamer from the midst of his being, or his life, permitting the artist to attain a point of indifference, a point where the possible and the actual, the ideal and the real, being and non-being touch upon each other. This is the point of becoming itself, as it were, the point at which one shares in the “entire feeling of life”<sup>22</sup> precisely because something new appears without the old therefore merely vanishing. If becoming were not a “becoming in dissolution”, if it did not relate to the old that dissolves, disintegrates, then the coming of the new, the occurrence of “what happens for the first time”, of the “youthful”, would remain inaccessible to the artist. There would be no dream of art. There would only be the actual or the possible, the real or the ideal, being or non-being. One must even move one step further. For *only* the new, only that part of the “forces and relations” that “has not been exhausted so far and is still inexhaustible”, can bring about a “sensation” of the old, a “sensation” of what is in the course of “leaving reality”. Hölderlin puts it like this: “The *possible* that enters *reality* by making *reality* dissolve, is effective since it generates both a sensation of the dissolution and a memory of what has been dissolved.” This is why in the “moment” of the “creative act”, the “sensations of dissolution and creation” come together and can be “traversed an infinite number of times”; this is also why the “moment” of the “creative act” as a moment of becoming, or of passing from one to the other, is a “moment” when one experiences the “entire feeling of life”, not just a “feeling of life”. Inasmuch as it forms a “whole”, the “feeling of life” results from a continuous intertwining of “disintegration and production” that can only be prompted by “production”, by creation, by the appearing of the new. Each time one experiences the “entire feeling of life”, “pain and joy”, “struggle and

19 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scènes du régime esthétique de l’art*, Paris: Galilée 2011, p. 30.

20 Friedrich Hölderlin, “Das Werden im Vergehen”, in: *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. II, München: Hanser Verlag 1992, p. 73.

21 Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne ‘Andenken’*, in: *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 52, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 1982, p. 121.

22 Hölderlin, “Das Werden im Vergehen”, p. 74.

peace", "movement and rest", "shape and shapelessness"<sup>23</sup> come into contact with, and penetrate, one another.

In the "creative act" the artist circulates unhindered between opposite "points", which are "*capable of disintegration and production*", as Hölderlin's has it. Hence, for something, a work of art, to be created, certain coordinates are needed, though they must not be rigid since they must also allow for a mediating process, a process that would be stopped by the presupposition of either an opposition between the points or a unification. These points or coordinates are the "infinitely new" and the "finitely old", the "really total" and the "ideally particular". The "creative act" thus turns against what Hölderlin calls a "sensuous idealism"; or, to put it differently, the fact that something new appears, that one can experience an "entire feeling of life", life itself, so to speak, gives the lie to the idea that "all" that exists are particular entities, and that their dissolution leads into nothingness. The new disavows the suggestion that dissolution is nothing but a weakening, that it brings death and effects destructive violence. It makes it possible to understand dissolution in terms of a "coming to life", or a "reviving". Hölderlin actually distinguishes between three "feelings of life", or between three aspects of the "feeling of life". The "feeling of life" can be an "entire", an "ideal", or a "spiritual" feeling; as such, it remains unconstrained because it is not dominated by the opposition between the infinite and the finite, the totality and the particular: it is determined neither by the infinite's "domination" of the individual nor by the individual's "domination" of the infinite. However, the "feeling of life" can also be a limited feeling, conditioned by contradictory instances, whether it is viewed under the aspect of the new or of the old. Under the aspect of the new, this "feeling of life" is the "I", the driving force that encounters what exists, the "individually old", the "object", or the "non-I", in the guise of an "unknown power". Under the aspect of the old, it denotes the inclusion of the old in its own infinity: here, the new itself has renounced its unity with the old, with the "ideally particular", and has exited the "entire feeling of life", has individuated itself and become the "individually new". Thus the "creative act" always relates to what is not creative, to the non-creative, to the moments before and after creation, and therefore to death, to weakening, and to destructive violence, at least if it also relates to the old, the existing, the isolated as an "unknown power". It is for this reason that the "creative act" must be considered an aesthetic judgement, an expression of the "feeling of life" that, just as in Kant, opens itself up and conveys a demand: not by expecting that others agree with it but by expecting something to be created, an artwork, or by expecting the new, the different, to develop into something "individually new". Whoever contemplates a work of art and feels the intensity expressed by the aesthetic judgement, the liveliness of a "feeling of life", participates in the "creative act" without which the work itself would not exist. Where there is no "creative act", all that exists is what exists already or what is already given, that which is indifferent to its own existence or its own occurrence, and which can just as well disappear completely, disintegrate, be destroyed and not leave a trace, like an object of pleasureless consumption, or a non-spiritual sign.

It has become evident that one can show with Kant and Hölderlin that judgements in art, the judgement that refers to art and the judgement that lies in the creation of an artwork, are an expression of the feeling of life and also of an expectation: of an expected agreement and of an expected creation. From a Kantian viewpoint the aesthetic judgement that refers to a work of art must be impure, for it must imply an awareness of art as art, an

awareness of the production of art as a purposeful, intentional activity. The aesthetic judgement that lies in the “creative act” is no less impure. “This is beautiful” expresses an intensification of feeling on occasion of the “infinitely new” announcing itself; hence, rather than saying: “I feel enlivened (and expect that all others will agree with me)”, it says: “I feel enlivened (and expect that something new will be created, to which I commit myself).” In truth, there is always a point at which the two expectations are indistinguishable, and the indeterminacy that characterises the free and harmonious play of the faculties is the indeterminacy of the “creative act”.

Both the aesthetic judgement that refers to a work of art and the aesthetic judgement that lies in the “creative act” have a temporal dimension that turns them into acts that must be repeated. With aesthetic judgements that refer to works of art, this is the case because the contemplation of the beautiful seeks to linger in its presence, or because lingering is inscribed in such contemplation, though in art the lingering seems to be interrupted by the awareness of art being art. With aesthetic judgements that lie in the “creative act”, it is the case because the creation of an artwork is not a spontaneous and sudden act that produces the object as if by magic. Another reason the aesthetic judgement that refers to works of art must be repeated is that the contemplation of the beautiful depends on an interruption of the lingering inscribed in it. It may not seek this interruption and yet it must if what is contemplated is not to collapse into something recognizable, or if the contemplation is not to submit itself to a rule or a concept. Obviously the awareness of art being art tends to fulfill this impossible need. There is also a further reason why the aesthetic judgement that lies in the “creative act” must be repeated: the creation of artworks makes them into something “individually new” the more their shape becomes manifest as the shape of such works, and hence exhausts the “creative act”, consumes the “entire feeling of life”. Where the production of a work of art separates “pain and joy”, “struggle and peace”, “movement and rest”, “shape and shapelessness”, where the “creative act” cannot but be an act of exhaustion, creation proves to be decreation, formation appears as deformation, and the form, the figure, the shape subside to shapelessness. The work of art always threatens to be a mere object that enters nothingness until the irruption of the new once again relates to it as a “power”, an “unknown power”, the power of idealisation, the power of the “feeling of life”. In the end, the expectation that a new work of art be created hovers between fulfillment and disappointment because the artwork affirms itself all the more as a particular artwork, the more it splits the “feeling of life” that expresses itself in the expectation of creation.

Now what about judgements in art that has been produced, in the artwork itself? In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno claims that there is an “analogy” between judgements and artworks inasmuch as the latter are “syntheses”<sup>24</sup>, objects obtaining a certain unity. But he also claims that the “synthesis” of the work of art remains “without judgement” since it is never possible to tell “what [an artwork] asserts as a judgement”: there is no artwork that could be contained in an “alleged statement” or message. In Adorno’s eyes it is “questionable” whether “works of art can be politically committed at all”. From this angle, it would seem that the question of judgements in art may have something to do with the relationship between art and politics. It should not be forgotten that despite his talk of a “free imitation in art” and his many references to art, Hölderlin, too, begins his philosophical fragment on “becoming in dissolution”, a fragment about the creation of art, about artistic “synthesis” as something to be achieved and as

24 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 187.

something already achieved, with a meditation on the “decline of the fatherland” and the “generation left behind”.

Jean-Marie Straub’s short *Joachim Gatti*, which was shot in 2009 and lasts for only one and a half minutes, consists of a single take. The spectator sees the photographic close-up of a young man’s face. The young man holds a white telephone receiver in his hand, has striking eyes and directs his gaze in an upward diagonal direction. He seems to have placed headphones around his neck. To the right, in the background of the image, one recognises a room with shelves. Straub has placed this photograph on a red mounting, though not in its middle. Perhaps this red mounting is a rectangular piece of cardboard. It lies on a surface composed of stones partly covered with moss. The surface may be the soil, or a wall against which the mount is leaning. Speckled, eroded, worn-out, the stones bear the traces of the climate. They are covered in lichen. On the left-hand side and on the upper part of the filmic image they form a frame around the mount which in turn frames the photograph as it provides a supporting plane for it; the photograph itself is surrounded by a white frame consisting of unexposed photographic material. Joachim Gatti, the young man in the photograph, was injured by the police during a demonstration in the Paris suburb of Montreuil that took place in 2009 and that targeted the closure of a clinic which had been transformed into a social centre. A rubber bullet hit his face and caused one of his eyes to go blind.

In the beginning of the short, an insect flies across the image, as if Straub had wanted to stress the fact of filming in an exterior location, in the open countryside, as it were. Then one hears the artist’s deep, growling, unreconciled voice. Straub says: “Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote”; after this announcement, he reads out the following passage from the *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Man*: “Only the dangers of society as a whole trouble the philosopher’s tranquil sleep and tear him from his bed. Someone can slip his counterpart’s throat with impunity under his window; he only has to put his hands over his ears and argue with himself a little to prevent nature, which revolts within him, from identifying him with the one who is being assassinated. Savage man does not have this admirable talent, and for want of wisdom and reason he is always seen heedlessly yielding to the first sentiment of humanity. In uprisings and street fights the populace assembles and the prudent man distances himself: the dregs of the people, the women of the markets, separate the combatants and prevent honest people from slitting each other’s throats.”<sup>25</sup> Immediately after reading this quote, Straub adds: “And I, Straub, I say to you that it is the police, the police armed by Capital, who kill.” The camera’s fixed shot, the simple and yet carefully constructed image, neither flat nor one-dimensional, created by Straub’s take, is supplemented here by two audible texts that relate to each other in a peculiar way, as if a tension existed between them, or as if the short were both disarming and elliptical. While, on the one hand, the quote from the philosopher ironically denounces philosophy and the abstraction that isolates human beings by replacing their natural impulse, their compassion in the face of those who suffer, with an anesthetising interest in the whole, in society as such, on the other hand, the concretion of Straub’s judgement, uttered in his own name as if it were the name of truth, seems to be completely bereft of irony. Or is it? For what is more concrete, more definite, than calling the police assassins, and what is more abstract than Capital, to which the director’s voice also refers, probably resorting to Marx’s identification of Capital with the bourgeoisie? Suddenly, the insect that passes through almost imperceptibly might be seen as an ironic touch, too.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Marie Straub, *Joachim Gatti*, in: *Danièle Huillet et Jean-Marie Straub*, 6, 3 DVDs, Éditions Montparnasse 2011. The original quote can be found in: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard 1964, p. 156.

Does the voice of the director make explicit what the philosopher who remains caught in abstractions does not wish to hear, namely that the murderers have a name and a mission, and that they are not obscure forces? In this case, the naming of the police and of Capital in the judgement that is uttered at the end of Straub's brief discourse must not cause the spectator to have doubts and ask himself what Capital is, and who the bourgeoisie or the ones in power might be, or how Capital can possibly arm the police; it must not cause the spectator to reject the judgement, and the short itself, as a piece of Marxist propaganda. On the contrary, it must, the abstraction notwithstanding, make everything named transparent, and everything intended evident, and do so beyond all doubt: "This is how it is." The judgement, "Policemen are murderers on behalf of Capital", emphasised by an insistent address directed at the spectators themselves, by Straub saying "I tell you", can be understood as a call for action, even as a command. For all those who during the projection of the short are outraged by the mutilation of the young man, who feel compassionate toward him and want to declare their solidarity with him, and who instantly decide to descend into the streets and fight the police, *Joachim Gatti* functions like a little militant machine. Conversely, the spectator who does not act, can either be considered a bourgeois himself, an agent of Capital, or a class traitor. He may be a philosopher or an aesthete who savours Rousseau's irony instead of taking it seriously and allowing it to push him in the direction of active practical behaviour. Yet what remains and interrupts the continuity between the film and actual acts of resistance is the surplus of art, a surplus that becomes even more apparent as a result of the film's multiple frames. Just as the film begins without words because the quotation from Rousseau is not read out straight away, in the French version the word "kills" does not signal the end of the film; silence follows it. Ultimately, the surplus of art lies in the fact *that* Straub conceives of his short as a small militant machine, as a *ciné-tract*. Or, to put it differently, *Joachim Gatti* functions perhaps as a small militant machine but also exhibits it as such. Obviously the machine is designed to work, to fulfill a purpose extrinsic to art, to bring together art and transformative praxis in the figure of the politically committed artist, and to render the difference between an intrinsically artistic purpose and a purpose extrinsic to art irrelevant. However, as an artist's film, the machine is also non-functional. The spectator cannot not be aware of the object being the product of an artist; he cannot not be aware of art being something else than simply a practical matter. When he relates to the object as if it were nature, to use Kantian language, the spectator feels pleasure at the display of a set-up deprived of any specific function. *Joachim Gatti* involves the spectator in a *double-bind*. Can the machine ever work? When it works politically, it undoes itself as an artist's machine. When, however, it works as an artist's machine and hence appears to be non-functional, it undoes itself as a militant machine. There is no judgement in art, in an existing artwork, that could fully fill the gap between art and its outside, society. Is there a dream of political art that seeks to enter this gap, beyond art and beyond politics?

Judgements in art dream, they are carried by a dream, they carry a dream themselves. For one lingers, feels pleasure without recognising or knowing anything. Or one traverses the old and the new in all their many aspects without ever stopping at one single aspect. Or one contemplates a judgement as a judgement without activating its function and realising what the judgement says. The dream comes to an end, and it proves impossible to recognise oneself in the dreamer. Does one shoot?





# The Good, The Bad, and the Pseudo

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Evan Calder Williams

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**W**

e begin with a beginning, that of Umberto Lenzi's *Roma a mano armata* (*Rome Armed to the Teeth*, in the US), from 1976. It opens simply: a view from inside a car, looking out over the dashboard, through the windshield onto the road in front of it, while a funky, grinding score blares out over it. More specifically, it is a view onto

both the road in front of it and the buildings surrounding that road, with specific attention onto banks and business. It is, then, a view *onto* the circulation of traffic and capital in Rome while *in* the Italian capital city's dense traffic, as the production credits imposes themselves *over* the images in bright red letters, hinting toward a national and global circulation of capital more banal and far more powerful than any of the subsequent crimes of a metropolis, "armed to the teeth" as it may be.

From this cursory description, a few formal aspects are worth pointing out.

First, this is not a long take. There are cuts: both to shots outside of the car and to those that don't break the vehicular confines, merely repositionings, shifts to another window, complete with Lenzi's penchant for micro-zooms. The editing of this sequence therefore comes closer to a type of mobile *découpage*, the analytical editing of a inconstant space unrolling across a duration and passage.

Second, when those cuts outside the car occur, they don't reveal the car passing through the space, in a pedestrian's-eye reverse shot onto more of the Roman block in question or the car and its drivers. No, there are just brief cuts onto the same category of things – stores, banks, pedestrians, traffic – recorded by the intravehicular camera. But in no way is it made clear if it is the same street, let alone zone of the city.

Third, in each of these cuts, we leap over space (and therefore, over a missing portion of drive time). Some specific Roman stores in passing, but not those ahead of the car. A bank's sign, but not the sign of the bank glimpsed just prior to the cut. Such a technique of urban cut-and-stitch is common from the *film cartolina* (postcard film) style of opening in which the film makes damn sure to hit all the touristic high notes. As David Bass puts it, "The city of attractions is a lazy tourist's dream: a collection of desirable wonders, visitable without hot slogs through potentially boring, dangerous, 'non-places' in between" (86)<sup>01</sup> In other words, the very opposite of what a

<sup>01</sup> David Bass. "Insiders and Outsiders: Latent Urban Thinking in Movies of Modern Rome." In *Cinema & Architecture: Me'lie's, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*.

neorealist film, at least according to Bazin and Deleuze, is supposed to be doing: namely, dwelling in precisely the non-places, the “elliptical and unorganized” (Deleuze). *Rome Armed to the Teeth* clearly does something different than the more celebrated slogs of realism, and even before those ‘non-places’ (banks, alleys, warehouses) reveal themselves as properly dangerous as they are. Yet while the film preserves the formal structure of that kind of attraction/postcard looking, it uses it to reveal nothing *other than* the elliptical and unorganized. We start at a specific, mappable point: Porta Pinciana, slightly north of Rome’s center. It is both “historic” and precise. As such, it could be the occasion to trace a specific trajectory. But where do we arrive at the end of the sequence? In the anonymous dark of a tunnel, halted midway through it as the credits end. And if we look back earlier in the sequence, it appears that we are entering the same tunnel which the film exited previously, in its most jarring break of location, from daylight to artificial dark. That’s to say, this is the *voiding negation of that cartolina technique*: preserving its form while evacuating its original material, its purpose, and its rationale. And in so doing, this also approaches a present negation of the opposite technique, associated with neorealism, by means of a corrosive negation that expands, as the elliptical and unorganized has passed from the material revealed by a rigorous, “critical” urban cinema to the very forms structuring the orders of vision of this “a-critical,” apolitical cinema.

I’ve offered this beginning and this example of reading a film’s syntactical underpinnings in order to grasp how it constructs screen and filmed space under less than genuine intentions. This isn’t to say I consider it a wrong reading: it is correct, and I’ll return to the particular way I think it is. However, the point of this talk is to cast a shadow on the very dominance of such readings. Or, more precisely, to offer a complementary method without which such readings may remain convincing but unable to lay hold of the intersection between concepts, aesthetic forms, cultural production, and historical processes.

So, let’s try a second way in. Consider the following openings, from Sergio Martino’s *Milan Trembles - The Police Want Justice* (1973), Enzo Castellari’s *The Police Incriminate, the Laws Absolve* (1973), Lenzi’s *Milan Hates: The Police Cannot Shoot* (1974), Stelvio Massi’s *Mark the policeman* (1975), Lenzi’s *The Execution Challenges the City* (1975), Enzo Girolami’s *Italy Armed to the Teeth* (1976), Lenzi’s *Violent Naples* (1976), Lenzi’s *The Cynic, The Rat, and The Fist* (1977), and, finally, Sergio Grieco’s *The Beast With the Gun* (1977). As these openings cannot be shown on paper as they were in the space and context of the talk, the relevant point, which will have to be taken on faith for the sake of space, is that the openings of every one of these films adheres to a remarkably similar structure of credit sequence, from the discontinuous view of and in traffic, to the non-revelation of necessary narrative material during that sequence, to the fonts of the credits, to the scores that jazzily pound and overcompensate for what is, after all, little more than the passage of a vehicle, and us with it, through the roads and cities of Italy.

All of these are openings from the Italian *poliziesco*, the police film, or, as it was pejoratively and more accurately called, the *poliziottesco* (the policeman-film, the “copper” film). And for the record, these openings are far from a selective sampling: such an opening is present in roughly half of all the films of this type.

My reason for showing, and opening with, these openings is three-fold. One is to lay a phenomenal baseline for the repetition of which I’ll speak: a

brief glimpse of the fatigue of the once-more and here-we-go-again. The second is to argue that the particular *style* of these openings - the *seguimento*, the following or chase, stuck in traffic or racing through it - is one that, through their utter, "mindless" repetition, provides critical materials to thinking what Manfredo Tafuri calls "the fractured city." The third is to insist, however, in a way that's not simple provocation or paradox, that this capture of a particular logic of the metropolis - and its historical particularity - is operative in these films as a critique *irrespective of that style, regardless of the fact that they take place in the city.*

To put it another way: whether or not that reading I proposed earlier seemed to overreach, the situation - and the nature and potential force of the analysis - changes when we start to look at these these films in terms adequate to them. In other words, this film - and that accompanying reading - does not and cannot make sense *as a single film* but only as one *passage* amongst a line of repetitions, within a tremendous spree of self-cannibalizing, internally recycling films. Or in its precise terms, as a film in a cinematic *filone*. In this context, *filone* is sometimes translated as a "thread" or "line", but it remains best in a more literal meaning: a "seam" or "vein", in sense of mining. A cinematic *filone* is distinct from a genre (the Western, the horror, the crime film, etc), in that while it absorbs the techniques of many cinemas, it emerges from a very precise point, most often a box-office smash film that becomes a template to be repeated with minimal difference over a very short period of time: in this case, more than 100 *poliziotteschi* in roughly 6 years, from 1973 to 1978. They are neither serial nor sequels, and unlike genres, they allow a far more restricted range of narrative and formal flexibility, while nevertheless accommodating a wide range of economic capacity as producers across the industry spectrum, from big studios down to local one-offs, dogpile onto the vein and, in so doing, exhaust it. Because just as a *filone* has a precise starting point (a *capostipite*), it also has a relatively clear point or period of ending, despite its stragglers and off-shots. More than that, the exhaustion and declining returns are not merely in terms of box-office returns but, notoriously in the case of the spaghetti western, comes to be folded into the very form and material of the films, as they either do it again, just cheaper and faster, or try with rare success to deviate one of its sub-elements - such as a single character or a stress on the comic - into a new coherent *filone*.

This specific *filone*, the *poliziottesco*, associated with the directors Enzo Castellari, Umberto Lenzi, Stelvio Massi, Marino Girolami, Fernando di Leo, and Sergio Martino, is indeed something very particular, for "crime films" wouldn't cover it. *Poliziottesco* makes the most sense as a designation, as they are truly *policeman* films, taking on the *cop* himself (always *him*, except for a very tiny sub-*filone* of the *poliziotta*) as the organizing principle of the films, via the specific figure of the *commissario*, or the inspector. He is, crucially, not a private detective and not a beat cop, but an officer midway up the chain of command, one in the position to be endlessly frustrated by knowing who the baddies are and yet having his "hands tied by the law" (a phrase uttered in a good half of the films).<sup>02</sup> With him in place, the basic plot structure of the films is unwaveringly consistent: criminal violence explodes, a talented, violent cop - or a citizen who, à la *Death Wish*, becomes an avenging angel after his family is murdered/attacked/raped - struggles against and goes beyond the bourgeois law that keeps him from bringing to justice and/or death those who undermine the basis of civil society that law is supposed to ensure.

02 The *commissario* is something like the petit-bourgeois of the police: high enough to get the attention and to think that he might make a difference, but one who doesn't make the laws against which he strives and which, no matter how much he strives against them, he ultimately supports, by being the exception that allows them to not be reformed.

To make sense of those beginnings I showed, let's consider the beginnings of the *filone* itself. One can certainly find scattered precursors in the Italian national cinema, from Gambino's *La Pantera Nera* ('42) and Lattuada's *Il Bandito* ('46) on. However, in terms of its more immediate context, one can discern three major origins, two of which are particular to Italy. First, recent American cinema: the first two *Dirty Harry* films ('71 and '73) and the first *Death Wish* film ('74), to which which the *poliziottesco* bears more distinct resemblance than other European or prior Italian production. Second, the Italian engaged cinema of the late '60s and early '70s, i.e. *cinema d'impegno civile*: a political cinema of condemnation, nominally or substantively leftist, casting light on corruption and the system that protects it, especially within the police apparatus. The films of the *poliziottesco*, in essence, hollow out the "engaged" aspect, leaving behind a scrapped structure to be put to other use. The screen time, and necessary rhythm, given to extended dialogue during which dense networks and complicities unfold, will come to be taken over by the durations and rhythms of gunfights and torture scenes.

The second major site from which the *poliziottesco* emerges is that of the spaghetti western. I mean *site* specifically here, to lay the stress on the economic space, and studio capacity, left by the spaghetti western after its "overextension" and 'overproduction', becoming - so the story goes - increasingly self-parodic. Into such a space, the *poliziottesco* emerged as capable of fitting and footing the bill. As such, the relationship between the spaghetti western and the *poliziottesco* is commonly understood as an "evolution" or "mutation" or a "transposition" (Castellari himself: "Our *polizieschi* are basically Westerns with Alfa Romeros and motorcycles. Fundamentally, it's about a sheriff in search of the truth and the horse thieves are the killers.")<sup>03</sup>

To complicate this account, however, we should pass through an extremely astute review of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon the Time in the West* (1968) by *Cahiers du cinéma* writer Serge Daney from 1969.<sup>04</sup> Daney writes that the Leone films, constitute the first attempt of some consequence at a *critical cinema* [cinéma critique], that is, no longer in direct contact with *reality*[...], but with a genre, a cinematographic tradition, a global text, the only one that has known a global diffusion: the western. That's no small thing.

For Daney, this couldn't happen in the U.S.: the cinema may have had a "critical sense", but not a critical cinema per se. But where? In one of the rare countries itself possessing a cinema that was serial, parallel, traditional, and popular: Italy. Or, more precisely, Cinecittà at the precise moment when the peplum was falling, threatened by parodies (Sergio Leone, already). For the essential was there: not because some demi-urge had decided one day to make a cinema that was critical, subversive, and vaguely political, but because this cinema was *above all* (or in the last analysis) the sole product of an economic evolution. It happened only so that Cinecittà could re-invest men, sets, figures, and capital in a new genre of films. It had to amortize.

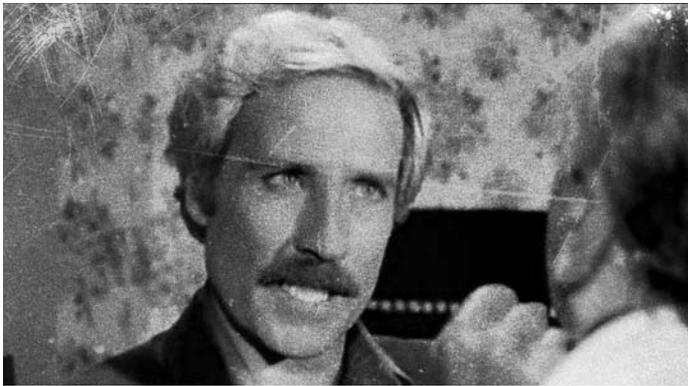
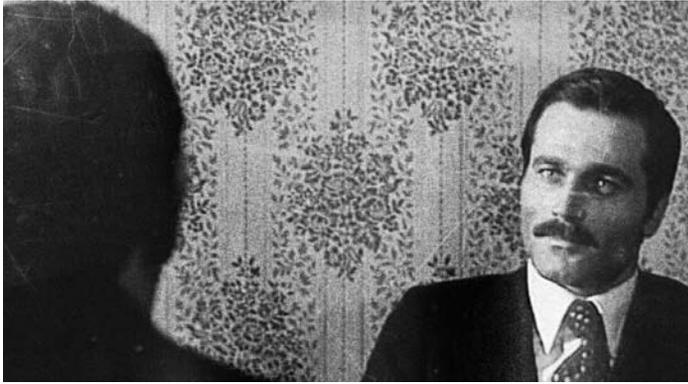
For Daney, the point was that "B cinema" - the only potential source of critical cinema *because* it bares the cinema at its most explicitly and grossly commercial - became a sort of *lumpen*-cinema. The second move, however, is taking up this *lumpen*-cinema as itself the material "effecting, under the mask of old forms (therefore without renouncing their popular character), a euphoric labor of deconstruction." As such, they "extenuate the habitual rhetoric of the western, to make of this overextension the equivalent of a negation."

<sup>03</sup> One of the films, Lenzi's *Il Trucido e Lo Sbirro*, plays this out in flawless gag: it opens as a western, wide vistas et al, before it's revealed that it is, in fact, merely a film being watched by Tomas Milian in Rome's infamous Regina Coeli jail.

<sup>04</sup> From *Cahiers du cinéma*, n. 26, October 1969. My translation.

But, leaving Daney behind, if the spaghetti western took its own generic conditions as its material, what, then, of the *poliziottesco*, which takes up this critical cinema as *its* own material? What does it mean to overextend the already negated-by-overextension? This is, I argue, a form of profoundly negative cinema, or what I call a *pseudo-cinema*. By *pseudo*, I don't mean false or sham. Rather, I draw my usage from a reading of the prevalence of the prefix in the work of Teodor Adorno ("pseudo-individuality," "pseudo-activity"), Guy Debord ("pseudo-totality," "pseudo-world apart", "pseudo-use," etc), and Siegfried Kracauer ("pseudo-luster," "pseudo-coherence," "pseudo-middle," "pseudo-reality," "pseudo-life," "While none of the writers explicitly lay out the specificity of this term, we can discern two relevant meanings across their manifold and non-identical deployments. First, and most obviously, as a description of an operative falsehood masquerading as adequate, a quality doggedly analyzed by all three writers. Second, however, and more importantly, I'd suggest that the *pseudo* designates the condition of the continued *production* of what was *already negated* and the continued presence of that negated material. The fallout of an incomplete negation, the *pseudo* is the ongoing operation of and *within* an evacuated form that can neither renovate that form nor halt its reproduction. It can merely proliferate, merely "over-extend." Its usage in the thinkers mentioned doesn't strike me as incidental, because it describes a crucial logic of capital in 20<sup>th</sup> century to which all three writers attended: first, that of the *incorporation of negativity into the plan of capital* (Keynes), especially in the cultural expressions and abetment of such incorporation, and, second, the necessarily bound other side, that of over-accumulation as such. What do I mean by overaccumulation? In Marx's work by 1859, accumulation (i.e. halted circulation) was no longer understood in the sense of "money as money" "piling up" (*Anhaufen*) in "a negative relation to circulation" yet capable of being plowed back in. That had been Marx's conception in 1857. Rather, in the sense he ventured two years after, in which money is understood *within* the commodity cycle, accumulation/over-accumulation becomes a piling up of use values side by side, unable to touch one another, as the hoard becomes not a pregnant pause in circulation but the prospect of its ongoing breakdown, its coming to condition the material landscape of circulation itself by means of increasing quantities of the "useless," the unincorporable, from humans to buildings to money itself. The *pseudo*, we might say, is the undergirding logic of this, but also, more relevantly for today, it is also the historical mode of appearance of this condition. And of course, in this way, it appears to us as the horror of the untimely: the obsolescent that cannot be demolished comes to dominate all the more, a terrible proliferating stuckness. But this would be to miss the point, for the *pseudo* carries with it its history. It comes out-of-time (that is, no longer being "adequate" to its time), not through a forgetting or coming undone from the present, but from an failure of decomposition, a frozen history cursing the present.

Back to the specificity of the *poliziottesco*: this pseudo-cinema develops through the *negation by extension* of two distinct modes of negativity. On the one hand, a *cinema of critique*, an engaged social-political cinema that's stripped out and leaves behind the ossified structures through which it had given voice. On the other hand, a *critical cinema*, the spaghetti western, which took *genre* itself as its motive material for repetition. For the *poliziottesco*, emerging in that cinema's still existing economic niche, looser generic framework (lone men, guns, notions of justice), and collapsing purposiveness, the repetition itself - a repetition already under the sign of



negation - becomes the matter at hand. The *poliziottesco* therefore derives from the emptied cinematic and economic space of two different modes of critical cinema, and it is in this voided, but extremely clustered, space that it explodes into productivity.

If these are the sources it inherits and “mines,” what are its operations, its techniques?

The first that must be stressed again is the economic drive without which these films simply wouldn't exist: the production of *one more of that thing that made a killing at the box office*. But what is the particular inflection of this injunction to produce more? It's what might be called the *injunction of minimal difference*. Quite simply: “See this film that cleaned up at the box office? Make that film. Make what is simultaneously that film and *not* that film. Make that film with the *minimal degree of difference necessary to establish it as neither identical nor different.*” In *poliziottesco* terms, this meant: find another blond man with a mustache who both is and is not Franco Nero. Shoot Naples like Rome, Rome like Milan, Milan like Torino. This minimal difference is important, because it allows us to grasp that a genre's possible overproduction and “decadence” is, as with the more compressed *filone*, already the case from the get-go: generic production is already *reproduction* and *overproduction* both. Why? Because there is not a difference in *kind* between the “early films” of a cycle and the late films. While there are more films entered into the cycle the longer it goes on, and hence the extension of those minor differences toward occasionally substantive drifts, the method of reproduction remains similar: *minimally different*. It is therefore fundamentally ordered around the form of the *too many*, of the *more of the same* which is, however, not the same.

Here, we should return to the question of evacuation. For seductive as it may (or may not) be, the sense of “mining the vein” misses the point and only

gets one half of the equation. The other half is a *flooding* of that seam of critique (in Daney's sense), in which every act of construction is an act of negation and vice versa. Nevertheless, preserving the geological figure, there is a far afield text that can help us think through this. In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler raises the figure of the *pseudomorph* ("false form"), a mineral compound that does not produce its own shape: "But these are not free to do so in their own special forms. They must fill up the spaces that they find available. Thus there arise distorted forms, crystals whose inner structure contradicts their external shape, stones of one kind presenting the appearance of stones of another kind."

Being Spengler, he meant this in a awful way, and the figure is deployed in order to attack the inadequacy of "the Arabian culture" as pseudomorphous. My intent is different, as I hope would be obvious, because if we consider this in terms of the understanding of the *pseudo* raised previously, the issue is clearer: it is the problem of this moving negation, this double motion of evacuation and construction. Because "distorted" as these forms may be, they nevertheless condition the terrain – and the "available spaces" – on which the next in the non-series will come. It is, then, a negation of prior form by addition to what was addition, *not* a revision or a subtraction. And while Spengler doesn't have the courage to admit this, it also casts backwards to reveal even those "organic" forms as themselves so many pseudomorphs, so many layers of "superficial modulation" and ornament.

This verges on the terribly abstract, so, concretely, how does this work itself out in the *poliziottesco*? We can think through those two specific inheritances outlined, the politically engaged cinema and the spaghetti western. Regarding the former, we witness an extreme compression: not merely the sense that audiences and characters alike are in on the rules of the game, but that the films themselves will perform their *generically requisite work* (i.e. showing the cop get frustrated by the system, thereby justifying his explosion) with an increasing level of detachment and haste. An example: In *Napoli Violenta*, Maurizio Merli's Commissario Betti is threatening resignation just *one day in* to his post in a new city, because they're already holding back his capacity to mete out justice... The incoherence arises because the *filone* has shifted emphasis, away from denouncing corruption toward the retribution that emerges when "politics fails." And so, as the essential elements shifts (from corruption scene to shoot-out), the time between the new "essential elements" is reduced, and the old forms that shaped the *filone* are crowded out. Critique has been reduced to a gesture that communicates the end of critique in the name of "going off the chain." And all that remains is that gesture, that face of determination and pleasure echoed in the audience that means little more than, *one more time, assholes...*

Crucially, though, the *filone* cannot actually ever undo the remnants of the *cinema d'impegno* in whose husk it took shape. It is its present encrustation of the past. It therefore continues to perform those previously formative encounters, but faster, impatiently, able neither to adequate its form to what it has already become nor to cut loose the mold which had articulated the figures of a populist, political cinema.<sup>05</sup> What, then, is the consequence of this? The dominant register of the engaged cinema was the problem of the political: how does one intervene against state and corruption? And in the dark key beneath which such films were made, the answer was almost always: one necessarily intervenes, but the system is rigged against you, and one cannot win. However, what remains of this inheritance in the *poliziottesco* is *merely* the sense that the political – as

05 A quick clarifying note: I don't think that audiences "suffered" through these moments, just waiting to get back to the bloody goods. No, the enjoyment and force gathers precisely in these interstices.

ethical intervention - cannot answer the problems that politics – as state apparatus – generates. In other words, “they are tying my hands!” In enacting again and again the scene of corruption without any sense that it can be legitimately critiqued, what emerges is a different kind of crisis, one of causality itself, as acts untether from grounding and the cinema explodes into a form of men’s melodrama, weeping very much included. All that remains of that scene of critique is nothing more than Betti’s smirk and a punch square in the face.

However, consider the other side: not the consequence of this missing recalibration to changed materials (i.e. the inability to drop the trappings of “critique”) but the desperate attempt to pull off what have been established as the prime operations of the *filone*. This is a problem we can see particularly in regards to the second major inheritance, the spaghetti western. Because in this case, the register at stake was that of commensurability, of the economic at such: the problem it poses is, how can one repeat minimally, across different national and historical settings? This register will collapse under its own weight, not because such a transposing repetition is impossible but, in fact, too possible. It generates the condition of the *pseudo*, as the critical is itself taken up as the material at hand, doubly negated by double (and triple and quadruple) overextension. The result is that the predominant fixation becomes not that of *reproducing the new* (the work of minimal difference) but, necessarily, by dint of sheer economic pattern, the *crowding of the old*, the lived remainder of the ex-new. It is, therefore, a deeply pseudomorphic problem. And, I insist, it is one that was, and only could be, transposed into the *problem of space itself*, of the built world, the city. Here, the technical form it will take is the *chase scene*. But what happens with this? A *filone* involves a huge range of economic capacity of its producers, from Z-grade to decent budget. But *all* must comply with the production of multiple chase scenes through the city. As such, the pressures of the market become directly visible, not because the films talk about economic crisis or strikes, but because through generally low budgets and compressed filming time, an enormous proliferation of *idiosyncrasies* and *repetitions* crystallize around the chase as such. To take a few examples of idiosyncrasies: in the clip I showed from *Violent Naples*, there is no correspondence between the part of the city shown from the angles in the car and outside; In *Bersaglio altezza uomo* (1979), an Italo-Turkish coproduction, the requirement for chases combined with an extremely low budget means that the majority of chase scenes are on foot. Lastly, in *Milan Trembles* (1973), *Milan Hates* (1974), and *Rome Armed to the Teeth* (1976), the same chase scene footage is used in all three films. A common enough procedure in genre cinema, except that here, it is used in *different cities*: the race through the periphery of Milan becomes the race through the periphery of Rome, and a chase *as such* uncouples from where it chases *through*. And yet, in the midst of films largely indifferent to their cartographic specificity other than varying location and tacking on a city name as a way to bolster regional ticket sales (24 *poliziottesco* films explicitly include the name of a particular Italian city in their title), when taken not as separate films but as a general stream, they “happen” to produce a tremendous document that captures the textures and temporalities of cities, even as it refuses to snap them into clear, mappable shape.

The theoretical approach which I’ve employed so far has a specific Italian correlate, from precisely the period of these films: *pensiero negativo*, “negative thought,” associated most closely with heterodox Marxist

architectural historian-theorists Manfredo Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari. An adequate account of this is far beyond the scope possible in this talk. Instead, five quick steps.

First, the Metropolis. For Tafuri and Cacciari, the Metropolis does not mean the large city, but rather “the postulate of the intrinsic negativeness of the large city,” as Tafuri puts it. It is therefore an account of the critical negativity born of the experience of the large city - those infamous shocks and defamiliarizations of modernity of which cinema was such a large part - and a wider form of negativity without which the city could not be thought. The Metropolis is the negativity of the large city both bound to and uncontained by the constraints of the city as such.

Second, the historical avant-garde played a key role in expressing, furthering, and endlessly circling around the negativity of the Metropolis. In the manifold and contradictory incarnations - Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, the Bauhaus, and on from there - one can detect the elaboration of this central problem: that of the relationship between abstraction and matter, between forms of thought and the unruly materials it alternately sought to rein in or break loose. Third, the full incorporation of that negativity into the plan of capital, such as in the Keynesian gambit. All that’s solid may melt into air, but that very melting comes to be the primary motor of territorial expansion, undoing of social forms, and the exploitation of crisis as the occasion to lay waste to dead weight in order to reroute labor into new forms. Capital learns, in short, to ride the negative tiger. In such a situation, the avant-gardes are revealed as not merely recuperated by capital but intrinsic to its processes, faced with a total negativity that they could not outpace, undermine, or withdraw from. Fourth, in the recognition of the inseparability of the plan from negativity, avant-garde practice - architecture, precisely - gives up on the idea of intervening into or shaping the plan. As Tafuri puts it, “Its crisis only comes at the precise moment in which, facing the reality of the Plan, the role of foreseeing or ideologically mediating the Plan ceases to exist.”<sup>06</sup> Such a crisis manifests itself, however, not in the cessation of construction but in the construction of *pieces*, present fragments of utopia or attempted negation that cannot influence the plan, merely populate it. And, I would stress in an extension of their thought, to *confirm the continued negativity of that plan* by constructing *only in* relation to it, be that antagonistically or opportunistically.

What, then, is the mode of construction proper to this? As a general form, it is the negative relation of thought and matter, a jarring incapacity to alter or halt. But let me offer a concrete example by returning to Rome, to where we started. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rome was positively cursed by the *plan*, from its incapacity to develop a coherent urbanist model to the hangover of Mussolinian planning. Of the many incarnations this took, most significant for this talk is the perennial problem of *abusivismo*, cresting in the years of the *poliziottesco*. “Abusivism” means, quite simply, illegal construction off or outside the plan, but tends toward unsanctioned hasty production, in recently emptied areas and literally within the shells of pre-existing structures, without regards to the quality of the housing produced or to the sustainability of those zones.

Taken in total, we can define the relation of Rome - and, I think fairly, the majority of other Italian cities, particularly those in the north which also faced a tremendous influx of southern labor in the years of the “economic miracle” - to “the plan” as follows. First, the need for the plan *in order to have the exception to it*. The profits of developers were possible *because there were*

06 From *Theories and History of Architecture*, “Note to the second (Italian) edition” [not paginated].

regulations and restrictions of construction, long-durée visions of expansion, and *because they ignored these*. But these developments were anything other than unwanted: wealth could consolidate and circulate only because the plan's exceptions, coupled with corrupt deals, produced greater differentials in land cost and building regulations, spurring building speculation and uneven levels of rent extraction. This points to the second general drift of the requisite failure of the plan: the *negation* of the still-present plan, never scrapping it but continually challenging it and undermining it through the excesses – that speculation, that sprawl - of the very exceptional production that the plan alone could make profitable.

What I am describing, therefore, is also the dynamic of the *filone*. I don't intend this metaphorically, not just because *filone* films may be cheap, cobbled together, stealing old designs, building worse on top of what already was, "just like" those abusive houses. Rather, the structural similarity - and historical correspondence - lies in the way that their repetition is precisely that which takes place after and through the negation by overextension of the guiding form, but which never scraps it.

What, then, of the relationship between what I've posed earlier, between the city as a negative form (the Metropolis) and the city as visual material (filmed Rome, Milan, etc)? After all, these films do relentless traverse circuits of poverty, and hence seem to drift toward a "reflectionist" model of social reflection: they roam an endless set of outskirts construction, container ports, abandoned zones, underpasses, slum periphery, and decommissioned industrial areas. In one of the *filone's* more pointed moments, at the staggering ending of *Milan Hates*, the shot will tilt upwards from the death of a subprole criminal in a pile of garbage to the cramped Milanese social housing block, not his necessarily but the generic same of those which he tried to flee through a spree of unremitting slaughter and theft.

On this front, however, I want to ask instead about the techniques by which such places get revealed, and the histories of those techniques: not a careful lingering gaze, not a slow track, but the excess and leakage generated in the film's very equivalent to the abusive and pseudomorphic. For in these films, it is in the insistent hurried chase that we cover territory, where small details, the pressing contradictions at hand, come to be glimpsed only in passing. And indeed, likely *not* glimpsed, barely caught, other than with a retroactive gaze and the capacity to freeze-frame. And yet, when one enacts that, in the mode of watching Roger Cardinal gestured towards, a different portrait of signs and data emerges.

To outline one version of what I mean, consider the continuous presence of insurrectionary and militant political graffiti in shots explicitly unconcerned with dwelling on such statements. In short, a different mode of writing on top of the already built, an angry, sloppy negative writing. Just like the inhabited vacancies and collapsing slums, these aren't the "point" of the films. They are "ornamental," as these images of writing are taken from the middle of a chase or from a shot in which the focus is on a conversation. But in so doing, the *poliziottesco* enacts the actual status of such condemnations. It recognizes them not as secondary in the sense of unheard, unimportant, or non-present, but as exactly concerned with the fundamental gesture of social upheaval: the possible roaring to the foreground of all that was kicked out of sight, into shadows, out to the periphery. Such a roaring to the fore, to the center, is precisely the premise and horror of ornament. It is not merely the lateral "sprawl" of *horror vacui*, but rather that of the supplementary becoming dominant, of form's being overwhelmed by surface: the



pseudomorph overwhelms the morph. Ornament throws off the mantle Ruskin assigned for it, in which its secondary qualities naturalize its secondary status, and instead, it makes those qualities – the necessary yet disavowed, the structural yet displaced – the very means by which it brings ruination to the field of focus itself.

Such an overthrow remains utterly withheld here, only caught in passing, only decades later.

And to be sure, there are films in the '70s, such as those of Ettore Scola, that aimed to make these spaces, and the political expressions within them, the prime object of sight and situated them in a historically grounded context. Such films may well be "better," and they do thicken an understanding of that distribution of life and non-wealth. But in the *poliziottesco's* inability to do this, in *not* taking that time but hustling ahead to the next fight, not to catch the perp but to simply continue the chase, in enacting spatially the transition of that evacuating passage from the critical to the pseudo, the *poliziottesco* belongs to a messy, bleak critique of repetition under the sign of a double negation that goes nowhere at all: negating, first, the prospect of transinstantial commensurability, and, second, the possibility of the built world as more than the crystallization of the pseudomorphic frenzy of the plan.

So to end on a simpler and more specific provocation, I want to suggest that these films, these deeply conservative, structurally fascist, nasty, sloppy, and fast films, elaborate the materials of a necessary and obscure critique *as much* as those of the much-fêted neorealist films of the '50s, and, more broadly, as other forms of modernist realism, even if they do not perform a certain kind of critique. How? What changed in those decades?

The difference is two-fold. First, the city has irrevocably changed. It has become the abusive city, the fragmented city, the catastrophe of the plan

raised to a fever pitch. It therefore *cannot be filmed as it was before*. Moreover, the guiding concepts that sought to detect the unseen of the city, its hidden-in-plain-sight and the cinematic forms adequate to those concepts and materials, have themselves entered the hollows of repetition. Second, the city, this *filone*, the metropolis – because here in the '70s, the three become crucially yoked together - *cannot* be understood in terms of single films, single works of art, that unfold within their specific limits a critique of the city. Rather, it can only be detected *across* films, through a *filone*, through spurts of overproduced pieces that unpack the collapse of rational production, a set of disaggregated yet minimally different pieces that constellate a historical order.

And it is for this reason that I argue, polemically, that this particular elaboration of a concept and critique of the city as lived site of repetition present in these cop films is *indifferent* to the aesthetic experience of the city that they create and record. That might inaugurate a line of thought – it lay at the outset of my questioning, indeed – and it must be attended to, but it runs *parallel* to the situation I detail. To make clear what has been hinted before: the fundamental problem of the *pseudo* (the material remainders of incomplete negation), which is the very problem of the metropolis in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (rather than in the period of modernizing shocks to the subjective system, i.e. mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup>), is one that is captured by the form-in-process of the *filone*, a form that only exists across time, that takes shape only through the accretions of its ornamental repetitions.

So yes, as individual films, they may be – in fact, they are - incoherent, violent, stupid, and highly repetitive. But taken together, as passages running through a period and a landscape evacuated but unable to stop constructing, they become something very different: a savagely clear portrait of incoherence, violence, and the stupidity of the reproduction of what has been. A frenzied, freezing portrait of what we more commonly call *history*.





# More or Less Art, More or Less a Commodity, More or Less an Object, More or Less a Subject — The Readymade and the Artist

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Alexi Kukuljevic

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What is Art? Ever since the nineteenth century the question has been posed incessantly to the artist, to the museum director, to the art lover alike. I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of Art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of art into merchandise. This process is accelerated nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. If we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification, then Art is a particular representation of the phenomenon – a form of tautology. We could then justify it as affirmation, and at the same time carve out for it a dubious existence. We would then have to consider what such a definition might be worth. One fact is certain: commentaries on Art are the result of shifts in the economy. It seems doubtful to us that such commentaries can be described as political.

— Marcel Broodthaers, from "To be bien pensant... or not to be. To be blind." 1975

**H**owever diminished by its triumphant and at times sordid history of reception, the radicality of the dada-esque gesture par excellence, the readymade, consists in its power of abstraction. Its challenge is not to the conventions of a specific medium, but, as Duchamp no doubt intended, to the aesthetic as such – that is, to the very question of aesthetic value. And it does so by forcibly collapsing the difference between art and the commodity: aesthetic value and value as such. The readymade shifts the question of aesthetic judgment, as Thierry de Duve argues, from the specific (is this or is this not a painting?) to the generic

(is this or is this not art?). The generic art object – an art which comes ready made – is made possible with the suspension of the specific qualities that serve as the material bearers of aesthetic value. The readymade, understood as an art object, introduces a gap into the art object itself which forces the separation between the specific qualities that make it the determinate thing that it is and its status as art which necessitates the indetermination of those very qualities.

The import of this shift *does not* consist in establishing the existence of art as a general concept to which various arts (poetry, music, painting, sculpture, etc) can be referred. But, rather, in opening up a *practice* of the generic as such. An inversion is thus effected in which one is an artist *because one is an artist* and not because one paints or one sculpts, etc. De Duve writes, “Whereas an abstract painting reduced to a black square on a white background is art only once you accept seeing it as a painting, a urinal is a sculpture only when you accept seeing it as art. Otherwise it simply remains a urinal. The generic seems to precede the specific.”<sup>01</sup> At the crux of the readymade is this tautological problem of what it means *to be an artist* once he or she is separated from the distinctive capacities that made one a painter or a sculptor. The artist becomes an artist *in the abstract*, in the generic sense, only by appropriating a split in the art object which the readymade foregrounds with a singular clarity precisely because it forces the encounter between art and the commodity. And it is this encounter with an object split that will require the artist to appropriate in turn the split in one’s own subjectivity. It is the negotiation of these two splits, I would like to suggest, that reorients artistic practice from the specific to the generic, framing the space to what is often called rather vaguely the post-conceptual.<sup>02</sup>

Although the readymade has often been read as a quintessentially subjective gesture (what Buchloh has referred to as foregrounding “intentional declaration over contextualization”<sup>03</sup>), I think, following a suggestive passage in de Duve, that it should be interpreted as a radicalization of the urge to objectivize the eye; it is thus the attempt to objectivate the subject in a object, which will in turn reframe the problem of the subject as a problem of ‘subjectivating’ the object – a problem that perhaps only becomes explicit in Marcel Broodthaers’ *Auseinandersetzung* with the legacy of the Duchampian readymade. Duchamp’s respect for Seurat’s scientific objectivism and the extreme rigor with which he attempted to mechanize the painterly touch is illustrative. Seurat’s attempt to reduce the hand to being a mere instrument of an eye that records the encounter with light – an eye, as De Duve puts it, “already encoded in the readymade discriminations provided by the paint manufacturer’s color charts”<sup>04</sup> – reduces the subject to the status of an impersonal record of the encounter with the object; the subject becoming a mere light recorder whose decisions have already be inscribed within the industrial process of the mass production of color (tubes of paint). Inserted into this industrial process the painter now chooses amongst an array of prefabricated colors and the painter’s touch becomes an effect inscribed within the industrial conditions that encode it. The problem of the readymade radicalizes this reduction of the subject. Although the readymade does result in the inflation of artistic decision (a problem that I shall return to shortly), it is important to see that this inflation of the subject is an effect of the attempt to eliminate, or better, neutralize, artistic subjectivity, treating the subject itself as an object along side objects. The readymade concerns a subject that has become an object.

01 De Duve, Thierry. *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 153.

02 Jeff Wall has given perhaps the most precise definition of this term. Since there are now no binding technical or formal criteria or even physical characteristics that could exclude this or that object or process from consideration as art, the necessity for art to exist by means of works of art is reasserted, not against the conceptual reduction, but in its wake and through making use of the new openness it has provided, the new ‘expanded field’. The new kinds of works come into their own mode of historical self-consciousness through the acceptance of the claim that there is a form of art which is not a work of art, and which legislates the way a work of art is now to be made. This is what the term ‘post-Conceptual means’ (“Depiction, Object Event” in *Afterall: 16* (Autumn/Winter 2007), 10).

03 Here Donald Judd’s formula, “If someone says its art, then its art...,” taken up by Joseph Kosuth in *Art and Philosophy*, provides the paradigm of the subjective interpretation. For Kosuth, art becomes an analytic proposition in which the artwork serves to establish the intentional claim of its maker. The work of art is thus a tautology, according to Kosuth, insofar as it merely serves to establish what is already contained in the intention of the artist who claims it as such. For Benjamin Buchloh’s dismantling of this position, see “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” (*October* 55: Winter 1990, 105-143).

04 *Kant after Duchamp*, 178.

Despite appearances the readymade is the least simple of things and like Marx's treatment of the fetish of commodities, is a thing abounding in metaphysical subtlety. If the readymade first and foremost has to be recognized as a commodity, this is not because it is merchandise. This is not Duchamp's problem, but that of Marcel Broodthaers. It is a commodity then not because it has a price tag, because it has been produced for the purposes of exchange – it is only in their later reproduction and edition (the irony did not escape Duchamp) that they become commodities, that is to say, merchandise in the strict sense. The readymade is a commodity because it *was* a commodity. And this temporal gap is established by its appearing *as art*. This temporal difference entails that the readymade has a negative relation to the commodity; it was, but *no longer* is. And yet it is nothing other than that thing that it was; it is not art (this is its challenge), but a commodity. Its sole content consists in being the thing it no longer is. Its appearance as a commodity now serves to negate this relation to the thing that it was. This is the strange temporality of the readymade; it has to not be the thing that it was.

The structure of the ready-made is parasitic on the structure of commodity itself, and reenacts in perverted form the drama of its fetishistic character. The peculiarity of the commodity as a measure of value consists in the structural contradiction that obtains between its use and exchange value. As a thing of use, the commodity serves a social purpose whether real or imagined and this utility is bound to the array of qualities that it exhibits and that inhere in its matter. And yet these uses are socially distributed, mediated, through acts of exchange that presuppose their quantitative commensuration, their equivalency and thus the liquidation in principle of their qualitative character. The dimension of the fetish, the peculiar allure of the commodity, consists in this negation of quality. In losing its qualities, it is as if this loss serves to magnify them, the commodity serving to frame their loss, bestowing the thing with an auratic halo.

The whole elaborately complex apparatus of the value form hinges on the formal operation that effects a slight of hand, a substitution in which things dawn a mask and appear to be precisely that which they are not, personifying value in and through the negation of their qualities. The commodity lives only by feeding off itself and its brethren, off their qualities, in a movement of perpetual cannibalization. Its matter is the barer of an exchange value whose existence requires the negation of the very matter on which it depends. In becoming a commodity things are gnawed to the bone. And the money form, the null sovereign of exchange, as Marx suggests, is the *caput mortuum* (the dead-head); money, the commodity of commodities, stripped of its qualities is the bone in itself – the skeletal remains, as Marx would have it, of living labor. And this lack does not appear as something subtracted, but something added to the commodity, thus giving it a sacred aura that enchants through its very intangibility. And like magic, no matter how many times you see the mechanism of the trick, the miracle of its appearance still enchants, for its allure is inseparable from the performance of the trick itself.

As the anonymous structuring background of all social life, capital does not require belief, but engenders it, like the magician's performance. As Althusser shows with an unsurpassable acuity, taking up Pascal's formula, it is the performance of the ritual that makes one believe: "kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe."<sup>05</sup> With capital, entry into the social-symbolic field is no longer a matter of *what* one believes, only *that one*

<sup>05</sup> Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation) in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 168.

believes. And one believes as long as one engages in the ritual act of exchange. The arch ritual of Capital, exchange, engenders a peculiar tautology – a belief in belief itself.

The mysticism of the commodity, which Marx maintains is structural and therefore in-eliminable feature, lies in this *negative transcendence*. Something in excess of the commodity's use (namely its exchangeability) appears only in and through that very use. The very appearance of the commodity, its fetishistic quality, consist in the fact that it appears *as that which it is not*. The metaphysical subtlety of the commodity – its fetishistic character – consists in the manner in which this negative transcendence serves to conceal what is in fact a social relation (exchange being a social relation that appears as a relation between things). Belief is thus a matter of what one does, the rituals one performs, and not what one thinks. There is no escaping this ritual. And critique, in my view, is inseparable from the kinds of rituals that one performs, not the exposure of the transparency of the ritual. The belief in pricelessness itself (not anything in particular of course, but pricelessness as such) is the most pernicious and insidious of ideological beliefs (the ground, we could say, at the risk of exaggeration, of all humanism).

In aping this structure, but perverting it, the readymade is at once more and less than the commodity. More insofar as it becomes a second order reification: a commodity, if you like, that exhibits, or performs, its own reification. It marks the space of art as the very limit of the commodity form. For the readymade only works (and it has indisputably worked its magic) insofar as it plays on art's parasitic relationship to belief. The readymade works only if one believes in art, i.e., if one believes in its difference, in its autonomy, from the mass production of commodities. Paradoxically it also serves to undermine this belief since the "belief" that the readymade demands the detachment of the readymade from "craft", and the specific qualities of a particular medium; the undermining of the belief in art's qualitative difference engenders a belief in art in general. As a belief, art is a social relation and the readymade exposes art's dependence on a social relation (the relation of judgment) which its appearance as art serves to conceal. In this manner, it would appear to render the process of reification transparent in miming its structure: reifying reification itself. This would be the readymade's putative function of disenchantment. Although the readymade is often interpreted quite legitimately as a critique of the claims of artistic autonomy (the separation of art and life), it functions only insofar as it reproduces the conditions of the separation in the same moment that it negates them. The readymade thus plays a double roll with respect to art. In playing this double roll, in playing art off the commodity and the commodity off of art, it is at once enchanting and disenchanting – both a negation of art and an expansion of its field. This is the essential ambivalence of the readymade, its insuperable challenge.

And this challenge can be interpreted in two ways. The challenge can be interpreted in a dandy-esque or skeptical manner (and Duchamp in 1913 during his time as an assistant at the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève avidly read Pyrrho).<sup>06</sup> In this reading, the readymade is neither aesthetic or non-aesthetic, but inculcates an indifference to aesthetic value (at least this was Duchamp's hope in making 'indifference' the very criteria of the selection of a readymade). It seeks to suspend (*epoche*) the operations of aesthetic judgment, engendering a kind of neutrality and cultivating an indifference to the very problem of the difference between art and life, as the stoic Pyrrho

<sup>06</sup> See Rabaté, Jean-Michel.  
"Duchamp's Ego" *Textual  
Practice* 18 (2) 2004, 221-231.

claimed indifference to being alive or dead. The separation effected by the object (its vertiginous status between art and life) serve to separate the subject from him or herself. In being selected and not made by the artist, the relationship between the eye and hand (*la patte*) is severed. The problem of art shifts from technique (as its focal concern) to wit (genius). Duchamp defines genius as the *l'impossibilité du fer*.

However, the challenge can also be interpreted more violently. The readymade, in this case, become paradigmatic of an anti-art gesture on par with the surrealist's enchantment with firing a gun into a crowd. The readymade stands for abolishing the sphere of art, challenging its pretensions to autonomy and exposing the institutional conditions that frame and legitimate art practice. The readymade then sets in motion a singular power of negation, focusing "art's" critical powers on its capacity to expose how the institution of art as an autonomous sphere is made possible through the exclusion of non-art. The readymade's subsequent inclusion within art, its institutionalization, stands for art's apparently unlimited capacity to reify the difference between art and non-art. Staged on this very difference, its power is thus seen as one of disenchantment, in which the art work's parasitic relationship on its former cult status, still animating the tendency towards painterly abstraction (e.g., Kandinsky's spiritualization of colour<sup>07</sup>), is itself challenged.

In staging itself on the gap between art and non-art, its power of abstraction consists in separating the artwork from itself: dis-identifying its appearance from what it is (a readymade is not the thing that we recognize: a urinal, a hat rack, a shovel, a comb, etc) and thereby separating thought from its object. It allows for a new conjunction between thought and the sensible, between appearance and how we recognize it, i.e., how we name it.<sup>08</sup> The sensible in not coinciding with itself allows thought to not coincide with itself, namely its object. The name serves as a locus of this disjunction, breaking the link between the object and its signifier. The readymade is art only insofar as it relates to that which it is not, a mere commodity. And yet this relation is not to a thing with qualities that could be used, as one encounters commodities in the market place. It is, to repeat, at once more and less than a commodity and thereby more and less than art, marking the empty site for *art in general*.

The readymade is the bone of culture (an interpretation that will not escape Marcel Broodthaers). This allusion to Hegel is apt, precisely because the readymade can stand in for art, serving this metonymical function, only by being identified absolutely with what it is not. The readymade as art is the *caput mortuum*. The bone is that most problematic of elements, for Hegel, whose being "in itself" signifies nothing for consciousness. Its sheer indifference to the dialectic of life and death (in life and in death the bone remains the same, utterly neutral) offers no image with which consciousness can identify. To pass off bone, as Hegel puts it, as the actual existence of consciousness "must be regarded as a complete denial of Reason."<sup>09</sup> And Hegel would no doubt judge those who judge the readymade to express the reality of art as harshly as those who regard the bone as their reality, i.e., the phrenologists. For this Hegel reserves, perhaps, the most violent passage in the whole of his corpus: "To reply to such a judgment with a box on the ear as in the case of a similar judgment in physiognomy mentioned above, at first takes away from the *soft* parts their importance and position, and proves only that these are no true *in-itself*, are not the reality of Spirit; the retort here would, strictly speaking, have to go the length of beating in the skull of

07 Thierry de Duve writes, "Pure Color was a regulative idea in Kandinsky's practice, and he felt obliged to justify it by giving it the ontological status of a living being; but for Duchamp it was flatly a thing, already made, a dead commodity" (*Kant after Duchamp*, 165).

08 This is no doubt close to what Jacques Rancière defines as the problematic complex of the aesthetic regime: "Art reveals a difference of the sensible from itself. And it makes the difference of the sensible from itself coincide with a difference of thought in relation to itself" ("What Aesthetics Can Mean" in *From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), 16). The conjunction of art and philosophy is necessary but not coincident as Rancière claims.

09 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Phenomenology of spirit*. Trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 205.

anyone making such a judgment, in order to demonstrate in a manner just as palpable as his wisdom, that for a man, a bone is nothing *in itself*, much less *his* true reality.<sup>10</sup> To those who deny reason to such a degree that the *logos* itself no longer has any force, one must resort to the fist or perhaps the club to prove one's point, acting as barbarically as the mind that one is confronting. And yet Duchamp's greatness lies in forcing this very convergence that entails the complete inconsistency of thought with itself.

Duchamp plays with and on the great fear summoned by the metaphysician, namely that of indifference – that in this confrontation with inconsistency the minimal difference that thought requires to distinguish itself will vanish, plunging it into an undifferentiated abyss. And Jean Paulhaun identified this most Empedoclean of inclinations with what he called the “terror” – the desire of an artist for a sign that would be its own sense. Since the sign itself reintroduces the gap (through its referential structure) that allows for its signification (its very function as a sign), the terrorist ends up destroying signification in the name of signification, i.e., in the name of pure meaning. The preservation of sense coincides with its abolition. Lacking any measure to moderate the difference between the sense and non-sense of art, the only evidence of art (real art) consists in its repeated destruction.<sup>11</sup> As Agamben writes, “The dream of the Terror is to create works that are in the world in the same way as the block of stone or the drop of water; it is the dream of a *product* that exists according to the statue of the *thing*.”<sup>12</sup>

However, the readymade proceeds in an inverse manner; rather than collapse of the distinction, it enforces a separation between the sign and the signified, as if to exacerbate the difference between the product and the thing *in the product itself*. The readymade could perhaps be said to mark a tendency in the object to resist its own “instrumentality.”

It is the object's hostility to the system of ends that Agamben reads in Grandville's illustrations and it is precisely this interpretation of the object, countering its own commodification, that informs his reading of the dandy of dandies, Beau Brummel. The materiality of the object does not resist through its use, but in its frustration of use. Precisely as the human attempts to seize upon the commodity's use, the object rebels against the intention for which it has been crafted. Precisely in the moment of possession, the object dispossesses the owner.

Duchamp often referred to the encounter with the readymade as a *rendez-vous*. It is at once deeply personal, a singular encounter of a singular life, but it serves to open the person to the impersonal which can be seized only through its appropriation. It dispossesses the owner of ownership and at the same time forces the owner to lay claim to the impersonal. It forces upon the subject *the task of impersonation*.

In rupturing the relation between the hand (*la patte*) and the work, the artist nevertheless remains its author, but as its author the artist relates to it as the Hobbesean sovereign relates to the subjects he impersonates. *The author is now the impersonation of the object*. Duchamp's eminent dandyism consists in translating what a figure like Beau Brummel already accomplished within the social field into the sphere of art proper.

The dandy already foreshadows the separation of the subject from its commitment to use, to utility, to the hand. Countering the bourgeois sanctification of labour, of work, the dandy seeks to separate himself from labour and its usefulness for the market. A dandy becomes a being that is essentially useless, trivial unproductive, reducing his self to the status of a

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> This is also what Alain Badiou, in *The Century*, has referred to, in a Lacanian idiom, as the *avant-garde's* passion for the real.

<sup>12</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. *The man without content*. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

mere thing to be ornamented; he becomes an object to himself in the same way that he is an object for others, living out his life, as Baudelaire put it, in front of a mirror. The dandy thus appropriates the process of reification itself, identifying himself with the empty shell of the surface, treating the world as an egg divested of its living potential. To quote Agamben, the dandy “must become a living corpse, constantly tending toward an other; a creature essentially nonhuman and antihuman.”<sup>13</sup> A spiritual automaton, striving to eliminate intentionality as the core determinant of the subject, the dandy places his self at the disposal of contingency and Agamben goes so far as crediting the dandy with the introduction of chance into the artwork, referencing Beau Brummel’s infamous folds in his cravat: “In the abolition of any trace of subjectivity from his own person, no one has ever reached the radicalism of Beau Brummel. With an asceticism that equals the most mortifying mystical techniques, he constantly cancels from himself any trace of personality. This is the extreme serious sense of a number of his witticisms, such as “Robinson [his man-servant], which of the lakes do I prefer?”<sup>14</sup> Dandyism, using the terms with which André Breton described Jacques Vaché, is always a matter of *desertion from within*.

The gap in the object must be sustained by a gap in the subject and only by inhabiting this gap does the artist appropriate her own inaptitude – what has often be referred to as the deskilling of the artist. We can now see how the ‘success’ of the readymade depends on a simultaneous inflation and deflation of the artist. An art that consist in the negation of its own quality can be sustained only by a subject that separates herself from its capacity to create, to make. Art touches upon its real to the same extent that the subject withdraws. The readymade shifts the scene from the work itself to the drama of the subject’s withdrawal, its self-dissolution – a drama initially marked by Duchamp’s own infamous withdrawal from the artworld and the myth real and fictional of his chess playing. Paradoxically the very exclusion of the artist’s hand from the work has the inverse effect of implicating her artistic subjectivity (the life of the artist). The artist can no longer be excluded from the work – not because she is its maker, but because she is its necessary effect. The author function is a product just as much as the work. Here we can think not only of Rose Sélevy or the aloofness of Warhol, but also the shamanistic practice Joseph Beuys or the self-travesty of Martin Kippenberger. To borrow the title of a text by Diedrich Diedrichsen on Kippenberger: the artist implicated by the work becomes a *Selbstdarsteller*.

The readymade ciphers an extreme contradiction. It is at once the result of an excessive asceticism with respect to artistic sensibility (the artist’s sensitivity for materials: the painter’s fetishization of color, the smell of paint: what Duchamp refers to as olfactory masturbation). The artist must separate herself from the practice that defines her. And it is precisely this separation that Duchamp already saw for example in the work of Seurat. And yet, this suppression of the hand of the artist (the artist as a specific technician defined by certain qualities) engenders an absolutization of the artistic subject as the subject that selects. The denial of the subject results in its inflation, just as the readymade’s purported negation of art results in the extension of its concept to everything designated as non-art. The readymade marks then a new relation of the subject to things, in which the thing inhabits a neutral space (between art and non-art), where the task is not one of supersession – as has been the now classical narrative of the avant-garde’s dialectic between transgression and recuperation – but of neutralization.

13 Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: word and phantasm in Western culture*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 50.

14 *Ibid.*, 53.

If Duchamp pursues the readymade for the sake of an aesthetic of neutralization, flirting of course with the impossible challenge of neutralizing the aesthetic, Marcel Broodthaers marks a third option that neither follows a model of critical transgression, or a model of neutralization – a model which I am tempted to call a model of substitution.

Broodthaers' work begins with a critique of the artistic pretension to either escape or neutralize the aesthetic. Dieter Schwarz highlights this problem when he differentiates Broodthaers use of appropriation from that of the readymade. Schwarz writes, "Even as it inserts an ordinary object into an aesthetic context, the readymade renders invisible its own concealment of the real object as an object of art."<sup>15</sup> Broodthaers seizes upon the manner in which the readymade conceals its own aestheticizing function under the guise of interrupting it. The readymade thus conceals the manner in which it widens rather than interrupts the aesthetic. By isolating this problem, he could distance himself from the dominant tendencies of his artistic conjuncture: pop, *nouveau realiste*, minimalism and, perhaps most importantly, conceptual art. Hence Buchloh writes, "As a pessimist of the intellect, he saw that the radical institutional critique of his late '60s peers would end in the mere expansion of the field of the exclusively spatial, plastic, and aesthetic concerns."<sup>16</sup>

Broodthaers does not occupy this new, post-conceptual, terrain cynically. His embrace of the aestheticizing function of art, like that of art's commodification, is conflicted, contradictory. And he makes this conflict into the motor of his practice, the essential problem of what it means to practice art generically. This is the import of his full embrace of the insincerity of the artist in distinction from the vocation of the poet and his repeated remythologizing of his decision to become an artist, which is always bound up, for Broodthaers with his abandonment of his vocation as a poet. For Broodthaers the art object's peculiar status, as a commodity whose selling point consists in the denial of its mere commodity status, occasions a split in the subject in which the artist is separated from the specificity of his or her practice (in his case, the specificity of poetry), but, nevertheless, is compelled to identify with the objects that come to define one's practice *as an artist*. The object at once foregrounds the subject who serves as its author and at the same renders this subject inaccessible. The object becomes a substitute that stands in for an absent subject.

And Broodthaers' early work, e.g., his use of mussels and egg shells, serve to mark the presence of a subject that exists only as an absence. The relation of this absent subject to the problem of Broodthaers' own identity is no where clearer than in the sculpture, *Pense-Bête*, included in his first exhibition at Galerie Saint-Laurent in 1964. The sculpture consists of the remaining copies of an edition of poems written by Broodthaers with the same title pressed into plaster. The essential tension of the piece, as he later notes, lies in the fact that the book of poems cannot be read without destroying the sculpture. The work thus literalizes a break between seeing and reading that had already animated Mallarmé's experiment in *Un coup de Dés*. Here we find the fully accomplished reduction of the sense of the poem not merely to its material inscription, but to its industrial inscription. The poem becomes a mere object, the reified product of the poet. Art in the abstract is the reification of this withdrawal. The sacrifice of legibility is the condition for the poem attaining the status of art as such. The prohibition consists then in the stubborn denial of legibility. The book of poem's legibility as art is bound up with negation of its status as poetry. And yet the author's

<sup>15</sup> Schwarz, Dieter. "Look! Books in Plaster!": On the First Phase of the Work of Marcel Broodthaers" in *October* Vol. 42 – Marcel Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs (Autumn 1987), 62.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

singularity “as both book-author and subject of a book prohibition,” as Rachel Haidu has suggested, remains, the imprint of his authorship visible in the fingerprints “left embedded in the plaster, a reminder of the name nowhere visible on the work.”<sup>17</sup> Here then the authenticity of the artwork is bound up with the prohibition of the poem’s sincerity, its desire to communicate.

Broodthaers’ career as an artist begins with a declaration of insincerity; his declaration of his ‘artishood’ becomes an exercise in public relations. And it is with his now infamous declaration of insincerity that Marcel Broodthaers announced his first exhibition as an artist, which he had printed on the folios taken from women’s magazines:

I, too wondered if I couldn’t sell something and succeed in life. For quite a while I had been good for nothing. I am forty years old... The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind, and I set to work at once. At the end of three months I showed what I had produced to Philippe Edouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie Saint-Laurent. “But it is Art,” he said, “and I shall willingly exhibit all of it.” Agreed,” I replied.... If I sell something he takes 30 %. It seems these are the usual conditions, some galleries take 75 %. What is it? In fact it’s objects.

The work, the objects, become the occasion of a complex staging of the artist’s self-presentation, a *mis-en-scène* which serves to frame and unframe, introduce and obscure the place of the artist. The artist operates within the conditions of the market and is thus insincere and yet, he or she operates insincerely within the market. To become an artist, for Broodthaers, demands the full adoption of this constitutive insincerity. The artwork stages the disappearance of the subject only to make it reappear in a new guise and under news conditions, namely the conditions of artishood. The suppression of the subject cannot do without a fiction of the subject.<sup>18</sup> Repeatedly restaging the fiction of his ‘becoming an artist’ Broodthaers makes the advent of art a complex staging ground for the presence and absence of a subject whose continued existence cannot be separated from the mechanisms that ensure its liquidation.

17 Haidu, Rachel. *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010), 52.

18 This is also the case, for example, with Frank Stella’s attempt to reduce painting to a near zero point, in which painting touches upon the status of being a mere object on the wall and thus not a painting at all. It is interesting that Stella stages himself in a photo taken by Hollis Frampton as man in a business suit by no means looking the part of the “artist.” The photo is also clearly staged, shot in a photographic studio. As a “studio shot” it clearly announces a shift in the problem of the studio (fetishized in the work of the abstract expressionists).







# The Persistence of the Aesthetic

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Robert S. Lehman

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nder the auspices of a conference dedicated to “The Art of the Concept” – that is, to the power of art to join with philosophy in the production of concepts – I propose to address the *persistence* of what in this framing has been excluded, or at least obscured. What persists – and what, I want to claim, has always existed only as persisting, constitutively imperiled but nonetheless effective – is the

*aesthetic*. The latter names the mark of finitude that becomes legible between 1735 and 1790, between the eclipse of classical rationalism foreshadowed in Alexander Baumgarten’s *Reflections on Poetry* and the provisional completion of the Kantian system in the third *Critique*.

This is also to say that the aesthetic occurs as an event in the history of philosophy between two attempts by philosophy to think the infinite – classical rationalism and Jena romanticism. It thus occurs between two attempts to think beyond what will be or what will have been the domain of the aesthetic. I want to underscore the place of the aesthetic in the history of philosophy – to locate it between the great pinchers of *romanticism* and *rationalism* – because doing so sheds light on the place of the aesthetic between *art* and the *concept*. Between these domains, the aesthetic interposes the affective, the corporeal, the particular – in short, all of those figures of finitude that persist within philosophy only under the sign of their cancellation. As an obstacle or as a channel, the aesthetic stands between art and the concept just as it stands between rationalism and romanticism.

If I understand correctly the motivation behind this year’s conference, it is to contest the centrality of the aesthetic – in effect, to contest the centrality of particular, sensual experience – to the philosophical discourse on art. The art of the concept, in rejecting any distance between art *and* the concept, would reject as well the aesthetic – as mediation or as obstruction – so as to articulate, immediately, the practices of art and philosophy. Bypassing the moment of specifically aesthetic experience, it would raise the artwork to the dignity of a philosophical truth.

To lay my cards on the table, I believe that this project is fundamentally misguided. More specifically, my suspicion is that an art of the concept – though it may dovetail in interesting ways with recent developments in continental metaphysics – can do no more than oscillate between rationalism and romanticism. And whatever their philosophical merits, neither of these standpoints leaves any real place for thinking the *specificity*

of art. In what follows, I will try to develop my claims through the staging of two conflicts between aesthetics, one the one hand, and the art (or arts) of the concept, on the other. The first will treat the aesthetic as it appears as an issue in the history of epistemology by looking at Kant's response to the so-called aesthetic rationalism of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school, and specifically to the latter's "perfectionist" view of beauty. The second will focus on the aesthetic as an issue in the philosophy of art by examining some romantic attempts to move beyond the aesthetic. In each case, my aim is to demonstrate the necessity of the aesthetic to the preservation of a space for art.

### Against Perfection

Immanuel Kant addresses aesthetic rationalism in the third and longest moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. Here, his stated aim is to explicate the *relation* of purposes in a judgment of taste – that is, he wants to account for the relation of the judging subject to the object judged, and specifically to the object judged beautiful. His conclusion – and this is probably familiar – is that judging an object beautiful means judging its "form of *purposiveness* insofar as it is perceived in the object *without the representation of a purpose*."<sup>01</sup> In other words, when we judge an object beautiful we judge it as exhibiting an order suitable to our cognition; but because the presence or absence of this order is only registered subjectively – through the necessarily subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure – we are never justified in treating this order as the result of an intentional act, or what Kant refers to as the result of causality through a concept.<sup>02</sup>

The third moment of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* demonstrates that a judgment of taste is not based on a *concept* of what the object judged is – formally or finally – but only on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure that attends it. It thus expresses in the clearest terms the distinction that motivates the *Critique of Judgment* in its entirety – the distinction between conceptually determining judgment and merely reflective judgment. Without this distinction, the need for an *a priori* principle of judgment would never arise. In a sense, then, the third moment locates us at the heart of the third *Critique*. And here, I think it is significant that many of the arguments Kant develops in the third moment were initially included in the *Critique of Judgment*'s unpublished introduction, where they served to frame the text as a whole.

Again, it is in this context that Kant develops his challenge to aesthetic rationalism and, specifically, to the latter's "perfectionist" view of beauty. For aesthetic rationalism, to judge an object beautiful is to judge it as exhibiting to the senses its *perfection* as an example of what it is. Even if we stop here, with this purely formal characterization of beauty *qua* perfection, that is, even if we bracket the question of what, exactly, it means to call a thing "perfect," we can still see where Kant's disagreement with aesthetic rationalism must lie. For aesthetic rationalism, Kant writes, "an aesthetic judgment...would always be a cognitive judgment about the object, because perfection is an attribute [*Bestimmung*] that presupposes a concept of the object."<sup>03</sup> Calling a horse, or a house, or a painting "perfect" requires a concept of what this thing is or ought to be. Aesthetic rationalism thus collapses the distinction between cognitive and aesthetic judgment.

01 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 84; 5:236. As is standard practice, this text is cited by the pagination of this translation followed by the volume and pagination of the German *Akademie* edition.

02 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 64-65; 5:220.

03 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 416; 5:227.

Kantian aesthetics lives on this distinction, and so it lives only insofar as it is able to distinguish itself from one art of the concept: aesthetic rationalism. Of course, nothing I have said indicates that the choice between Kantian aesthetics and aesthetic rationalism should be grounded in anything more than our predilections, and so, appropriately, that it should be anything more than an aesthetic choice. This might be true, but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that the stakes of this choice are insignificant. The challenge to aesthetic rationalism that Kant develops, the challenge to the seemingly plausible notion of beauty-as-perfection, is absolutely central to the formation of the critical system and thus to modern epistemology in its entirety. To see why this is the case, we first need to take a short detour, to follow back to its origins aesthetic-rationalist perfection.

For the purposes of my argument, the notion of perfection that becomes central to aesthetic rationalism receives its most clarifying definition in the correspondence between Gottfried Leibniz and Christian Wolff that begins in 1704 and continues until Leibniz' death in 1716. Leibniz, who was thirty years older than Wolff, undertook this correspondence during a period of anxiety regarding his own philosophical legacy – this is the same period of intellectual labor that gave us *The Principles of Nature and Grace* and *The Monadology*, both of which offer condensed statements of Leibniz' views intended to reach a broader audience. Wolff, who presented himself to Leibniz as a disciple, most likely appealed to the older philosopher as another way to ensure that his work would survive his imminent demise. My point is that in the letters between Leibniz and Wolff, we can see the forging of what is intended to be a lasting philosophical system. And aesthetic rationalism is one of its branches.

In response to Wolff's request that he explain to him his concept of perfection, Leibniz writes that "the perfection about which you ask is the degree of positive reality, or what amounts to the same thing, the degree of affirmative intelligibility, so that something more perfect is something in which more things worthy of observation are found."<sup>04</sup> Leibniz ends his letter here, with this somewhat puzzling double characterization: perfection is to be understood *extensively*, through its success at integrating a number of distinct marks such that it presents to the mind "more things worthy of observation." And it is to be understood *intensively*, as concerning a thing's *degree* of positive reality, or its *degree* of affirmative intelligibility. The former – the "extensive characterization" – is easier to grasp, since it anticipates the familiar celebration of "unity in variety" or "identity in multiplicity" that we find in neo-classicism. If something presents us with a multiplicity of things worthy of observation while remaining self-identical – that is, while remaining one thing – we take pleasure in its perfection.

It is tempting, I think, to interrupt Leibniz here, and to ignore the intensive characterization of perfection, which, in any case, sounds like a relic of scholasticism. So, compare Leibniz assertion that perfection describes a thing's "degree of positive reality" with Aquinas' claim five-hundred years earlier that "a thing is said to be perfect in proportion to its actuality."<sup>05</sup> Leibniz' willingness to translate the metaphysical concept of "actuality" or of "reality" into the epistemological concept of "intelligibility" helps a bit, but it remains hard to shake the sense that what we are dealing with is only a holdover from an earlier moment.

But things are more complicated. Wolff responds to Leibniz' definition of perfection with another letter, and a plea for clarification. Is it really true, he wonders, that "more things worthy of observation occur in a healthy body

04 G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 230.

05 Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings: Volume 1*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 37.

than in a sick one," though "a healthy body is judged more perfect than a sick one."<sup>06</sup> Presumably, the question originates in a simple mathematical operation. A "healthy body" – which we may call perfect – comprises a collection of properties worthy of observation. A sick body includes these properties, but it includes something else as well: the source of its illness. Is it not true, then, that this additional property integrated by the sick body in fact makes the sick body more worthy of observation than the healthy one?

Leibniz reply is telling, and it goes some way toward unpacking his notion of "affirmative intelligibility":

One shouldn't doubt that there are more things worthy of observation in a healthy body than in a sick one. If everyone were sick, many remarkable observations would cease, namely, those constituting the ordinary course of nature, which is disturbed in disease; the more order there is, the more things worthy of observation there are. Imperfections are exceptions that disturb general rules, that is, *general observations*. If there were many exceptions to a rule, there would be nothing worthy of observation, but only chaos.<sup>07</sup>

When we take pleasure in a vision of perfection, we take an interest in the general rules that provide the distinct properties of a thing with their principle of order, and not with those properties for their own sake. To describe perfection as a measure of "affirmative intelligibility" means just this: an object is perfect to the degree that it expresses the general, intelligible rules that determine it. The sick body is unworthy of observation – or, as Leibniz clarifies, of "contemplation"<sup>08</sup> – because it presents us with "exceptions" that impede our mental movement from particular to general, or from object to rule. Not only do these exceptions fail to provide us with pleasure, Leibniz writes; in their stubborn particularity, they are rather the source of "nausea."<sup>09</sup>

With regard to aesthetic-rationalist perfection, we can draw two (related) conclusions: First, the pleasure we take in perfection – or in beauty – is a pleasure that comes from encountering a particular thing that *qua* particular invites an uninterrupted movement beyond it, a movement to a general rule or concept. It is in this light that we can read one of Leibniz scattered references to actual art, this time from the *Principles of Nature and Grace*:

Music charms us, even though its beauty consists only in the harmonies of numbers and in a calculation that we are not aware of, but which the soul nevertheless carries out, a calculation concerning the beats or vibrations of sounding bodies, which are encountered at certain intervals. The pleasures that sight finds in proportions are of the same nature, and those caused by the other senses amount to something similar, even though we might not be able to explain it so distinctly.<sup>10</sup>

In other words – still Leibniz' words – "the pleasures of the senses reduce to intellectual pleasures known confusedly."<sup>11</sup> Art, then, for Leibniz, obeys the rationalist ideal of knowledge, which prescribes the gradual translation of the "confused" into the "distinct," which is synonymous with the translation of limited, spatio-temporal perceptions into timeless, aperspectival knowledge. And here we can see the thread that connects – through however many intermediaries – the nascent aesthetic rationalism of Leibniz to Hegel's completed philosophy of art. The latter slows the process by which the mind digests artistic particulars – it draws the process out over thousands of years of world history – but the nature of the movement from the sensual to the intelligible, or from art to the concept, remains effectively unchanged.

06 Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 231.

07 Ibid.

08 Ibid., 234.

09 Ibid., 232.

10 Ibid., 212.

11 Ibid.

The second conclusion we can draw – and this is really just the inverse of the first – is that the particularity of a thing, insofar as it is anything but the thinnest veil for the general, is *nauseating*. Inassimilable particularity disgusts the observer. It is no accident, then, that this particularity is figured in the letters through the example of the sick body.

Through the concept of perfection, aesthetic rationalism prescribes the overcoming of the aesthetic, at least insofar as the latter describes the particular moment of sensual experience. With this, we can return to Kant.

In the third *Critique*, Kant rejects the rationalist equation of beauty with perfection. He does so, however, having already in the first *Critique* rejected the entire rationalist order of explanation through which the concept of “perfection” is established: the reduction of the sensual to the intelligible, or the translation of the one into the other. At stake here is nothing less than the distinction, so vital to the critical system, between the “receptivity of impressions” and the “spontaneity of concepts,” or between the intuition and the understanding. These two faculties, Kant writes, “cannot exchange their roles. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can cognition arise. But on this account one must not mix up their roles, rather one has great cause to separate them...”<sup>12</sup> The difference between these two faculties is a difference of kind, not of degree, though this has not stopped ostensibly sympathetic readers of Kant – from Maimon to McDowell – from trying to improve critical philosophy by locating for these faculties a common origin. Nonetheless, to treat sensibility as though it were merely confused cognition is to deny the autonomy of spatio-temporal experience – to deny, therefore, the human standpoint.

Only from this standpoint is the encounter with *irreducibly* particular things possible, and so – Kant claims – only from this standpoint is the experience of beauty possible: “Beauty [only holds] for human beings, that is, beings who are animal and yet rational, though it is not enough that they be rational (for example, spirits) but they must be animal as well.”<sup>13</sup> A judgment of beauty can be made only of particular things, and it can be made only by finite creatures affected by these things. Purely rational beings – spirits, or angels – see the world too infinitely. They move at once from particular to universal, and in this movement, the particular – the locus of aesthetic pleasure – is lost. In Kant’s language, they are unable to *linger*.

The pleasure in the beautiful that Kant denies to purely rational beings, the pleasure that he attributes to the harmonious interplay of the faculties, and that he reveals to be another name for the “feeling of life,”<sup>14</sup> this pleasure must at the same time be a pleasure in the disunity of the faculties, and so a pleasure in the very fact of being finite. It is, then, the pleasure that comes from not being a rationalist.

And here, we can move from aesthetics as an issue in modern epistemology to aesthetics as an issue in the philosophy of art.

### No Judgment without Art

Where no aesthetic judgment exists – that is, where no autonomous realm of sensual experience exists – art cannot exist either, provided that we understand art as a category made up of irreducibly particular things. This is where Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* leaves us. I want to ask, though, if the *converse* of the Kantian claim could also be true. Could we say that while

12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193-194; A51/B75-76. This text is cited by the pagination of this translation followed by pagination of the A and B versions of the German *Akademie* edition.

13 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 53; 5:210.

14 *Ibid.*, 52; 5:204.

art – as something other than the concept – depends on the autonomy of the sensual, conversely, *the autonomy of the sensual depends on art?*

Before trying to answer, we should pause to acknowledge that this binding of art to the sensual has been challenged by philosophers as well as by artists, most directly by the theorists and practitioners of so-called “conceptual art.” Here, I am thinking primarily of the moment of “pure” conceptual art characteristic of the work of Joseph Kosuth and the Art & Language group, and the claim that I associate with them that “the actual works of art are ideas,” and so are not objects of aesthetic experience.<sup>15</sup>

I do not have much to say about conceptual art, first because it never really existed, at least not in the way that it represented itself. Kosuth, for example, has produced some *art* – some particular objects of experience – and he has produced some *ideas* – some fairly bad art theory. The notion that the latter could stand in for the former has become a large part of his legacy, unfortunately. The second reason that I do not have much to say about conceptual art, though, is that the project to which it lays claim unfolds according to a logic that was articulated with much greater precision a century and a half earlier, during the romantic period. It is in the writings of the romantics that art is called on to take over from philosophy the labor of the concept, and thus to move beyond the realm of the *merely* sensual. Only within the horizon established by the romantics does Kosuth’s pronouncement on “the end of philosophy and the beginning of art” take on meaning. More exactly, for the romantics – and I am thinking of the Schlegels, Novalis, and the young Schelling – art names the operation through which the sensual and the conceptual become one. It appears as the solution to the problem of the aesthetic, where the aesthetic marks the difference between art and the concept.

No doubt, this tendency of aesthetics toward its own overcoming through the artwork is anticipated in Kant’s own writings. Famously, these writings exhibit a good deal of uneasiness with fine art. As a product of technical skill, and thus as an intentional object, a work of art can never occasion a *pure* aesthetic judgment. A painting is always a better or worse example of painting; a lyric is always a better or worse example of poetry. Through these works, “perfection,” which Kant was previously so careful to distinguish from “beauty,” returns as a problem for aesthetic judgment. So, Kant writes, when we encounter a work of art, “we have to look beyond the mere form [of the thing] and toward a concept.”<sup>16</sup> Fine art pulls Kant toward his own philosophical past, toward aesthetic rationalism and so toward the *concept*.

At the same time, however, it pulls Kant in another direction. It pulls him toward the confluence of the finite and the infinite characteristic of romantic *art*. This confluence is figured only cryptically in the third *Critique*, in the articulation of lawful order and spontaneous creation that Kant attributes to the artistic “genius.” For the next generation of philosophers, however, Kant’s notion of genius will reveal a possibility hitherto barred by critical philosophy: the possibility of the subject externalizing its freedom – which is, strictly speaking, *infinite* – in a *finite*, intuitable object. With this possibility in mind, August Schlegel can write that “when in an artistic work body and spirit merge in perfect harmony, the merely animalistic disappears as well as the merely rational, and the ideal, the truly human, the divine, or whatever expression one wishes to use, emerges.”<sup>17</sup> We can hear in this remark an echo of Kant’s characterization of beauty – beauty is for those creatures who are neither *merely* animalistic nor *merely* rational – but, for

15 Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 3.

16 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 180; 5:312.

17 Quoted in Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 80.

Schlegel, this is true of the artwork only insofar as the distinction between the animal and the rational is overcome in favor of a “perfect harmony.”

Already in Kant, then, and far from fortifying the autonomy of the sensual, the products of fine art seem to point to the dissolution of the sensual through its translation back into the concept or its projection forward into the romantic work. This double dissolution exists within the aesthetic as an essential possibility. But this possibility, I want to claim, arises only insofar as art opens a gap between itself and its other, or between art and the concept. And this gap – between art and the concept – is what the romantics, somewhat paradoxically, call on art to close.

In other contexts, I have tried to make this point by turning to the early writings of Alexander Baumgarten, and specifically to his *Reflections on Poetry*.<sup>18</sup> In this text, where aesthetics is first named, we can perceive the *interruption* of the rationalist continuum, the splitting of the sensual from the intelligible that Kant would inherit, and the role played in this splitting by art in general and by poetry in particular. All of this is clear only with the benefit of hindsight. There is no indication in the *Reflections* that Baumgarten sees his project as anything but an extension of the Leibnizian-Wolffian program and a demonstration of the “most amiable union” linking rationalist philosophy to Horatian poetics.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, the presence of poetry in this text forces a decision, a decision marked in Baumgarten’s short discussion of the philosopher and the poet.

Both of these figures make use of language, Baumgarten notes, the philosopher no less than the poet; however, the former – the philosopher – “presents his thought as he thinks it. (...) He has no special interest in terms, so far as they are articulate sounds, for as such they belong among the *things perceived*. But he who presents sensate subject matter is expected to take greater account of terms.”<sup>20</sup> Unlike the philosopher, the poet – “he who presents sensate subject matter” – is responsible not just for what he says but for the form in which he says it. The particularity of his language is more than just a vessel for a non-sensual truth; it is his language’s essential quality. As such, “it presupposes in the poet [the presence of] a lower cognitive faculty”<sup>21</sup> – *lower but distinct*. And it is by means of this lower faculty that the “science of perception, or aesthetics” is constituted.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever his intention in composing the *Reflections*, Baumgarten hollows out the space that, fifty years later, will be occupied by the modern, finite – essentially Kantian – subject. But this inaugural gesture first appears as the effect of a distinction between two uses of language – the poet’s and the philosopher’s – and of the irreducibility of the former to the latter. And this is what I mean in saying that the autonomy of the sensual might depend on art. The autonomous-sensual – what I called a moment ago “the human standpoint” – emerges only through the separation of “things perceived” from “things known.” Poetry stages this separation; the modern subject – through Kant – inherits it.

And modern aesthetics inherits it as well, but it also inherits this notion of the artwork as divided internally between itself and its other. Just as the subject is both animal and rational, the poem, for example, is both *art* and *concept*. “Hence,” Baumgarten notes, “aesthetics which treats of [this] presentation is more extensive than the corresponding part of logic.”<sup>23</sup> The latter can satisfy itself with an attention to the conceptual in isolation from “things perceived,” but aesthetics confronts a certain confusion. This confusion is registered by Kant in his oxymoronic designation for judgments of fine art – they are “logically conditioned aesthetic judgments” – as well as

18 For longer discussions of the aesthetic sequence initiated by Baumgarten, see my “Between the Science of the Sensible and the Philosophy of Art: Finitude in Alain Badiou’s Inaesthetics” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 15 no. 2 (2010): 171-185, and “Abstract Pleasures: Romanticism and Finitism in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens” *Modern Philology* (forthcoming 2012).

19 Alexander Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 36.

20 *Ibid.*, 78.

21 *Ibid.*, 77.

22 *Ibid.*, 78.

23 *Ibid.*

by Hegel – albeit with different aims – when he locates *within poetry* the passage “from the poetry of imagination to the prose of thought.”<sup>24</sup>

The co-presence in the work of art of both art and the concept is never stable, and as such it determines the tendency of modern discourses on art to move toward one pole or the other, to reduce art to the concept – as prescribed by rationalism – or to imagine the reconciliation of art and the concept in the absolute work – as envisioned by romanticism. The latter at least has the merit of retaining both sides of the distinction, but only insofar as the distinction itself has been abolished and art has become – surreptitiously – the name for a grander philosophical or religious or political project. And obviously these “romantic” projects extend far beyond the nineteenth century.

What I am claiming, though, is that the apparent need for a romantic or rationalist art of the concept only arises insofar as art separates itself from the concept, and in this separation opens the space for the modern subject. And this is why, if we are interested in what Nathan Brown referred to in his introduction to “The Art of the Concept” as “the conceptual co-articulation of art and philosophy,” we need to attend equally to art and philosophy’s *aesthetic disarticulation*, a disarticulation that shadows every experience of every work of art. We need to attend, then, to the work as what interrupts the observer in his movement from art to the concept; or that frustrates the observer in her attempt to bring the two together under a shared heading.

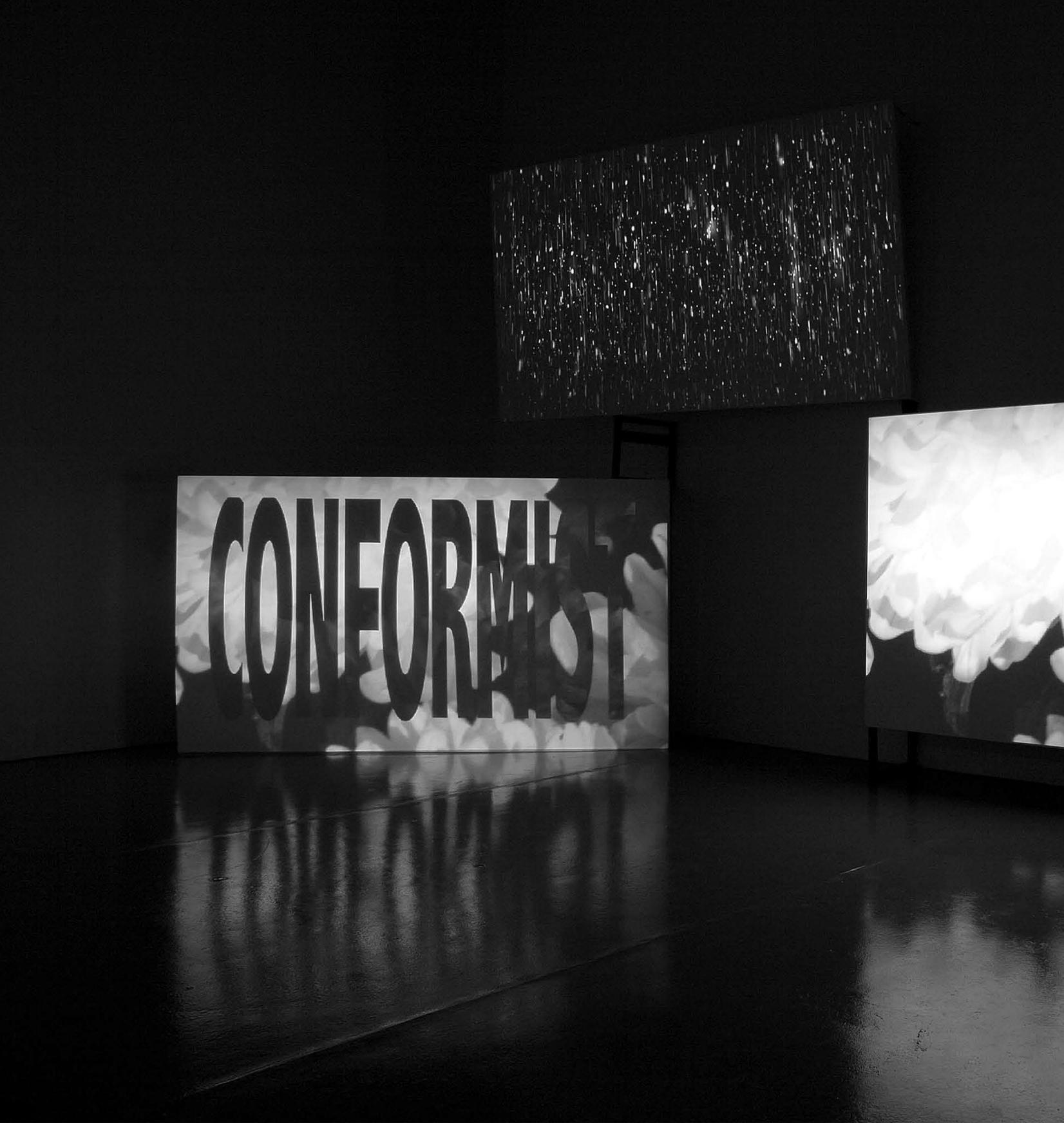
As a way of concluding, I want to point out that we can find this interruption or frustration *thematized* in any number of post-war artworks, and precisely at those moments when they seem to locate themselves beyond the purview of the aesthetic: In Ad Reinhardt’s “ultimate” paintings, for example – the chromatic black paintings he completed from 1954 until the end of his life – which resist the aesthetic through purgation, through the elimination of figure and color in favor of what Reinhardt called a “colorless” square. Or in Warhol’s “cold, ‘no comment’” silkscreens,<sup>25</sup> which figure the interchangeability of particular images through their serial repetition, and thus the reduction of each image to a notion of “image in general” (in the sense that each of the fifty “Marilyns” in the *Marilyn Diptych*, for example, should reduce to the “original” publicity still from *Niagara*).

In the case of both of these artists, however, it is the presence of what Warhol understood as “surface accidents” – a source of Leibnizian *nausea*, perhaps – that prevents the *particular* work from passing over into or reconciling itself with its own, *general* concept. These accidents can be literal accidents – as in the streaking or variations of shading that make each Marilyn, or each soup can or electric chair, so easy to distinguish from the others – or they can be the result of a singularly rigorous practice – as in the barely perceptible cruciform shapes that inhabit Reinhardt’s last paintings, which testify to the minimal difference between surface and depth and refuse attempts at photographic reproduction. The effect is more or less the same. These “surface accidents” make manifest in the artwork the breach that separates art from the concept.

But also – and this is more fundamental – they remind us of the need to see or hear, read or experience, the work itself; and thus they remind us of the chasm that separates each work from any general rule or essence. The aesthetic is the name of this chasm, just as it is the description of a specifically human structure of experience.

24 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89.

25 Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006



**Amanda Beech**

***Sanity Assassin*, 2010**

**22 min with score, three channel projections with  
sculpture**

**Installed at Spike Island Bristol 2010.**

Photo: Stuart Bunce



# Traversing the Paradigm Concept without Difference, Image without Art.

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Amanda Beech

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## Context

**T**his essay, first delivered as a paper, was set performatively in parallel with a screening of the video work *Sanity Assassin*, 2010. The video work explores the operations of critique and as they are configured around conceptions of subjectivity, image and space. Moreover, this essay and the video work looks to confront the ways in which process as artistic method operates as the 'figure' for a critique, which results in a type of non-foundational theism of the image. The work and the essay then set to question knowledge as a processional operation and how this discloses new and worrying idealisms at the heart of knowledge itself. The essay refers to these encounters with knowledge throughout, recognizing that they circulate around more or less coherent perceptions of subjectivity and meaning. The video work is forceful and committed to exposing the problems of our identification with reality as a mark of achieving knowledge-power ascendancy. As much as the video performs out these problems so does the essay as it condemns the commitments that have hitherto operated as the defining beliefs of a critical artistic practice. Whether these other practices claim an interest in critique that is not of any significance here. Moreover, this essay and the video are focused on how standard methods and commitments are embedded within artistic practices both within the work and the peripheral discussion that satellites them. In that sense the essay relies upon an axiomatic approach to art, that is not located in any formal identification of practice, but moreover in a problem of belief, attitude and method.

## Text

The non-instrumentalised art work has often been discussed as configuring a non-relational self-producing space, unbound from the constraints of a regime of causality. In this sense, it has come to symbolise an image of freedom from law; a pre-political state of infinite and dynamic uncertainty, openness and flux. This is how we characterize critical art as we understand it today. However, as we know, this figuration of the infinite and the infinitely possible, remains tied to particular axioms and paradigms of meaning that constrain this art towards an 'ideal functionalism' asserted in art's ability to mend society or to produce new and better forms of life. This constraint is evidence of art's predilection for the paradigm and this articulates a 'spontaneous philosophy of artists'. Here, despite the promise of a radical unbinding from normativity and the status quo, we see the same paradigms reasserted as compliant, conservative and hard proof that art is unable to think beyond the existing set of conditions that define its (human) agency. A concept of art such as this is figured at art's moral, aesthetic and spatial centre. It is the category of the uncategorisable, or the self-satisfying pleasure, that we can call art's 'crisis of crisis'. Aesthetics and philosophy have shared and produced this same paradigmatic reading of the art work and in doing so have forced a particular ethics of artistic practice that we understand now more than ever to define the normativity of critique.

If such paradigms, that are metered out in standard forms of art, aesthetics and philosophy, are not a necessary form of power for images, in that they might be detached from our understanding of the political, then could we consider how images without such paradigms could register power in material form? What would such power constitute and what are its consequences for both society and art? What concept of the image would refuse the organizational, moral or spatial impulses that have characterized art as we understand it? What we must ask here is not simply a question of how art produces or generates thought, nor how thought produces the sensory. Such internal observations on the rhetoric of the image, whilst being pertinent, instead must be understood in the context of a larger problem.

Instead, I would offer the dynamic of the 'thought-image' to consider the force of materials as condition of the concept. Artworks are thus sites of force and statements of fact. This demands that we examine how art can be understood as impositional, propositional and demanding in its exhibition. But can we accommodate the concept of such an art without the insistent self-consciousness, the 'real as reference' or the doxa that encodes art in the degenerative terms that I have laid out? In order to move these myths to one side, we must turn to the question of how science can be understood with the image; that is, without the predilection to condemn the image as a representationalist problem. Such questions demand a re-thinking of art, aesthetics and philosophy; the thought that thinks them and the implications of concept as connected to the operations of image-force.

## Strategic Learning

It is clear that the dimensions, spaces and epistemologies that define and locate artistic critique share a common parlance with certain theoretical strategies encountered in philosophy, and that in this commonality they idealise certain *methods* where critique must be performed and *figures* upon which a theory of critique must be based.

The ethics that have been substantiated and underscored through this philosophy of art have secured its political foundation and social habits. Here we can see the following tendencies that are the legacy of a particularly avant-gardist conception of a politics of aesthetics:

- *Spatial*: The artwork is made distinct from the political field; and because of this it achieves ascendancy in the political, for politics. (Theories of autonomy and heteronomy that are configured in a dialectical bind.)
- *Aesthetic*: The less visible or more virtual an artwork is then the more freedom it accrues to escape the ruthless normativity of a dominant system. (Theories of ambiguity and inaesthetics in a verticalist hierarchy of aesthetic category form.)
- *Moral*: The artist understands that the consistent and prevailing mechanism of power is dominance writ large as global capital, as well as specifically governmental policy and Statist interests. (This is a theory of the individual/private first imagined and then pitted against a standardised version of a faceless and abstract power.)

A concept of art that is capable of producing another logic is challenged by this sustained method of critique within these categorisations.

But what backgrounds all these operations is a theory that organises difference. Its role has been to imbue art with an essential alterity. This is the principle that for art to be Art it must embody within it a capability to be *anything*. This theory of Art acts as the bedrock for its essential political claim: That art is free for freedom: it is free to enlighten us to, as well as to generate a hitherto concept-free alterity. Can we approach the thought-image without a theory of difference that has over-determined art's organization and identity?

This desire for self-abstraction, an escape from its own mediating function is art's own nature-myth. What I mean by this is that art's nature is seen to be totalised in an abstract *concept of the image*, where the image is conserved as the thing that *cannot be thought in particular*. This concept of art is taken as a form of real abstract power that can be grafted onto the social to achieve a political claim. A concept of freedom is now the guarantee that art can never be chained to particular forms of power. However, if we understand this version of art from a logical perspective we can hear that as actualised presence the image is in fact considered to be weak in its power to effect social change or to actually appear within the context of social situations since it is only there as a reminder of what it is in fact not. Here art is understood as representational and interpretive, or as a form of mediation: It is something that hampers the natural access to the real in itself since it is never *anything* and always *something* but this something does not matter! This negation as critique is clearly contradictory and is vital in expressing the limits of this theory of art, because now the image abides by the normative systems in which it operates and is essentially passive, naive and romantic - *any sense of its particularity is made arbitrary*.

This self-understanding of the artwork spirals around the concepts of transcendence and politics, and is caught within the love-hate dynamic of being general *and* specific. This is an art that is *always already* caught within the dilemma of its social function and its self-identification.

In theorising the artwork as such, a general ontology of art is generated that is made up of an ontology of real inconsistency and an ontic category of its specifically consistent form: The thought of the image is chaos, its actual

presentation is order. This dialectical framework has embedded itself as the primary paradigm of artistic critique that art is caught up within and by which it defines itself. It can be easily recognised as the foundational moment of many contemporary art practices that are regarded as 'conceptual'. It has exacerbated a constraining dominance for Art that has defined the operations of Art as a persistent claim for difference, naively constrained to its own universalising rule of infinitude and capable only of an arbitrary commitment to form and matter.

### Becoming invisible

What is perhaps more remarkable, is that thought alone is enough to create world change. This hierarchy of thought over the mediating properties of the image reminds us that, as material in the world, the image is the manifest constraint that any 'good' art work seeks to be *free from*. Essentially, for art to do its work it must abstract itself from itself and achieve freedom from the problematic ideality of representation: It must become *invisible*. The concept of image as mediation then becomes the dominant target of and the victim for the undoing of actual material power, and this is whether we associate the image with abstract or particular power that we recognise as ideological: The specifics of actual governments, people, or the nebulous flux of global financierism.

Furthermore, this freedom from mediation is the blind faith of an artistic practice that mystifies the pure and private thought as much as direct communal experience. This faith is met by the naivety of a knowledge that thinks it knows knowledge enough to articulate its edges. What now becomes stark is how this ethic, that purchases its politics at the denial of representation, further stabilises *an ideology of the immaterial* as a habit of knowledge as well as the yardstick for a moral art. Here, the cult of the processional and the predilection for the temporal enact a manifest denial of representation that is in turn correlated to an accumulative gain for an idealised egalitarian conception of visibility in the political. If representational politics is denied then we win the 'free appearance' of the multitude.

Problematically, the critique of representation is over-determined here as a literal attack on meaning and semblance itself; the exact operation that images constitute.<sup>01</sup> Visibility is claimed as the moment of *becoming political* where direct lines of communication between those that speak and those that listen do not require the problematic mess of interpretation: Speech has achieved the level of direct abstraction. This 'perfect communication' spells a certain form of horror, it is either the hellish univocity of the masses singing as one chorus, or the Babel-esque anarchy of language subjects where each speaks only singular truths. Both obviously have theological overtones.

As such, the fact that artworks might achieve the promise of their own abstraction as a strategy for a politics seems like a distraction, since it refuses to account for the ways in which images operate as non-passive truth producing entities. What is also forgotten for art and for politics is the necessity of mediation. Namely, this is how the mediated image is generated through reality.

01 The historical Modernist critique of the dematerialisation of the art object to or with 'life' stands as testament to this faith in invisibility. If the artwork can dislodge its attachment to mediation then so much the better: It has merged with 'life'. This evasion of 'meaning' is also evident in Modernist painterly abstraction. However, in both cases for the art work to be understood as egalitarian it must claim that it produces this as an experience of a special and abstract language or vice versa, an ordinary language that is offered as a 'special experience'. In this sense the equality that is aspired to within the denial of representational form is lost through the framework that presents the experience as much as the claim that the art work can achieve the great escape from the modality of its actual material; that is, its inorganic construction.

## We love crisis, it's safe there

Art happily sets itself out as the site of a more forbidding nature within its claim as a participant in the real. It figures this nature as an excess of the uncontrollable and unknown. All logic is destroyed at the level of the inorganic dead space of the image. Reason can never account for the spectacular horror of the image, and what is the most banal to us is now rendered as the most strange. This excess of the image is underscored further when the task of freedom from mediation is understood as impossible but still desirable; and this constraint is self-reflexively acknowledged as the demonstrative power of a certain form of political critique.

This operation of critique is consistent with a Kantian inspired Enlightenment discourse, as the passage towards self-knowing. Critique is figured therefore on the relation we configure with ourselves, where we are privileged with the choice (who knew it?) to either undermine our subjectivity or to make it 'more visible'. This commitment to the stable and central condition of subjectivity is the suicidal fantasy of art's critical purchase. It hinges our death upon a collision with real nature as becoming; this is a death that our images rehearse for us, as well as manifesting in their persistence a form of return that we can only know but never will witness. This connection between critique, aesthetics and subjectivity, is the mark of our self-obsession but also the mark of a kind of narcissism that delights in the fact that we will never truly know ourselves, whilst at the same time claiming this knowledge of self as absolute. The face in the mirror is the ultimate stranger and we re-enter the horror genre. The thought and image of instability and groundlessness has operated as a standard tale for a particularly human crisis of power and knowledge. For Adorno and Horkheimer, capital's enculturalisation of the masses to the jitterbug, Rockefeller's sociological research on advertising (that Adorno worked on for some time, albeit with bitter contempt), and collective consumerism produced a crude barbaric and miasmatic nature; a mimetic false reality in a totalised experience. This false nature is fought in their critique by a transcendental reason that can overcome the false image. But it is here where a deeper mysticism of reason is invoked opening the door to another form of horror.

This vision of transcendent autonomy, by which critique can claim its reason, is turned upside down but nevertheless retains its structural integrity in theories of embodiment and affect. Here, in phenomenological experience, the *instability* of subjective identities is made central in an inaeffectics of the sensory; or, as I see it, an aesthetics of sacrifice, a becoming one with nature, and a radical disembodiment. Space, borders and territories collapse back into the cosmology of the infinite and ideal structures are incorporated into sensation and the primacy of experience. Art, here, is the category of a real unstable nature; it is the manifestation of chaos, temporary relations and the random contingent universe.<sup>02</sup> It is part of the continuum of a nature-force, a deep self-producing creative generator that orders without sense.

However, we can see that in the attempt to coalesce the image with thinking (a thinking over thought), there is a re-standardised idealism that further territorialises space with a spiritualism of a more aggressive form. Moreover, creativity is dispossessed to the condition of a private, psychological and facile expressionism. The collapse between theory and practice, thought and the image, or concept and sense, is made all the more

02 This association of art as nature can be connected to the *Relationalism* of the 1990's as much as the genre of embodied affect in practices that also claim to access the truth of our lived reality. On the one hand we see the identification of a deeper real of a social harmony claimed in a being together that surpasses or exceed the given constraints of the political, and on the other hand worlds are claimed in discrete spaces of experience that produce a real unmediated event. The problem in all cases is the assumption and need to overcome mediation whilst at the same time understanding that the only access to the unmediated is achieved at the operation and site of mediation itself: the constructed image.

distinct through these appeals to sense and ultimately horror. This is a *self as nature* that privileges sets of decisions, identifications and observations for *nature*. And we see this whatever way around art's critique is claimed.

What can, on the face of it, be seen as a traversal from a critique of the space of 'standard culture' (understood as the terrain of dominance that we are destined to be caught within) to the comprehension of culture as having access to a real and infinite nature as freedom is in fact no journey at all. This understanding of the mediated image as the key to a knowledge of reality is a story familiar to the story of artistic critique. Making some early conclusions, we see that art's critique is always already defined in relation to *itself* as a form of natural alterity of whatever real or unreal kind. The only possibilities that are offered in this instance are that images are 'merely' capable of representing things as they appear (of course, this 'merely' refers to the fact that such a literal empirical reading of the work is not enough to satisfy the requirement of art's claim to the real), or, they are connected to an aporia of a pre-established harmonious multiplicity. As such, given these fairly limited perceptions of the image, art as a self-suppressing economy is identified as the exemplary form of critique: This means that art can only be about ART. This is the crisis that art's critique has enjoyed for too long.

### Grasping difference

Such distinctions between what is claimed as the scientific terrain of philosophical inquiry and the world of image-language are common, and are connected to this frustrating habit that I have described above. We see this in Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* that is compelled to identify the world of images to the space of a regressive folkloric sentimentalist regime whilst idealising the thought that thinks the primacy of the real. The concrete assertion here is that there is, and must be, a dichotomy between sensation and conception, and science must be set against the spectacular and irrevocable combination of orthodoxy and the image. This leaves any hope for an art that can engage with materialism at a loss. The line that is drawn between the mediated image and the scientific image has exacerbated what I have already described; that is, a form of tragic parlance of the image, and a tragic conception of the political where the image as art work is left to narrate its dual constraint to a task of vigilance and its own spontaneous nature.

This description of critique is immediately referential to Louis Althusser's description of the circle of decision as the defining *practice* of philosophy, but it also reminds us how this practice for Althusser must avoid its theorisation and representation as a figure *for philosophy*. Althusser argues for "...a description of its manner of being and of its manner if acting; let us say of its practice."<sup>03</sup> His theory relies upon a process, where philosophy intervenes to produce a distinction between a corrupt manifestation of ideology, "a culture that cultivates,"<sup>04</sup> and real science as the advancing of facts. Philosophy is thus the servant of real science and enables the distinction to be drawn between these categories. "We (have) intervened in the 'space' where the ideological and the scientific merge but where they can and must be separated, to recognise each in its functioning and to free scientific practice from the ideological domination that blocks it. [...] All lines of demarcation traced by philosophy are ultimately modalities of a fundamental line: the line between the scientific and the ideological."<sup>05</sup>

<sup>03</sup> Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and other essays*, Verso, 1990, 73.

<sup>04</sup> Ibid; 95

<sup>05</sup> Ibid; 99

Importantly, the circle that philosophy articulates “is not at all sterile like logical circles...”, “... it is not a circle at all.”<sup>06</sup> As such, if the sciences have a spontaneous philosophy (i.e. a philosophy that risks habitual returns to its own knowledge as the basis for an unquestioned belief system, producing a sterile circle of dominance) then the soft sciences - the humanities - are more accustomed to a spontaneous ideology (that is, they are always already trapped within this worst case scenario. They succumb to the illusion that they are operating as a form of science, and as such fall prey to the worst illusion of all: their trust in language itself. This type of work can be exemplified in the work of Structuralist tendencies to analyze language as systems, etc.).

I entered the necessary circle deliberately. Why? To show even crudely that whilst it is indispensable to leave philosophy in order to understand it, we must guard against the illusion of being able to provide a definition – that is, a knowledge – of philosophy that would be able to radically escape from philosophy or a ‘meta-philosophy’; one cannot radically escape the circle of philosophy. All objective knowledge of philosophy is in effect at the same time a *position within* philosophy. [...] There is no objective discourse about philosophy that is not itself philosophical.<sup>07</sup>

However, despite the attempt to generate the operation of philosophy as *practice*, and as part of a real interdisciplinary network of activity, it is the figure of philosophy that remains the hero of the piece. It is the saviour of an ultimate reason that can also save art from its ideological predisposition. “Outside these real practices, we encounter the pretensions of certain disciplines that declare themselves to be sciences (human sciences). What are we to make of their pretensions? By means of a new line of demarcation we distinguish between the real function of most of the human sciences and the ideological character of their pretensions.”<sup>08</sup>

A key problem emerges here when it is assumed that the practice of philosophical description is not rhetorical or interested, and that this description produces a freedom from ideology in the process of its intervention. As such, whilst it is clear that philosophy is conceived of as part of this ‘whole’, it is un-free to establish a speculative relation to knowledge, and is implicitly bound to its spontaneous form. Philosophy remains as *the* pivotal axis of decision that imposes a certain form of transcendence despite its claims to deny a principle of freedom: Philosophy does not seek to become science but instead to effect its discipline at the highest level policing and producing of a correctness. This is decision that draws a line between science and ideology. It is philosophy that *grasps difference*.

This problem of transcendence is doubled in the description of the circle itself (not just the practice that produces its line) as a description that risks totalising thought to method and therefore disallowing the contingency that this description of philosophy as practice seems to imply. The circle as figure-process then alerts us to a systematic habit that achieves its decision through asserting philosophy as an essential quality; something that pre-exists other forms of practice and is immanent to them.

This reminds us of the essential and grounding distinction that is required in recognising the circle as a *practice of power*, that bears out no relation to itself, can never know itself and the production of the circle as *the figure of thought as nature* that reinstates itself in relation to itself. Here we witness the shift from a practice of non-knowledge to the level of practice

06 Ibid; 102

07 Ibid

08 Ibid; 98

that is thoroughly conscious on the one hand, and yet on the other hand relies upon the immemorial turning of the circle as a ceaseless mark of an inaccessible reality. This is the distinction between the production of lines of demarcation and the repetitive stamp of the circle as a more mystical form.<sup>09</sup>

It is precisely through recognising the problems inherent to the artistic tradition of critique, in particular its predisposition for process as a point of escape from the traps of ideology, (inaesthetic and abstract critiques, for example) that we identify what is at stake in Althusser's method. For the art world this correlation between process and figure is not simply determined in aesthetic category form, but moreover in the persistence of 'critical method' that is recognised in all aspects of the artwork from its production and situation to its dissemination. The fear of trusting the illusions we encounter as the experiential, interpretative and sensory domain of the image persist. This fear highlights the problem of a faith in a real that is made accessible in some methodological approach. But, this is false and it is the exact mark of the persistence of the paradigm or the ideo-logic of the circle that Althusser sought to overcome.

If art's self-narration of the ironic authorship of that same sterility is not tragic then it is psychotic: A self-producing ontological relativity in an infinite regress towards the paranoid. This is the dilemma that Donald Davidson was careful to point out in his essay "The Inscrutability of Reference." Here, Davidson acknowledges our predilection to produce naïve realisms that render this hall of mirrors if we persist with a background theory of language.<sup>10</sup> Tragedy has located an ethics of the real by underscoring the myth that we can recognise our finitude by staring into the depths of the infinite and in fact structuring a relationship with it. This theology of the image is wholly conservative and essentially private and psychological, capable of only animalistic expression. The desire to open the doors to a real concept-free alterity ends in underscoring the paradigm of the human condition as tragic finitude. The circle is no longer a description: It is our image immaterial – our definition.

### Materialism and the image

In the face of these perennial issues encountered in a politics of aesthetics, we must consider now how we might understand the scientific image; that is, we must tackle the manifest image before us as real material (without recuperating the conditions that undermine the mediating facility of the image) on the one hand, and without claiming that there is nothing beyond the site of the given on the other hand. We must be careful to organise our theory of the image, firstly because we know the temptation to picture this dynamic in itself as some mark of our understanding, and secondly by privileging knowledge in this way this picture in itself would all too easily be recuperated as the image as a site of contradiction. This interpretation of the image would be incorrect, since the split between knowing and not knowing that would actually defend this contradiction is not available in the first instance. There is no contradiction between the as yet unknown and the known.

Here we need to overcome the problem of how although art seems obviously capable of generating thought, or even producing what we can call philosophical problems when explored according to these strategies that I have described, it fails to generate a real critique of those systems as bad

<sup>09</sup> "Althusser and the Concept of the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists" Pierre Macherey, trans, Robin Mackay, *Parrhesia*, Number 6, 2009, 14-27. Macherey's text identifies certain errors implicit to Althusser's critique that cannot be accommodated by Althusser's self-reflexive argument. First Macherey identifies "an absolute confidence in the impartial mission of philosophy." He then goes on to articulate a final problem latent to this description of the circle: "This intervention consists in tracing the lines of demarcation, which in reality only retrace the lines already traced, and demand to be retraced again, with no assignable issue, in so far as the conflict of forces that it brings to light cannot emerge as a definitive division that would once and for all isolate all its manifestations. One might see in this approach the index, not so much of a vulgar theoreticism, as of a mystique of the philosophical, which would fundamentally be the last word of Althusserianism, a last word which no 'autocritique' would succeed in rescinding." 26

<sup>10</sup> Donald Davidson, "The Inscrutability of Reference", *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, 234.

habits (i.e. we persist with a conservative critique), and it is also incapable of traversing the paradigms that define critique. In fact, the mobility that art demonstrates in its moving between categories underscores the normativity of critique further as a standard operation. This requires us to understand the image in an expanded sense: Can we experience the world in the same register in which we conceptualise it? And, how would we think this adequation without a correspondence theory?

As I have shown, the administration of artistic practice in this way restricts the definition of art to a specific morality, which is organized by the task of becoming political. The problem here is that the category of the political is claimed as recognizable and achievable, it is misunderstood and over-determined as a spatial and aesthetic concept.

This apprehension of the political is transparently recognized across the regime of the artworld, from artists, writers and philosophers who deal with art, the gallerists and agents that deal art, and the institutional networks that show art. How can we conceive of a practice that does not substantialize these paradigms on the same contradictory and conservative terms is the test for art now.

Francois Laruelle's non-standard aesthetics and non-standard philosophy attempt to acknowledge and also to overcome the paradigmatic methods that I have mentioned by subjecting them to the power of a universal science. The question that stands out in this case is: How do these non-standard philosophies and non-standard aesthetics trump those standard forms *without philosophy*?

Furthermore, how we characterize materialist philosophy in this context remains central. My approach to this characterization and centrally for this essay is to define the problems of materialism as the persistent attempt to think the primacy of the real without producing the real as correspondent to thought-material; that is to think *matter*. The failure that materialism encounters is marked in an inevitable return to the articulation of a circle of decision as a substantial entity that effects real disciplinary control in our lives and which is abstract power. In many ways then Laruelle's task is very much a philosophical problem. It is about the potentiality for a form of non-standard difference that can only be purchased through refusing contingency as a paradigmatic correlate to thought, for difference, and at the same time to dislocate those grounds of refusal in a more radical unbinding of relations at the level of a macrocosmic materiality. At what level do we account for the category of difference that this theory requires? A *difference that refuses an account for difference*: Concept without difference.

Looking at Richard Rorty's Neo-pragmatic 'literary turn' pushes the potential errors of thinking the image as substantive material home. Here, belief is secularized in a politics of private irony just as the liberal state secularizes belief in civil society: A form of work on the self. This organization of fideism merely compartmentalizes its universal claims to the temporal and the specific whilst naively establishing its own tolerance for belief as universal and dominant abstract power. At the same time, Rorty's formal adjustment of turning culture into a form of science, and politics into culture does not escape nor does it change the hinges of such definitions. The idea of culture as a science allows culture to fantasize that it can escape the fact that it is habit based and habit producing, a site of radical freedom, whilst retaining the order of the folkloric at the level of the political.

For Laruelle, both aesthetics and philosophy are now subject to a larger principle of a chaotic non-relational law accessed through a science that

inhabits being. It is through this universal quantum science that Laruelle anticipates the traditional formations of an individualistic subjectivity to be destroyed in a radical non-identarian schematic of Generic Man.

With the promise of Generic man we also have generic philosophy and generic art; that is, a set of categories that exist without identarian referents in a non-dialectical unilateralism that has also, strangely enough, given this protracted science a very human interest and a human dimension. It is here in this human interest where we identify certain ontological claims to be recuperated in Laruelle's work. We can then return the question from how Laruelle's theory might compromise those other ontologies that he targets towards a question of identifying those that are central to his theory. How does this non-philosophical science as a practice understand its relation to the meta-structural background of quantum force that promises an immanent ethics?

This question must be understood in Laruelle's case within a conceptual framework that on the one hand seems to promise a radical equality of the human and therefore a type of politics that can be accommodated in the given, and yet also conserves a concept of the non-political. This non-standard political or scientific moment in itself risks a pragmatic naturalism that would turn such a complex refusal of existing structures towards an unapologetic and naive affirmation of the status quo and a new ontological normativity. On the other hand, is the generic matrix in the end an intolerant matrix with its own standards set within the assertion of another naturalism – another institutionalism; another genre of the generic?

These questions ask us to look squarely upon the politics of our metaphysical and meta-critical traditions, and to see if their diagnostic realisms can anticipate and even cope with the mediated image. If anything, the task here is not only the demand to re-think artistic critique but to go further towards a need to radically re-organise what we understand art to be and its dominant referent, the name Art. This is to comprehend the image as force without doxa. This means that we must reconsider the referential categories of art as our references and to examine how the production of art challenges the notion of reference in itself to itself. In other words, it must be understood as a relation that is unbound from itself. This demand is replicated for our conception of subjectivity. No longer is the image a rehearsal and narration of our death. And we do not need to associate these inorganic constructions with a portrait of our subjectivity. This is effectively a throwing away of the mirror. Laruelle's understanding of how the image produces identity in a universalizing sense, and is not directed to a thought of world, further corroborates the productive, imaginative and generative force of the thought-image that threatens any standard form of interpretation: "It is an absolute reflection, without mirror, unique each time but capable of an infinite power ceaselessly to secrete multiple identities."<sup>11</sup>

As I have described, it is endemic to art's standard critique that it operate in a self-conscious modality. In other words, art must constantly modify itself as paradigm through a doubling that relies upon a philosophy or a theory of itself as nature or as an essentially unstable category. This is the self-referentialism that is traditionally required in order for art to be understood and characterized within the category of ART.

If the name ART is defined by its operation that is called 'critique' and I believe this to be its dominant category in neo-liberal culture, then another comprehension of art's critique is required. Perhaps even this demand might return us to the Althusserian problem of another spontaneous philosophy and/ or another spontaneous aesthetics.

<sup>11</sup> Francois Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, Urbanomic, Sequence Press, 2011, 82

Laruelle argues in *The Concept of Non Photography* that the circle of decision need never be entered in the first place, and in fact the idea that we should think that we are always already in the circle, and that a philosophy need work through it in order to overcome it, is more evidence of *another spontaneous philosophy*. (All philosophy is spontaneous.) Quantum mechanics, on the other hand, is employed as the promise to annihilate the retinal burn of a particularly historic perception that persists within decision to unbind the types of synthesis that generate various dyadic forms and their resolution.

However, despite Laruelle's claim, he understands that the circle remains, and that this remainder must be met in an expanded phenomenology that refuses reciprocity between man and world. Here, philosophy remains as subject but the process that thinks philosophy is based in quantum mechanics. Philosophy must be free from thought to think, but we must work through, out of and past those relations without relation and without a theory of difference. These manifest theories and images that we recognize as illegitimate and illogical are to be annihilated, and the question remains of how this happens. This is crucial because at some point we need to recognize them as other forms of actual material power, not as demonic illusions.

It remains to be seen how Laruelle's work understands the production of typologies in his theory; say, between the quantum mechanics that is untied from a figuration of its infinitude and a type of philosophy that persists in figuring its central paradigm in the form of a standard method. These observed distinctions between process and method, between thinking and thought, and added to this the special character of a human dimension, highlight how this processional mode of thought struggles to traverse the paradigm of this comprehension of philosophy as method.

Problematically for Laruelle, the concept that stands as the truth upon which the image can be unbound from aesthetics, and by which thought can be free from philosophy risks producing a more basic form of philosophy. This is despite and due to a "theoretical autonomy of the visual order", that is, "a function of the vision-force alone – of the Identity of the real – rather than of the World."<sup>12</sup> For it is here where the real remains defined in relation to the image by thought, and non-philosophy cannot give up on its determination of philosophy as the axiom against which it determines its own purchase.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these issues, it is engaging to think through Laruelle's work since he aims to deal with the image as equivalent to a science. Even so, this writing really struggles to say anything in particular about art which is perhaps more frustrating in its attempt, as it really doesn't need to. However, most of these arguments about philosophy tend to leave art cold; or at least, and perhaps more accurately, they leave art *out in the cold*. Art's biggest achievement in most of our cases would be to be taken seriously, to be taken as seriously as philosophy takes itself seriously (sic). Can art think a little more ambitiously than this? Of course it does and it can, and in doing so it risks the same ideological pretensions as philosophy. Remember that this small aspiration for art to be considered as philosophy is in the majority of cases a philosopher's fantasy.

What seems most pressing to deal with is how art and philosophy share the same problems and perhaps the same egoistic tendencies that obsess about self-definition. Here, and now looking to art as my example, we can raise the question as to how and if a correct understanding of art might have

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; 76

<sup>13</sup> Ray Brassier in "Being Nothing," *Nihil Unbound*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2007 asks this question in more depth and more explicitly. It is here where Brassier argues that Laruelle's concept of adequation reproduces certain *philosophical* problems. "For while it may be perfectly coherent to claim, as Laruelle does, that I am identical-in-the-last-instance with radical immanence, or that I think in accordance with the real and that my thinking is determined-in-the-last-instance by it, it does not follow then that I am the real qua One" 136. As such, Laruelle is claimed to "confuse the real with its symbol by reintroducing a 'rigid designator' which is supposed as sufficient for fixing the essence of the real in a manner ultimately indistinguishable from its co-constitution via decision" 137. Therefore, thinking is confused with identity that fixes both the real and the human as category form and in doing so risks a "transcendental individualism" 137.

any effect on its systems, standards and operations, which it seems to aid and abet. These, as we know, are the systems of a luxury market and neo-liberal consumer capital. Here, we must ask if any refiguring of critique can only be construed as tinkering with language – as another semantic work on the self that actually supplants one commodity form for another.

This dilemma urges us to look to how the images that we construct permit and actually promise such a science rather than offering the thought of the world that we perceive as its correlate. To take the image seriously, and artwork as facts, is to understand how images exact force. This is not a modification of art under the name Art, but an interrogation, traversal and a leaving behind of the name itself; the name as we know it. This is to understand the power of semblance and to comprehend images as representational action. How an artwork can effectively participate in such a transformation is then an interdisciplinary project of a new scientific realism where any concept of art can locate its force that grasps relations in the structure of a type of montage that is direction without ground. This is a leaving behind of the category of the uncategorisable, an unraveling of a politics which requires an order of ontological and non-ontological dimensions, and an overcoming of the fear of representation towards an opening up to a groundless reflexivity of the image.





# Articulating Quantities: When Things Depend on Whatever Can Be the Case

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Vera Bühlmann

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Man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking.  
— Martin Heidegger

Further still, beyond the world of representation, we suppose that a whole problem of Being is brought into play by these differences between the categories and the nomadic or fantastical notions, the problem of the manner in which being is distributed among beings: is it, in the last instance, by analogy or univocality?  
— Gilles Deleuze

## Précis

**T**he world is everything that is the case – I would like to take this famous line from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as a starting point. The world is not the totality of things, he says, but that of facts. I would like to consider, inversely, the world as the totality for whatever *can be* the case. After this inversion we can – a small deviation not withstanding – keep with Wittgenstein's language game and call the totality of whatever can be the case the totality of *artefacts*. Artefacts capture and embody acts of concentration by intellect, not things that have happened or are given. What distinguishes them as *artefacts* from facts is that they conserve an act of concentration by condensating this act into manifest form.<sup>01</sup>

The crucial question, for considering the world as the totality of that which can be the case, regards what I would tentatively suggest we call the auxiliary structure needed for being able to say something about this world at all. My core interest in the following concerns the possibility of a philosophical grammar. I call it an *auxiliary structure* and not an *infrastructure*, because referring to it or behaving in it needs thought that considers. Such a grammar allows for conception, of course, but the act of conception it structures is ampliative. I would like to consider the possibility for a philosophical grammar in which conceiving is engendering-by-inference. Ampliative inferences are inferences capable of broadening a terms extension beyond the possibilities that were contained in the premises. Such thinking-as-conceiving involves an aspect of *inception*, of beginnings. My interest, in short, is to regard artefacts as articulations of such a philosophical grammar, in pursuit of an architectonics that were proper to the city today. Of course this article can be no more than an early step in this pursuit.

The brief sketch I would like to layout in this paper to support such an interest in artefacts as condensations of intellectuality departs from exploring a peculiar proximity between Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger and Gilles Deleuze. A proximity which may seem quite unlikely, at first sight, but for which I would like to argue along the following lines: all three share a common interest in the Kantian insight that reason conditions experience, but more importantly, they explore this insight in relation to *acts of learning* rather than *objects of knowing*. This distinction creates, despite all the obvious differences if not incompatibilities, a peculiar proximity among their thinking.

In their own individual ways, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Deleuze have evoked the ancient sense of *mathesis* as an art of such conditioned learning. They have embraced the challenge that for learning, the conditions can never be sufficient nor clear and distinct. In such a sense of mathesis, to which I will refer to in the following as *mathetical*, learning is less concerned with issues of representation or recognition than with an act of appropriation and inhabitation of intellectual capacities and abilities. Learning in a mathetical sense involves a kind of *privation* which inverts the usual sense of the word: it involves a privation which engages in a relation of *giving* without *depriving*.

In the following I would like to extend on this aspect that for learning the conditions can never be sufficient nor clear and distinct. I will suggest to view artefacts in a broad sense – be it software, architecture, film, music, a piece of technology, suggestions for policies, tools for financing, business plans, recipes or theory books – as the manifest instances of acts of learning.

<sup>01</sup> In giving this twist to Wittgenstein's interest on cases, casuistics and on a philosophical grammar, my perspective is much influenced by the writings of Louis Hjelmslev, cf. especially: *Catégorie des cas* (1 vol.). Acta Jutlandica VII, IX. (1935/37).

I will regard artefacts as cases which are conceived and engendered by ampliative reasoning; this means, in full demand of that gesture, withstanding the temptation to subject thought to the comfort zone provided by artefacts if we assign them the a-conceptual status of incommensurable singularities, or the not-engendered one of generic stem cell like entities.<sup>02</sup>

Considered in their relation to the acts of learning which they manifest, rather than to their status as objects of know-how, artefacts are condensations from the outer space of intellectuality. They are aliens-from-within, if you like. Unlike pieces of art, they are popularized and in that sense de-capitalized acts of concentration. If it makes sense at all to say – with consideration – that they *are*, we might have to extend the conceptual leap from *being* to *existence* towards *insistence*, and claim that just like *things are* insofar as *they are there* (Dasein), *artefacts are* insofar as they are *here*. If *being* corresponds to things-as-they-are-named, and *existence* to things-in-their-thingness, we can say that *insistence* corresponds to the prespecific-genericity proper to things considered within the fantasmatics of what can be learnt mathematically.

### Within the outer space of intellectuality

Wittgenstein had started to sketch out a philosophical grammar for addressing things-as-facts. A philosophical grammar for addressing things-as-artefacts considers things in their pre-specific genericity. It assumes they can be named, in this pre-specificity which they manifest, by *mathetical* instead of *literal* names. We can find such mathetical names, I would like to suggest, in algebraic *polynomials*.

The etymological meaning of polynomials is *having many family names*. Polynomials name heterogenous things, hybrids that comprehend aspects of many generic lineages. Polynomials name things that have no natural belonging – if natural belonging means that the identity expressed belongs to exactly one genus or genre.

From a pragmatic viewpoint, we can characterize the mathetical *context* of polynomials today as follows. For all sciences working with methods of probabilistics, factoring polynomials is as *ordinary*, as *elementary* and *capability-dependent* a practice as composing more or less well-formed, more or less well-reasoned arguments in sentences is. Polynomials feature in systems of differential equations, and they are especially useful when describing processes which do not unfold uniformly and steadily in space and time. Polynomials allow to map, probabilistically, they are the building blocks of all sciences involving computation and electronic technology today.

The intention by suggesting such a mathetically grammatical perspective is not to conflate polynomials with names, mathematics with linguistics. The intention is to consider a way in which we can address the peculiar mathetical language-ability triggered by computation and the algebraic symbolicalness proper to it. Such a perspective would allow us to assume, next to the calculating and conceptualizing faculties of reasoning as judging (literally in German *Urteilen*), a faculty of computation which is concerned with mathesis, with the art of learning to partition (literally in German *Teilbarmachen*).<sup>03</sup>

If we take the algebraic formula for *a circle* as an example, we can see that what this formula names is *never fully given*. Polynomial predication is

02 Rem Koolhaas has recently given two highly interesting accounts of the contemporary urban conditions, viewed from the perspective of infrastructures' new factual primary rôle in architecture and in urbanism: *The Generic City*, he holds, is pure abundance and availability of potentials, with no earthening in either identity, history, or God. *The Generic City*, in his description, is less a utopia/dystopia (as any utopia/dystopia keeps within the idea that city's order represents the possible/impossible path to salvation) but more radically, it fabulates a kind of paradise generalized, and thus paradise decoupled from man's (always individual) banishment and expulsion. There is no need, in this paradise, for engendering and conceiving, nor for learning. In an origin generalized, there is knowledge, but not recognition; there is no sexuality within the generic. The other text is called *Junkspace*, and describes the same reality of infrastructures' primacy, yet in the light of the decoupled other: *Junkspace* is the space of objectivity provided by language, once the modernizing movement of globalization has taken possession of it. As such, it is a pure place of guilt, Koolhaas says, not of beauty. There is not only no sexuality anymore, if we ascribe infrastructures the primary rôle for how we understand our living spaces, there is also no erotics anymore. While the *Generic City* draws an account of paradise without the prior loss of it, *Junkspace* is banishment without origin and without the possibility for salvation. Cf. Rem Koolhaas: "The Generic City" (1994) in: *X, M, L, XL*, Monacelli Press 1998, pp. 1248-1257; and "Junkspace", in: *october*, vol. 100, *obsolescence* (spring 2002), p. 172-190.

03 This idea draws much from the suggestions made by Jules Vuillemin in his seminal books *La Philosophie de l'Algèbre* (1962, no engl. translation), *What are Philosophical Systems* ([1986] / 2009) and *Necessity and Contingency* ([1984] / 1996).

not directly about the assignation of an object as a thing, nor about the assignation of things as generic objects. The formula for a circle is the formula for *any* circle, and needs, in order to denote a *particular* circle, further determination which relies on input or investment that cannot be deduced from what the formula itself contains. In short, the formula must be placed within a certain problematical domain, it must be ascribed a certain rôle within the act happening in this domain (the problem), and it must, as an actor within a larger play, be equipped, or more precisely: doped, with properties and features.<sup>04</sup> Polynomial predication organizes a dramatical space where things intermingle, in the pure symbolicalness of objects which are regarded in their dissolution into generic pre-specificity. The polynomial space of predication comprehends, it incorporates this intermingling, yet there are no particular instances involved in the non-dramatized purity of it because the polynomial space itself, without a grammar that structures its expressions, is incapable of *organizing* this intermingling. Strictly speaking, there is nothing to be counted nor judged yet, in the space of polynomial predication, before the drama is staged, before the partitioning is organized.

Such a grammar is a formulaic grammar, and the identities it names are both generic and pre-specific. Hence they are – in a fully determinate yet never exhaustively determinable sense – *evoked*. They are literally *called out*, *summoned*, *roused*, out of the outer space of intellectuality we all engage with when we learn. These pre-specific identities are only insofar as they are articulated, a bit like *daimonions*, manifest voices, like those we encounter in erotic recognition. Viewed in their prespecificity, these identities were more adequately called *erogenic* than *generic*; they vibrate of erogenous affectivity, these identities are the pure skinning and membraning of the restless intermingling of abundant responsivity, which is proper to things when dissolved into the symbolicalness of polynomials. Without the evocation of grammatical articulation, the polynomial space of predication comprehends a mere happening of subtle violence.

The attractive promise is that such a grammar may provide us with the ability for systematic and structural thought in domains where reason is not only *insufficient* but also *abundant*. In other words: whenever we refer to the probable, the topical, the urban. The space of polynomial predication comprehends virtually *anything* that can be thought rigorously. As such, it exhausts neither thought nor the outer space of intellectuality – it relies on input or investment that cannot be deduced or induced from within it; but it does provide the virtual consistency of how we can consider this *where* where all the artefacts that ever were, are or will be here, as manifestations of acts of intellectual concentration, are being conceived. The outer space of intellectuality is vaster than we can imagine or overview, in any one moment or in any summation of moments. But we can be positive that it is not infinite. It is abundant yet not unlimited, because it is only insofar as it is *inspired* by the thinking of people, finite beings.

The modality of its consistency is *virtually real* – not *actual*, and not even necessarily *actually possible*. It consists in the purity proper to differences of which the parts are potentially set in relation to anything at all, within the boundaries provided by the space of polynomial predication as it is dramatized. Within the outer space of intellectuality, the differences are not yet actually related to a code that joins them; they are not *rendered present*, they are not symbolized. Or in other words, the erogenous skinning, membraning of this differential space is not yet responding to something. It is not yet organized by the reciprocal liminalization provided by a formulaic

04 The relevance of doping for quantum-mechanical technology and its artefacts has been the topic of a recent conference the contributions to which are forthcoming as a book: Vera Bühlmann, Ludger Hovestadt (Eds.): *Printed Physics*, Springer, Vienna/New York 2012; cf. especially the article by Ludger Hovestadt: "A Fantastic Genealogy of the Printable", pp. 18-70.

identity-relation, i.e. by an algebraic equation. As such, the outer space of intellectuality is the springing origin of the *dignity* of thinking. Its fertility engenders. It is an erotic, a cultivated fertility, not that of natural reproduction qua multiplication. Thought that strives for articulating the contradictory consistency of this space – it's unjoined differences-in-relation – involves the genesis of its actualizations. Thought that claims authority within the outer space of intellectuality is involved in a static genesis, through its acts of intellection. It does not revolve around a center. Rather it involves condensation, a skinning, a membraning, falling off from its rotating acts of concentration. The products of this fertility are subtle and vulnerable, to the point of their virtual non-existence – if the grammar that expresses these condensations is incapable of receiving them as cases.

In this, thought in such domains of abundant yet insufficient reason is different from the dynamics of dialectical inferential movement. Dialectical inference negates the process of condensation, its mediality and simulacras, and instead of affirming this process it strives for the annihilation of contradictions through normalization. Mathetical inference, on the other hand, strives to articulate the contradictory in myriads of ways. It strives to articulate polynomial names as quantities, not names as generas or singularities. Polynomial names involve diverse ranges of powers, articulating them into formulaic systems of equations means mediating between the involved ranges and orders of powers. Mathetical inference can dissolve the violence involved thereby through a posology of pharmaceutical doping. Such a posology, in the proper sense of *logos*, does not need to be invented anew, I would like to suggest with the lines of argument presented here. Rather, it can be found in and extracted from algebraic structuralism which attends to the world as the totality of artefacts. Algebraic structuralism is a *categorical* structuralism,<sup>05</sup> and it looses the dogmatism that usually goes along with categorical thinking if we relate it to *domains of abundant and insufficient reason*.<sup>06</sup>

What I would like to present in the following is a sketchy proposal of approaching such a way of thinking about the articulate-ability of quantities for polynomial predication.

## Mathesis

There was a time when the *theory of the forms of experience* and that of the *work of art as experimentation* had maintained an intimate relation. In a today somewhat outdated sense of the word, *the arts* were referring to the development of *abilities* very generally, to a sort of cunning reason and the sophistication in *how* we can carry out human endeavors in general. As such, the term comprehended a double make-up of the development of such abilities as *ars* and as *techné*. The Greek term *techné* seems to have been applied in a sophisticated and pragmatist sense for relating and comparing such developed or cultivated abilities. In its Latin translation as *ars*, this sophisticated, pragmatist dimension was largely reoriented towards a more meditative frame of reference. In both cases, however, *techné* and *ars* were meant in a more general sense than any skill or craft in particular. And even more importantly, they both implied an infinite scale: there can be no comprehensive definition, no delineation of *how good we can learn to be in something*.

05 There is currently, and somewhat symptomatically, a great debate emerging within philosophy interested in metaphysics and the foundational issues of mathematics. It concerns the relation between set theory and category theory. Cf. for a condensed and rich introduction to many of the issues involved: Mary Tiles' review of Penelope Maddy's book *Defending the Axioms: On the Philosophical Foundations of Set Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2011, accessible online at *Notre Dames Philosophic Journal*, Sept.13 2012: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/25941-defending-the-axioms-on-the-philosophical-foundations-of-set-theory/> (accessed: July 15th 2012). Also, with many further references, the article on Category Theory at Stanford Encyclopedia: Marquis, Jean-Pierre, "Category Theory", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/category-theory/> (accessed: July 15th 2012).

06 If we conceive of such genesis in terms of a grammar, we can avoid subscribing to what Hegel had wisely stigmatized as "the bad infinity" – which would mean ascribing artefacts the status of an absolute self- or auto-conditioning. Though infinitary in regard to its engagement with an element of the probable, such a grammatical structuralism is nevertheless finitary in the actualizations it conditions. We can express that and only that which the grammatical structure allows to be the case. The powerful move of articulating the polynomials as quantities, symbolically, instead of names as generas or individuals, lies in its capacity to deal with what linguists call "grammaticalization", the becoming of grammar. Cf. for the relevance of grammaticalization and IT technology especially Bernhart Stiegler: "Nanomutations, hypomnemata and grammatisation", online at: <http://arsindustrialis.org/node/2937> (accessed July 15th 2012). Cf. also footnote [13].

Abilities as abilities, both in *ars* and *techné*, cannot be mastered, strictly speaking. Developing them means learning, in a non-transitive sense. Today we have largely dismissed such a notion of learning, in favor of orientating thought to an objective dimension of knowledge which we can learn to cultivate by what is today called *literacy*. Yet different from the old notion of *mathesis*, attending to the literal assumes a given naturalness of meaning, to be received and represented. In this respect, it leaves us with an insuperable helplessness within the apparent phenomenality peculiar to the *fertility* and *autonomy* of thoughts thought, which they acquire within the outer space of intellectuality.

Heidegger has paid attention to the mathematical alternative to the notion literacy. He referred to it with cautious consideration as *the mathematical*, and meant by it, in an open sense, *that which can be learnt*. In *Die Frage nach dem Ding* (1935/36)<sup>07</sup>, Heidegger comprehends genuinely philosophical thought as thought revolving around the notion of *the thing*. The mathematical is concerned with things, he says, insofar as we can learn about things. Not simply how to use them, name them, or master them, but rather how we can learn about things in their thingness. About bodies as bodiliness, plants as plantness, etc. With these abstract terms Heidegger does not refer to *an idea* of a thing, but to a certain kind of intellectual experience of an object as a thing in a certain appearance. This experience is conditioned by a sort of intellectual intuition, yet it only concerns the possible awareness of our interiority. Such experience is not real, for Heidegger, it is purely projective.<sup>08</sup> He introduces the mathematical as that which at one and the same time gives things to us, and allows us to learn about them: "The mathematical, this is what we intrinsically already know about things, what we do not have to extract or abstract from things but what we, in a certain way, bring along ourselves".<sup>09</sup>

Learning, he continues, is *a giving to oneself what one already has*. It contains an element of *a-substantiality* which for Heidegger is, in this certain mathematical way, strictly personal.

### There is a naturalness proper to reasoning

Different from Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze has suggested to consider a possible generalization of this peculiar *element of a-substantiality* that is involved in mathematical learning.<sup>10</sup> He conceives of purity not as an attribute, but as an elementarity, as a transcendental quasi-naturalness proper to reasoning. This elementarity, for Deleuze, is conditioned by three inseparable principles: that of *pure quantifiability*, complemented by those of *pure qualitability* and *pure potentiability*. Raising these terms, the quantitative, the qualitative, and the potential, to the level of *-abilities* is crucial for understanding Deleuze. He calls them principles, but – by raising them to the level of abilities – he manages to call them so in such a way that they do not presuppose anything given. These principles do not allow us to recognize, imagine or picture ideas by thought. Rather, ideas bath in this pureness as a natural elementarity, and this pureness grants that thought is *natural* in a different way from assuming its Good Nature. Within such a setting, ideas need to be indexed before they can be treated analytically or synthetically. They need to be actively coded. Thought can engender thinking, within this elementarity of pureness, because thought is mobilized by what Deleuze in a later work calls *the surplus value of code*.<sup>11</sup> Deleuze conceives of ideas as the differentials of thought, and

07 Heidegger, Martin: *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen*, in: Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, 2. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944, Band 41, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann 1984.

08 It is purely projective in a specific way, which Heidegger clarifies as follows: "Where the casting of the mathematical design is ventured, the pitcher of this cast places herself on a ground which comes to be itself projected itself only in the design ventured. There is not only a liberation proper to mathematical design, but also a new kind of experience and designing of freedom itself, i.e. of the actively resumed attachment. Within a mathematical design, an attachment to the conditions claimed is taking place." My own translation, cf. the original German: "Wo der Wurf des mathematischen Entwurfs gewagt wird, stellt sich der Werfer dieses Wurfes auf einen Boden, der allererst im Entwurf erworfen wird. Im mathematischen Entwurf liegt nicht nur eine Befreiung, sondern zugleich eine neue Erfahrung und Gestaltung der Freiheit selbst, d.h. der selbstübernommenen Bindung. Im mathematischen Entwurf vollzieht sich die Bindung an die in ihm selbst geforderten Grundsätze. Befreiung zu einer neuen Freiheit." Heidegger (1984), p. 97.

09 Heidegger 1984: "Das Mathematische, das ist jenes an den Dingen was wir eigentlich schon kennen, was wir demnach nicht erst aus den Dingen herholen, sondern in gewisser Weise selbst schon mitbringen", p. 74.

10 cf Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], transl. by Paul Patton, Columbia University Press 1994. In what follows I refer mainly to the chapter entitled "Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference", p. 168-221.

11 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* [1980], transl. by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press 1993; cf. especially "The Geology of Morals", pp. 53ff.

thinking for him involves determining – reciprocally – the differential relations contained within them.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Deleuze presupposes *a naturalness* for reasoning which precedes the assignability of truth or falseness to any act of thought in particular. This naturalness itself provides conditions, yet neither sufficiency nor well-foundedness for emerging thoughts.

Considered together, Deleuze's ideas and this elementarity of pureness make up for considering reason not from the point of view of its conditioning, but from the point of view of inception or genesis, as Deleuze called it. Precisely because he assumes a naturalness to reason, Deleuze can hold, in a *mathetical* sense, that reasoning depends upon learning.<sup>13</sup>

Deleuze inverts the analytical assumption of an objectivity of problems. There is an objectivity of problems, for him, but it is given to thought only as ideas – of which he conceives, in turn, as differentials of thought. Within such an elementarity of naturalness proper to reason, we cannot have *representations* of problems/ideas, we can only attend to them by *formulating* them. Reasoning, for Deleuze, is the faculty capable of formulating problems in ways that allow for Critique, and this means: *formulating problems-in-general*. This way of formulating problems-in-general, I would strongly like to argue, can only be considered as algebraic and symbolic – not as literal or numeral in any direct sense.

But let us look more closely at this articulate-ability of quantities within such a transcendently-empirical setup. A differential takes the fractional form of a ratio. If ideas are not what is represented or mapped in reasoning, if they are differentials which need to be formulated – in order to pose the problem whose objectivity they embody, once they are formulated – we cannot deal with a differential's fractional form as a ratio directly. We have to empirically-experimentally investigate the ratio (*think: the idea, the differential of thought, the being of a problem*) by expressing it in a variety of forms. This is what polynomials allow for. Polynomials are algebraic ways of how to *index* ratios such that they can be put into symbolical terms that allow for a variety of ways of how to express the ratio's quantity. As algebraic expressions, ratios are put into an arrangement of terms which involve *indeterminate variables* and *constant values*. The sum of these terms either needs to equal zero, or another version of the same quantity articulated differently, i.e. factored differently. Like this, ratios can be algebraically expressed such that they can be determined strictly reciprocally. The abstract identity postulated by algebraic equations is expressed as symmetry relations that can only be unified according to a mapping that involves elective symbols, as George Boole had called it.<sup>14</sup> Algebraic expressions with polynomials allow for all the arithmetic operations except division – and division is precisely what is expressed in the form of *ratios*. Like this, Deleuze can maintain that ideas can be *tested* – by algebraically articulating their form symbolically, as a differential, i.e. as a form which comprehends a fully determinable ratio.

Deleuze has extracted the philosophical consequences of this when he writes that *quantitas*, the Kantian concept of the understanding capable of grasping the *quantum*, i.e. things-in-their-extension, cannot be regarded as powerful enough for dealing with the different kinds of generality at stake: "The zeros involved in  $dx$  and  $dy$  express the annihilation of the quantum and the *quantitas*, of the general as well as the particular, in favour of 'the universal and its appearance'."<sup>15</sup>

The assumption of *abundant yet insufficient conditions for reasoning* allows for an empirical science of investigating the universal and its

12 I elaborated on this Deleuzean notion of ideas as the differentials of thought in Vera Bühlmann, *inhabiting media. Annäherungen an Herkünfte und Topoi medialer Architektur*, PhD University of Basle 2009 / 2011, published online: [www.edoc.unibas.ch/1354/2/Promotion\\_Bühlmann\\_Juli2011.pdf](http://www.edoc.unibas.ch/1354/2/Promotion_Bühlmann_Juli2011.pdf) (accessed July 15th 2012). Cf. especially the subchapters comprehended in the section *Funktion, Sinn und Form*: pp. 120-189.

13 Deleuze says for example: "Just as the right angle and the circle are duplicated by ruler and compass, so each dialectical problem is duplicated by a symbolic field in which it is expressed." The capacity of such symbolic fields considered as tools he defines as follows: "Instead of seeking to find out by trial and error whether a given equation is solvable in general, we must determine the conditions of the problem which progressively specify the fields of solvability in such a way that, the statement contains the seeds of the solution'. This is a radical reversal in the problem-solution relation, a more considerable revolution than the Copernican." Deleuze [1968], pp. 179/180.

14 In his *Algebra of Logic* George Boole has introduced three laws according to which logical identity relations can be established algebraically: the *distributive law*, the *commutative law*, and the *idempotency law* (which Boole also called the *index law*). All three regulate the establishment of symmetry relations within not fully determined givenness (hence Boole's crucial involvement of probabilistics into logics). It is crucial to understand the abstract move involved in considering an algebra of logics, as this is directly inverse to the consideration of logical foundations for mathematics (i.e. Frege's and Russell's Logicism). While the latter seeks in logics a *formal representation* of abstract identities, the latter seeks in mathematics the means for learning to think abstract identities in ever more differentiated manners. For

appearances. The particular and the general come to be, therein, the toolbox of such experimental measuring – concepts are representing the objectivity of something problematical only insofar as they are tools for learning to think. Deleuze degrades Kantian concepts of the understanding quite plainly in favor of such learning: “As a concept of the understanding, *quantitas* has a general value; generality here referring to an infinity of possible particular values: as many as the variable can assume.” So far so good, but he continues: “However, there must always be a particular value charged with representing the others, and with standing for them: this is the case with the algebraic equation for the circle,  $x^2 + y^2 - R^2 = 0$ . The same does not hold for  $ydy + xdx = 0$ , which signifies ‘the universal of the circumference or of the corresponding function’.”<sup>16</sup> The algebraic formula for a circle needs a symbolic investment in order to become apparent as a particular circle. The particular, hence, is not a given concrete but an evoked appearance. An appearance engendered through a kind of abstraction which renders symmetries within the purely asymmetrical, it creates consistencies by testing the reciprocal determinations of differential relations. We have to dramatize ideas, as Deleuze calls it.<sup>17</sup> The generalities are what can be extracted from abstract thought, not the other way around. Abstract thought does not presuppose the General Forms as given. Thus, the validity of General Forms can only be empirically grounded. Concepts can be created *mathetically*, they are grounded in what we have learnt to conceive rigorously.

Just like in the case of Heidegger, for whom such mathematical learning as “giving to oneself what one already has” is strictly personal, also Deleuze’s notion of reasoning as learning is enacted by *Personas*. But for Deleuze, attending to the thingness of things means attending to ideas within the outer space of intellectuality – and this is only possible if we actively dramatize them. Both, Heidegger and Deleuze assume a dynamism which allows such attending or dramatization. For Heidegger, this dynamism takes the mechanical and in that sense self-sufficient form of a proof which pivots around the given axis of time.<sup>18</sup> This self-sufficiency is opened up by Deleuze. He allows the mechanical, linearly circular dynamism – Heidegger calls his notion of proofing *Kreisgang* – to follow lines of flight which always depart from what has just been learnt.<sup>19</sup>

### **A locus in quo of imaginary points and figures**

Let us raise some of the background issues to algebraic numbers and symmetrical quantities.

In 1883 Arthur Cayley, a British algebraist working on variational calculus and invariance-theory, gave his presidential address of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in London with the following endeavor. There is a notion, he told his fellow intellectuals, which is “really the fundamental one (and I cannot too strongly emphasize the assertion) underlying and pervading the whole imaginary space in geometry.”<sup>20</sup> It is hard to see at first what this statement implies, and why he holds it of such importance to devote his entire speech to it and this with such a tone of gravity in his voice. Has not geometry, at least since its analytic turn to the Cartesian Space of abstract representation, lost its cosmologically ordered elementarity in favor of merely providing an imaginary plane for experimental science? <sup>21</sup> So what exactly is Cayley referring to with this imaginary space in geometry – what had happened?

algebraists, abstract identity is treated as a difference relation, while for logicians abstract identity is treated as the representation of a unified relation. While logicians seek, ultimately, to determine a unified universe (of discourse), and proceed by seeking to analyze elementary sets or atomic units from which to build up by generalization, algebraists like Boole and Dedekind proceed inversely. They do not begin with assuming ultimately fully analyzable elementary units to work with. They begin with assuming a never exhaustively representable abstract unity as the “universe of thinkable objects”. Hence the former approaches are referred to as “finitary approaches”, and the algebraic approaches as “infinitary approaches”. By this, algebraists can experimentally test logical structures. Thereby, the values of mathematical rigor and exactness are no less important for algebraists than for logicians, yet they are sought for in the exact definition of concepts to be experimentally applied within the infinite universe of the thinkable. Logicians, on the other hand, seek exactness for the definition of the whole universe of discourse, in order to legitimate the application of one defined concept as opposed to another definition of that concept – this features most prominently in Frege’s “metaphysics” of Three Empires (the empire of physical/empirical “objects”, that of psychological “objects”, and that of logical “objects”), as well as in Popper’s many world theory. I would strongly like to suggest, without being able to go into details here, that Boole’s *laws of thought* are misunderstood profoundly, if considered as an early version along the same lines as *sets of axioms* are proposed in the foundational discourse on mathematics. Boole’s laws of thought are less like logical axioms than like experimental laws. They are like postulated laws of nature that allow to regulate and orientate experiments, within the “nature” of the *intellectual Universe of Thought* (rather than that of the Physical Universe). Obviously, some of the most diversely and

- all too often overheatedly disputed issues are at stake here. Introductory articles on George Boole and on his Algebra of Logics that are rather uncorrupted by taking a specific stance on the foundational question in philosophy of mathematics can be found at Stanford Encyclopedia: Burris, Stanley, "George Boole", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/boole/>; and Burris, Stanley, "The Algebra of Logic Tradition", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/algebra-logic-tradition/> (accessed July 15th 2012). Cf. also footnote [6].
- 15 Deleuze (1968), p. 171.
- 16 Deleuze (1968), p. 171
- 17 cf Deleuze (1968), pp. 216ff. Also his article "The Method of Dramatization", in *Desert Islands and other texts, 1953--1974*, semiotexte 1994, pp. 94-116.
- 18 cf. Heidegger (1984), "This concept of pure understanding, quantity, is nothing else but the synthesis which empowers appearances to appear as specific figurations in space. Hence, all appearances, insofar as they are intuited, are quantities, extensive quantities (space). It is the same precondition which allows the encounter of that which encounters, which brings what encounters into constellation. Proof is a going in circles [ein Kreisgang]. If we see through and enact this going in circles [diesen Kreisgang], we may receive, as knowledge, the pivot around which everything circles". My own translation, cf. the original German: "Dieser reine Verstandesbegriff Quantität ist aber nichts anderes als jene Synthesis, kraft deren Erscheinungen als bestimmte Raumgestalten erscheinen können. Also sind alle Erscheinungen als Anschauungen Quantitäten, und zwar extensive (Raum). Es ist dieselbe Bedingung, die das Begegnende begegnen lässt und die es als Gegen zum Stehen bringt. Der Beweis ist ein Kreisgang. Wenn wir diesen Kreisgang als solchen durchschauen und vollziehen, gehen, bekommen wir eigentlich zu wissen, worum sich alles "dreht"." p. 252.
- 19 Deleuze, with this characterization of elementary pureness of reason, in which thought dramatizes ideas through involving them into spatio-temporal dynamism by specifying those dynamisms, opens up sights onto a philosophical domain that is conditioned by abundant and insufficient reason. I would like to suggest that this is the domain of symbolic algebra, and that the cases engendered by it – the artefacts – make up all the spatio-temporal dynamisms conceivable. Every single artefact embodies a multitude of acts of concentration which was necessary for dramatizing an idea. It is in this sense that they conserve intellectual energy. What for Heidegger is "the power of synthesis which brings appearances into extensive form" (cf. footnote 18), the dynamisms conceived through their extension as artefacts make this "power of synthesis" accessible in terms of intellectual energy: artefacts allow us to apply, store and construct with symbolically encapsulated acts of Heidegger's "power of synthesis". *Intellectual energy* can be conceived as encapsulatable, storable, transmittable, and even transformable in artefacts of any kind, i.e. of any symbolic constitution. The power of synthesis thereby acquires a qualifiable quantification. For the energy conserved, by such acts of concentration articulated into the manifest form of artefacts, depends upon our ability to understand it. If we naturalize those artefacts, as autolog or self-sufficient objects, without esteem for the acts of concentration they encapsulate, they don't conserve but consume energy, through annihilation of their mediality. Because then, there are always too many artifacts, and too many which are not optimally configured, or not to the right optimization configured, etc. The wealth of artefacts then inevitable appears like a waste of resources, intellectual as well as material resources. Cf. footnote [2] on Koolhaas' generalization of the concept of paradise in what he calls *The Generic City and Junkspace* – without understanding and esteem, artefacts must be seen, within the context of Western history at least, as establishing a realm of pure guilt.
- 20 Cayley, Arthur (1996) [1883], "Presidential address to the British Association", in Ewald, William, *From Kant to Hilbert: a source book in the foundations of mathematics*. Vol. I, II, Oxford Science Publications, The Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, pp. 542–573, reprinted in *collected mathematical papers* volume 11.
- 21 Cayley's is not a solitary voice at that time. Within the last decades of the 19th century, Gustav Lejeune Dirichlet, Ernst Kummer, Leopold Kronecker and Karl Weierstrass all wrote on the theory of numbers involving algebraic quantities; Husserl published his Habilitationsschrift entitled *Über den Begriff der Zahl* (1987); Dedekind wrote *Über die Theorie der ganzen algebraischen Zahlen* (1871) and *Was sind und was sollen die Zahlen* (1888), Russell wrote his PhD on the *Foundations of Geometry* (1897) and Whitehead published a comprehensive volume entitled *Universal Algebra* (1898). All of this before the writing and appearance of Russell's and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* in 1910/1913.
- 22 Cayley [(1996) [1883]], as reprinted in *collected mathematical papers* volume 11, p. 784.
- 23 Cayley [(1996) [1883]], as reprinted in *collected mathematical papers* volume 11, p. 784.
- 24 Cf. how Deleuze [1968] speaks about the possibility of intellectual intuition, by reference to an "ideal cause of continuity": "the limit must be conceived not as the limit of a function but as a genuine cut

The crucial sentence is the following specification Cayley gives: “I use in each case the word imaginary as including real.”<sup>22</sup> Both terms, imaginary and real, are meant in their number theoretical sense, but nevertheless, the issue Cayley wants to address is not one dedicatedly for mathematicians. Quite to the contrary, his concern is: “This has not been, so far as I am aware, a subject of philosophical discussion or enquiry”.<sup>23</sup>

The issue raised in this address concerns the grand question of whether and in what sense a notion of space is relying on experience and subjectivity. Yet the extraordinary take it presents, for philosophers, is that this question is raised out of the field of number theory. This is an unusual perspective. How can we, philosophically, conceive of space such that it features “as a *locus in quo of imaginary points and figures*”, or in other words: as the scene of the event of a peculiar kind of “elementarity” (hence, geometry) where figures are articulated out of a numerical domain of which we must, somewhat paradoxically, try to understand that it literally “includes the real”.

By “including the real” is meant that the numerical domain at stake is said to extend beyond the infinite number line of the real numbers. In their continuity, the domain of the real numbers comprehends all the positive and negative integers, zero, as well as all the rationals and the irrationals. It is indeed difficult to *picture, mentally*, what could be left out by the real numbers, but this is precisely the point of Cayley’s address. From the perspective of number theory, Cayley’s question considers the possibility of a kind of intellectual intuition, and it considers that the quantitative may host something like *forms of construction* which might hive off such a notion of intuition out of the threatening swamps of unconditioned revelation in a mystical or theological sense.<sup>24</sup>

The imaginary numerical domain Cayley is referring to is that of the Complex Numbers, and what this domain allows for – as we could perhaps put it – is *operations on real infinities*. The crucial point about them is that their conditioning cannot be thought of as natural (if we understand natural by its more conventional notion, not the Deleuzean one we have put forward above) namely that the quantities describing it need to be factorizable in a unique and necessary way, according to an assumedly universal and unique order of primes.

This may seem like a fancy question for number-crunchers, not for political and intellectual realists, materialists, or idealists, but just consider that none of our electronically maintained infrastructures today would be working without those quantities. And yet, their usage is still today commonly put into rhetorical brackets which claim that only the “real” part of these operations was of importance, philosophically, whereas the imaginary part is called “but a technical trick” which we can apply when dealing with symbols. Contrary to this view, Cayley raised the question concerning the “nature” of such tricks.

Can there be, in short, something like an intuitive rendering-present by intellect, such that we can learn to say something reasonable about the conditions of this rendering-present – even though we cannot assume any necessity for it to appear as it appears?<sup>25</sup> What was preoccupying Cayley, and many others in the second half of the 19th century, was the unsettling suspicion that we cannot exhaustively address reality by investigations following the Cartesian doctrine *verum et factum convertuntur*. The status of numbers has grown problematic in a new way, with this newly developed capacity to render-present, symbolically and insofar intersubjectively, by acts of intellection.

[coupure], a border between the changeable and the unchangeable within the function itself. [...] the limit no longer presupposes the ideas of a continuous variable and infinite approximation. On the contrary, the notion of limit grounds a new, static and purely ideal definition of continuity, while its own definition implies no more than number, or rather, the universal in number. Modern mathematics then specifies the nature of this universal of number as consisting in the ‘cut’ (in the sense of Dedekind): in this sense, it is the cut which constitutes the next genus of number, the ideal cause of continuity or the pure element of quantifiability.” p. 171.

- 25 This is indeed a very old meaning of symbols – symbols evoke an immaterial presence in our thinking of something which lacks manifest presence. Symbols are place-holders, indexes, and they enforce a certain immediacy upon us. Hence our associations with symbols tend to center around mystical or sacral contexts. Or around contexts of undisputable control, when we think of our passports as symbols of our identity, for example.
- 26 Husserl referred to them as “Anschauungsthatsachen”, as *intuitive facts* (although he means it in a different sense than the intuitionist schools of Herman Weyl or Luitzen Egbertus Jan Brouwer), and Russell’s main preoccupation remained the quest for how *logical quantification* is possible.
- 27 It is in this sense that Deleuze speaks of “the universal in number” as “the next genus in number, the ideal cause of continuity or the pure element of quantifiability” ([1968] p. 171); and in which Jules Vuillemin proposes an “Ontologie Formelle” to complement a “Critique Générale de la Raison” in the end of his book *La Philosophie de l’Algèbre, Epiméthée*, Paris 1962, pp. 465ff. The crucial point is that the notion of the universal is related to the learning made possible by mathematics, and not to a realm of logical representation of the achievements of such learning.

## Considering the symbolicalness of symbols

The troubling question can be put like this: *how can we conceive of the symbolicalness of symbols in Universal Algebra?* For Whitehead it was an open question. For Russell just as for Husserl, it was clear that assuming for symbols a status of their own – one that is not grounded in geometry nor in arithmetics nor in language – would be profoundly mislead; they both held firm – albeit in different versions – that symbols need to regard *necessary facts*.<sup>26</sup>

Yet with algebraic expressions, there is an objectivity proper to symbolic encodings that allows the encoded to be referred to and represented *in purely general terms*. This generality is not gained by strictly deductive reasoning, and it nevertheless does not depend upon psychological subjective experience.<sup>27</sup>

Conceiving of a genuine symbolicalness of symbols means tackling with the primacy of abstract algebra as the means for formulating symbolic constitutions. These constitutions provide the structures for what can be expressed as the cases of this peculiar algebraic generality.<sup>28</sup> Strictly speaking, the fundamental theorem of algebra leaves the general applicability of arithmetics problematic. If algebra is granted a universal status, applying arithmetics turns into a practice of engendering solutions as cases, i.e. of calculating solutions which are not, strictly speaking, *necessary solutions*.<sup>29</sup>

For the majority of philosophers, an affirmation of this would be a straight forward capitulation of enlightenment philosophy at large, because it means that the strong link between calculability and necessity were broken, and along with that, the distinction between *philosophy as metaphysics* and *philosophy capable of critique*.

Yet if Algebra's universal status is considered as complementing a probabilistic element, into which the formula – i.e. the algebraic *identity-as-relation-to-be-established* – is sought to be integrated, all that the fundamental theorem of algebra asks for, philosophically, is to ascribe a different modality to the abstract objects of mathematics and logics than that of either *necessity* or *contingency*.<sup>30</sup> I read Deleuze's concept of the virtual in these terms, as the modality for the experienciability of things which are not merely actually possible but virtually real. *Virtually real* means in principle fully determinate (and hence conceptually exact) yet never actually exhaustively determinable. We can consider the virtual as the modality of the things engendered by abstract thought. The symbolicalness of symbols encodes forms of structure for determining unknown quantities, and is itself neither form nor content. Such algebraic quantity-expressions can be considered "pure" in a quasi-Kantian sense: They make reference to no specific magnitudes at all and work only with conceptual definitions. "It sets before the mind by an act of imagination a set of things with fully defined self-consistent types of relations", writes Whitehead about such vectors of imaginary verticality.<sup>31</sup>

## Coda

Aristotle had performed a bold move when he appropriated from the Olympian Gods their mark of distinction, their family names as a sign of belonging to different generations and genera, and claimed this divinely

Hence, instead of *universal logical and ontological quantification*, these philosophers suggest to consider the *quantification of the general* in relation to a *formal ontology of the general*, by viewing in it a kind of philosophical auxiliary structures for learning within an experimental empiricism in the realm of abstraction. Cf. footnote [28].

28 In physics and Engineering we more or less casually calculate spaces with algebraic numbers which relativize the assumed unproblematical rootedness of all numerical values in positive natural integers or a homogenous spatiality; and with regard to the formalization of language in logics, we very well know meanwhile about all the problems related both, to universal and to existential quantification. For a discussion of this issue in analytical philosophy after Kant and Frege, cf. Michael Potter, *Reason's Nearest Kin. Philosophies of Arithmetic from Kant to Carnap*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000. Potters book is a great overview and introduction over the issues involved and approaches presented, but its limits are within the author's decision to exclude any discussion concerning the challenges introduced by algebraic quantities. The framing question in his book is: "Can we give an account of arithmetic that does not make it depend for its truth on the way the world is? And if so, what constrains the world to conform to arithmetic?" (p.1). Potter takes it as a given that such an account is possible, and he assumes that all of the figures he discusses do as well. Certainly for Wittgenstein and for Dedekind, this seems to me like a crucial misreading. Cf. for a critique in a similar direction also the review by Richard Zach, "Critical study of Michael Potter's Reason's Nearest Kin", *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 46 (2005) 503-513 (online: <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~rzach/static/njfl-potter.pdf>).

29 Algebraic terms are polynomials, they embody unequal potentials. The liberty of engendering solutions as cases comes in because every algebraic solution requires a depotentialization of its terms, such that an order can

distinctive mark to be applicable to all there is. *All there is is things that can be named*, he set out to consider.

Once people had started to conceive of the mythical Happenings in terms of philosophical *consequences and inferences between things that can be named*, a structure was needed to receive and conserve the voices of the Mythical Personas. Words originally simply meant verbs, abstract acts in infinitive form. *Energeia* was Aristotle's term such an abstract Principle of Actuality. With the verbs, grammar was providing a structure to receive and conserve the mythical voices by distinguishing cases, as a sort of a negative form, in which we can encounter *things-that-can-be-named* as affected by *energeia*, as involved into the actuality at play with the activities expressed by verbs.

We still commonly say today – albeit we mean it, undoubtedly, in a largely technical and sterile sense – that grammatical cases are the structures provided to receive and express what is *decadent*, what is falling or declining. This is where the term *casus* comes from. Language and its grammar solves the threat of decadence for community by turning it into a problem to be articulated. As such, it needs not be *solved* anymore. The effect of expressing the threat in language literally *dissolves* it, by probabilizing the forms in which it might appear.

These articulated expressions have led a fertile life, within the space of intellectuality. Entire populations of words have been conceived, engendered, and raised, which allow for this enormous richness in articulating *what may be the case*. The real question today is not the purely metaphysical one about Being's *analogy* or *univocity*, as Deleuze suggests in the quote which I aligned, together with the one by Heidegger about the ability to think, as a kind of entrance to this article. The real philosophical questions today asks us to actively value and esteem artefacts as the conditions for everything that can be the case.

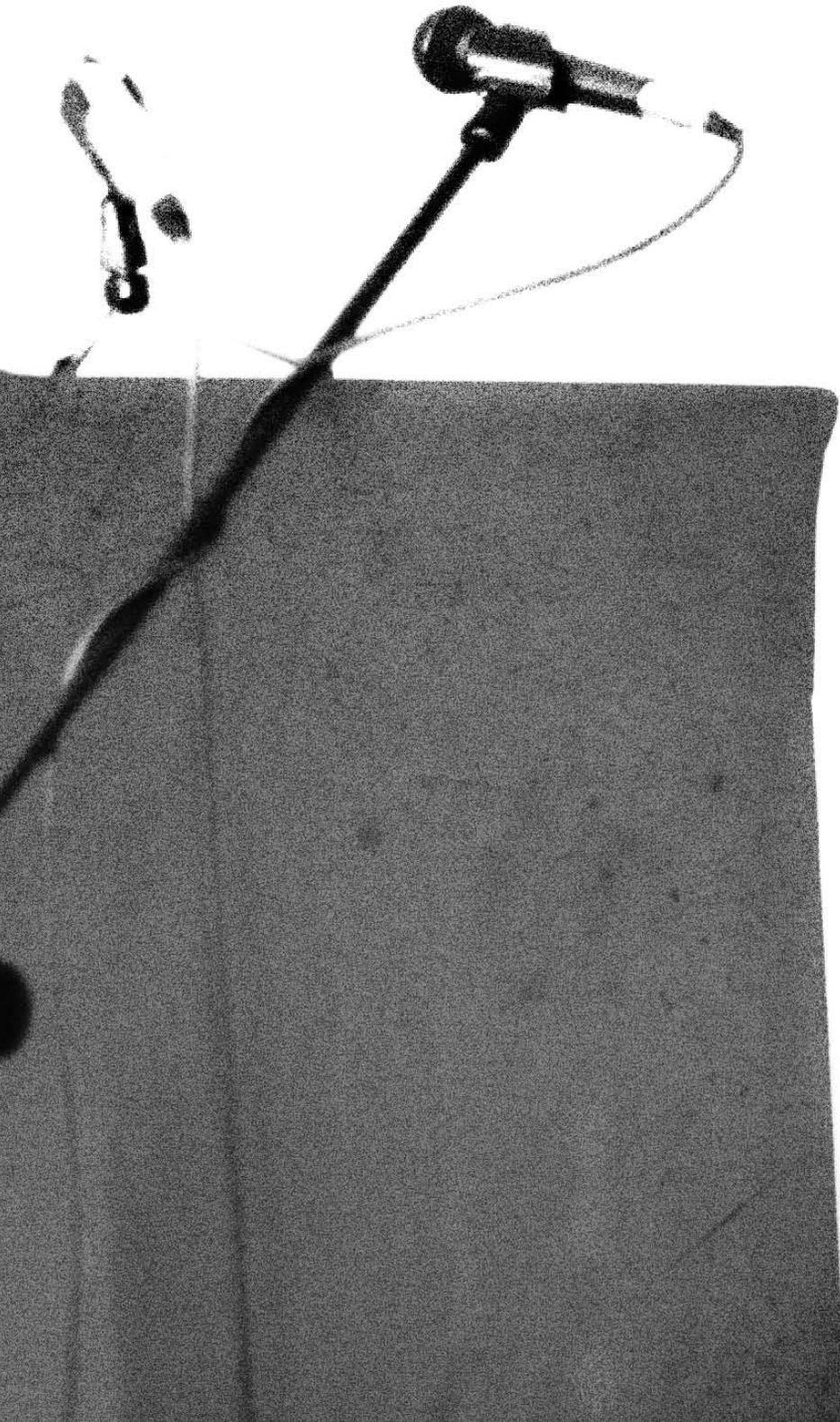
The interesting aspect about raising the question of whether and how the consideration of an *art of concepts* is meaningful, I would like to suggest, is how we can account for polynominality and the spatio-temporal dynamisms they engender. And for this, I have attempted to argue, it is crucial to include *techné* alongside *ars*, in their correlation within *mathesis as the art of learning*.

be established which is shared by all the components. If number spaces that may extend into the imaginary and algebraic ideality are allowed for solving polynomial equations, there are many different ways of achieving this depotentialization; hence the vastness of the possible solution spaces.

<sup>30</sup> Algebraic reasoning means specifying what outcome you will want to have, and producing it by taking an infinitary approach to deal with this probabilistic element. Infinitary means, by eliminating from the vast and non-controllable possibility space of your solutions anything you do not want to feature in the result. This elimination procedure works by injecting into equations, as a kind of doping, whatever is necessary and sufficient for common denomination and factorization of the terms involved, such that the two sides of an equation may be transformed and balanced in ways that are neither fully necessary nor arbitrary.

<sup>31</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Treatise on Universal Algebra with applications*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1910, p. vii.





# What is a Literary Problem? Proust, Beckett, Deleuze

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Audrey Wasser

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“C

ette fois-ci, puis encore une je pense, puis c'en sera fini je pense, de ce monde-là aussi. C'est le sens de l'avant-dernier. Tout s'estompe. Un peu plus et on sera aveugle. C'est dans la tête. ... On devient muet aussi et les bruits s'affaiblissent. A peine le seuil franchi c'est ainsi.”<sup>01</sup>

Thus begins the second paragraph of

Beckett's *Molloy*, the first words of the novel Beckett composed, in fact, as we know from the manuscripts.<sup>02</sup> They announce *Molloy* as one of a series, a next-to-last. *Molloy* emerges from a world, one likewise heading to its end. And as another well-known novel begins – “longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure” – these lines of Beckett's decorate the entrance to his work like the entrance to a dream, marking the threshold between waking and sleep, where sights blur and sounds grow faint.

The following paper intends to pose the question of literary genesis, and I will do so with the help of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* as well as his writing on Proust. This isn't the whole of the question “what is literature? – but it is certainly a good place to go wrong. For how we understand the integrity of a work depends intimately on where we think literature comes from, and what kind of relation we understand it to maintain with its causes. Is a notion of causation, in fact, completely inappropriate here? Is the very idea of a “work” only possible on the basis of the work's extraction from history, psychology, or everyday language use? Must the originality of a work be thought only in terms of its break with the literary tradition? Must its autonomy be purchased by means of a negation of all of the conditions that gave rise to it?

<sup>01</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1951), 9. “This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it'll be over, with that world too. Premonition of the last but one but one. All grows dim. A little more and you'll grow blind. It's in the head. ... You go dumb as well and sounds fade. The threshold scarcely crossed that's how it is.” Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 7. Beckett's English translation departs from the original, a gesture to *Molloy*'s place in the subsequently completed trilogy.

<sup>02</sup> Richard L. Admussen, *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: A Study* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), 68.

\* \* \*

I will address these questions by means of Beckett and Proust's writings; but before I do, let me say a few words about how the concept of genesis has become a real stumbling block for literary studies.

Fundamentally, this stumbling block is the legacy of Kantian aesthetics in literary theory. With the rupture Kant introduced between being and knowledge, and with the freedom he preserved for the moral subject, Kant bequeathed to a study of the beautiful the irreconcilability of two orders of production: on the one hand, the order of nature, whose products obey laws of cause and effect, and on the other hand, the order of freedom, where the rational subject acts "through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason."<sup>03</sup> The more sophisticated theories of literature tend to dwell in the contradiction between causality and freedom. But the majority demand a choice: either literature is produced by the causal vectors of, say, a social or literary history, or else it is essentially determined by its autonomy and spontaneity, by the fact that it sets itself apart from any heterogeneous causes.

These two alternatives, these two entrenched ways of thinking about the ontology of literary production, appear to cover the entire field. The first posits that the cause of a work is an idea, intention, or social-historical reality that will be reflected in the work once the work has been made. For this view, it doesn't matter if the cause of the work is an idea or an empirical reality; the point is that a cause exists, and the work – its effect – is assumed to resemble its causes. This approach understands causation as a kind of *pre-formism*, a term from the history of biology describing the idea that organisms develop from fully-formed, miniature versions of themselves. The opposed view suspects that the truly new cannot be articulated in advance of its creation, that the possibility of a work of art does not, and cannot, precede its reality the way a sketch precedes an oil painting. Instead, the true condition of artistic creation must be the absence of all condition. Consider Maurice Blanchot in *The Space of Literature*, who asserts that the work is born "when the work ceases in some way to have been made, to refer back to someone who made it, but gathers all the essence of the work in the fact that now there is a work, a beginning and initial decision – this moment which cancels the author..."<sup>04</sup> In this view, an essential negativity characterizes literature, a freedom from all of the intentional, programmable, or deterministic structures that belong to the objective world. The work is without parentage; this approach sees only *creation ex nihilo*.

This choice between pre-formism or spontaneous creation is a false choice, I would argue, between the Being and Nothingness of causation: between causes that must either be located in the realm of the full plenitude of Being, or else declared wholly absent from the world as it is, so that only a negative power can be responsible for the event of artistic invention. Faced with the conceptual blockage of this either/or, I would propose a rethinking of the notion of causation itself. One set of resources we have for doing so lies in Gilles Deleuze's work – or rather in a certain version of Deleuze, one that acknowledges his ongoing engagement with questions of structure and structuralism, and with the constitutive role of the unconscious in thinking the genesis of the new.

The role of structure in the genesis of the new comes to the fore in Deleuze's concept of the problem. The problem or the problematic neither

<sup>03</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), §43.

<sup>04</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1982), 200.

belongs to the plenitude of being, nor can be identified with negativity or a lack in being. Rather, problems have their own modality. Deleuze laments the dubious alternative we have received from the history of philosophy with respect to Being and Non-being, in lieu of which he pursues a different course: like Heidegger, he affirms the ontological status of questions or problems, and will speak of the “being of the problematic.”

Most fully elaborated in *Difference and Repetition* and the *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze’s positive conception of problems is indebted to the French epistemological tradition, and in particular to Henri Bergson’s engagement with metaphysics and the history and philosophy of science. Against a positivist history of ready-made concepts, Bergson draws our attention to the way problems themselves are posed. “Stating the problem is not simply uncovering,” Bergson argues; “it is *inventing*. ... [T]he effort of invention consists most often in raising the problem, in creating the terms in which it will be stated.”<sup>05</sup>

Likewise, in place of the priority normally placed on solutions and answers, Deleuze affirms a problematic register in which solutions acquire meaning and orientation. “We are led to believe that problems are given ready-made,” Deleuze writes, “and that they disappear in the responses or the solution... we are led to believe that the activity of thinking ... begins only with the search for solutions.”<sup>06</sup> Instead, he argues, in problems lies the very “genesis of the act of thinking” (ibid.). As problems are constituted within existing symbolic fields (159), they determine their solutions, in which they are not annulled, but rather preserved: “a problem does not exist apart from its solutions. Far from disappearing in this overlay, however, it insists and persists in these solutions” (163). Instead of indicating a subjective or negative moment in knowledge, in short, a problem is fully objective and fully positive: it has the reality of a structure, “an ideational objectivity or a structure constitutive of sense.”<sup>07</sup> Problems possess the same reality as linguistic or social structures, which inhere in their manifestations but are not exhausted by those manifestations.

We might recall Claude Lévi-Strauss’s argument that cultural myths arise in response to the structural problems of a people.<sup>08</sup> Deleuze takes this a step further by arguing that *all* structures are inherently problematic: a complex of differential relations between multiple heterogeneous orders, structures are saturated with relations that can’t be lived, or lived all at once. They cannot be formed into unitary works or self-identical concepts. It is the heterogeneity of a structure with respect to itself, its supersaturation of meaning, we might say, that *makes it* a problem – that gives it the sense of an imperative or a task, and imbues it with a dynamism that it transmits to its solution.

This notion of problems is vital to a theory of literature because it addresses the central paradox that has had literature, and indeed all art, in its grips since the birth of Kantian aesthetics. This is the paradox of the new: how is it that new forms or new works arise within a causal history, and at the same time effect a rupture with that history?

Drawing on Deleuze’s work for a literary-theoretical argument, then, I would propose the idea that literary works arise in response to *problems*. These problems persist and remain embedded in the works which express them. A literary problem is as unique as the work of art it conditions, yet of greater complexity than the work itself. It is real, without being independent from the work that emerges as its solution. The problem is a heterogeneous complex of genetic, poetic elements that inheres in the work and depends on

05 Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Anderson (Citadel Press, 1974), 51.

06 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 158. Hereafter cited in the text.

07 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), 121.

08 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

the work for its determination: indeterminate in itself, certain elements of the problem are selected, extended, and repeated in the work that serves as its response. The work constructs its problematic ground at the same time as it offers itself as a solution.

In both of the positions I outlined earlier – in the approach to literary creation as a kind of pre-formism on the one hand, and as a creation *ex nihilo* on the other – in both of these positions, a question of repetition is at stake. In fact, both share an impoverished view of repetition, where repetition can only be a repetition of the same, and is denied any productive power in itself. But if we reject these positions in favor of a notion of literature originating in *problems* – that is, in favor of a problematic genesis of literary works, which reveals the transformations effected within already-existing symbolic fields – then we may discover resources for thinking beyond the opposition that controls the question of literary creation. The conversation between Proust and Beckett, I think, will give us some insight into how literary problems work.

\* \* \*

In a 1934 review essay called “Proust in Pieces,” Beckett describes the project of a professor Albert Feuillerat at Yale who attempted to reconstruct the so-called original version of *A la recherche du temps perdu* through a stylistic analysis. From the sixteen volumes eventually published by the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Feuillerat extracted the unified core of an aesthetically coherent three-volume work that would have corresponded to Proust’s pre-war intentions, had they remained unperturbed. Beckett remarks, somewhat contemptuously, that the professor found Proust’s style in the extant work too full of “dissonances” and “incompatibilities,” and hence sought to restore the “uniformity, homogeneity, and cohesion” of Proust’s 1913 vision.<sup>09</sup> “Proust in Pieces,” the title of Beckett’s review, turns out to be unsettlingly ambiguous. *Which* Proust is in pieces, after all? Is it the sprawling sixteen-volume work available to the public, responsible for having pulled apart the unity of Proust’s vision? Or is it Feuillerat’s reconstructed version, the result of a bizarre dismantling process?

Questions of genesis are thus intimately related to those of the totalization, “homogenization” and “cohesion” of a finished work. Feuillerat’s stated goal, which Beckett seizes upon in his review, is “the revelation of a different Proust from the one we’ve imagined.”<sup>10</sup> Of Beckett’s own work on Proust, we might say the same: it reveals a different Proust from the one we think we know. Beckett’s critical essay on Proust was published only a few years earlier in 1931, sixteen years before he began *Molloy*. Like Feuillerat, Beckett seems to construct another Proust at the heart of Proust, like a sort of ship in a bottle, or one of those Celtic souls Proust wrote of, imprisoned in inanimate objects until they are discovered by loved ones and set free from their containers. Critical of Feuillerat’s project, Beckett nevertheless has his own way of pulling Proust to pieces and compressing the remaining parts, taking only what he needs, so that when he recalls Proust later in his fiction, he will re-member what he has first dis-membered, and then constructed again in the shape of a problem that spoke only to him.

The dour epigraph of Beckett’s book on Proust declares: “E fango è il mondo.”<sup>11</sup> References to Greek mythology, to the earth over a mineshaft (“daystones”),<sup>12</sup> to the “double-headed monster of damnation and salvation,”

09 Samuel Beckett, “Proust in Pieces,” *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984) 64.

10 Albert Feuillerat, *Comment Marcel Proust a composé son roman* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1934), 8; qtd. in Beckett, “Proust in Pieces,” 63–64. Trans. mine.

11 “The world is mud.” From Leopardi’s “A se stesso.” See Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, trans. Jonathan Galassi (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux), 2010.

12 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (Chatto & Windus, 1931), 3. Hereafter cited in the text.

as well as to “disfigured” creatures, “victims,” and “prisoners” (1-2), suggest we would plunge into a study of Dante’s *Inferno*, not *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Beckett continues: Proust’s narrator practices a “necromancy” (15); his personality is subject to a “perpetual exfoliation” (13); memory and habit are “attributes of the Time cancer” (7); and habit in particular, Beckett remarks, “is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit” (8). Faculties “atrophy,” joy and sorrow grow in the body like mutant fetuses (“superfoetations”) (3), and the recurrence of involuntary memory, Beckett declares, is “a neuralgia rather than a theme” (22).

Yet, on the far side of Beckett’s spartan and macabre prose, and in spite of his predilection for medical metaphors, we can recognize Proust’s concerns, and something of his language, too. For there are prisoners in Proust (Albertine), just as surely as there are victims of sadism or masochism (Vinteuil, Charlus). There are attacks of neuralgia – Beckett draws this term from Proust’s own description of the Vinteuil septet, which, in *La prisonnière*, witnesses the unnerving return of the “little phrase” from the sonata.<sup>13</sup> There are treatises on the deadening effects of habit. Even the distortions of age make a ghoulish appearance in Proust’s “bal de têtes” episode in *Le temps retrouvé*, where long-time acquaintances appear to be wearing masks over the faces of their younger selves.

In short, Proust’s work becomes strange in Beckett’s hands, but it is a strangeness that draws something forth, a transformation that makes visible a tendency that was already latent within it. Perhaps in disrupting a certain anesthetizing effect of Proust’s prose, Beckett gives Proust over to us in a new way. In so doing, he also constellates a literary problematic field from the pieces of Proust he selects. These pieces exist in Proust; they aren’t Beckett’s creations. But they will be re-animated and re-purposed in a new context.

If Beckett’s essay seems like it would be useful to a study of literary influence more conventionally understood – that is, to a study of influence that goes in only one direction – I will argue, in what follows, that what Beckett reveals is the extent to which Proust is already committed to a Beckettian vision. Just as the double-headed Janus is the symbol of Proustian logic, for Beckett (1; 22), so does a literary problem face in two directions, and promise both forward and backward-looking transformations.<sup>14</sup>

One section from *la recherche* to which Beckett devotes a particular attention, calling it “perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote” (25), is titled the “Intermittencies of the Heart.” This was also the title Proust first gave to his novel in 1913, suggesting that something of the genesis of his own project may, perhaps, be glimpsed here.<sup>15</sup> The passage in question, an extended sequence from *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, deals with the mourning and recollection of the narrator’s grandmother; and it features one of eleven instances of involuntary memory in *la recherche* that Beckett lists – a list, incidentally, he takes wholesale from another critic without citation.<sup>16</sup> The passage begins with Proust’s narrator returning to Balbec after his grandmother’s death a year earlier. Alone in the same room he occupied on his first visit, he bends over to undo his boots, when the sensation of his grandmother bending over to help him suddenly disrupts his entire being. Her face appears, not as he consciously recalled it in the intervening year, but as it really was, “my real grandmother, of whom, for the first time since the afternoon of her stroke in the Champs-Élysées, I now recaptured the living reality in a complete and involuntary recollection.”<sup>17</sup>

13 See Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, three volumes (New York: Random House, 1981), III 262.

14 C.f. Margaret E. Gray, “Beckett Backwards and Forwards: The Rhetoric of Retraction in Molly,” *French Forum*, 19.2 (1994), 165, and Leslie Hill, *Beckett’s Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 5.

15 As Angela Moorjani points out in “A Cryptanalysis of Proust’s ‘Les Intermittences du coeur,’” *MLN* 105.4 (1990), 875. Moorjani cites Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, trans. Euan Cameron (New York: Viking, 2000), 590. See also Tadié 566-67 for other titles Proust considered. He submitted manuscripts to Grasset with this title, which he kept until October 1913, when the first set of galley proofs were being corrected.

16 John Fletcher signals that this list appears in Arnaud Dandieu’s *Marcel Proust: sa revelation psychologique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot 1930). See Fletcher, “Beckett et Proust,” *Caliban: Annales Publiées par la Faculté des Lettres de Toulouse*, 1 (Jan 1964), 98-99.

17 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, II 783.

Yet with the return of his real grandmother, whom he discovers “as if in a mirror,” and with the renewal of a “wild desire to fling [himself] into her arms,”<sup>18</sup> comes the narrator’s certain awareness that she is gone. Or as Beckett puts it, “For the first time since her death, he knows that she is dead, he knows who is dead” (28). The simultaneous experience of her presence and absence leads the narrator to imagine that Time itself runs in a series of parallel lines, so that his grandmother’s presence continues on one track and her absence on the other. To this metaphysical reality corresponds a morbid psychological state, which he terms “the intermittency of the heart.”<sup>19</sup>

An exploration of mourning, this episode is also a drama of recognition, estrangement, and preservation in a virtual state. This play of preservation and estrangement continues when the narrator’s mother arrives in Balbec. Not only does the narrator recognize his mother’s grief as if for the first time, but he sees that she has, in fact, been changed into his grandmother:

[A]s soon as I saw her enter in her crape overcoat, I realized.... that it was no longer my mother that I had before my eyes, but my grandmother. As, in royal and ducal families, on the death of the head of the house his son takes his title and, from being Duc d’Orléans, Prince de Tarente or Prince des Laumes, becomes King of France, Duc de La Trémoille, Duc de Guermantes, so by an accession of a different order and more profound origin, the dead annex the living who become their replicas and successors, the continuators of their interrupted life. Perhaps the great sorrow that, in a daughter such as Mamma, follows the death of her mother simply breaks the chrysalis a little sooner, hastens the metamorphosis and the appearance of a being whom we carry within us and who, but for this crisis which annihilates time and space, would have emerged more gradually. Perhaps, in our regret for her who is no more, there is a sort of auto-suggestion which ends by bringing out in our features resemblances which potentially we already bore...<sup>20</sup>

Here is Beckett’s commentary on this passage. Characteristically, he mixes paraphrase and free indirect translation, citing nothing:

[T]he dead annex the quick as surely as the Kingdom of France annexes the Duchy of Orléans. His mother has become his grandmother, whether through the suggestion of regret or an idolatrous cult of the dead or the disintegrating effect of loss that breaks the chrysalis and hastens the metamorphosis of an atavistic embryo whose maturation is slow and imperceptible without the stimulus of grief. (25)

We can witness the repetition, selection and condensation at work in Beckett’s piece, transforming Proust’s prose into Beckett’s own, the hastened metamorphosis of another sort of “atavistic embryo”: in this case, that set of shared images and concerns between the two authors, unspoken, undeveloped, still in a sort of “larval” state.

Surprisingly, Beckett leaves out the most memorable part of this whole section – an extended dream sequence. Following a passage he translates directly and actually surrounds with quotation marks, Beckett concludes by stating that the narrator’s memory of his grandmother fades away. Yet Proust’s narrative does not even pause for a paragraph break here, but winds its way into an oneiric underworld, where death is explored as part of an

18 Ibid.

19 C.f. Tadié, 591.

20 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, II 796-97.

“[D]ès que je la vis entrer, dans son manteau de crêpe, je m’aperçus ... que ce n’était plus ma mère que j’avais sous les yeux, mais ma grand’mère. Comme dans les familles royales et duciales, à la mort du chef le fils prend son titre et, de duc d’Orléans, de prince de Tarente ou de prince des Laumes, devient roi de France, duc de la Trémoille, duc de Guermantes, ainsi souvent, par un avènement d’un autre ordre et de plus profonde origine, le mort saisit le vif qui devient son successeur ressemblant, le continuateur de sa vie interrompue. Peut-être le grand chagrin qui suit, chez une fille telle qu’était maman, la mort de sa mère, ne fait-il que briser plus tôt la chrysalide, hâter la métamorphose et l’apparition d’un être qu’on porte en soi et qui, sans cette crise qui fait brûler les étapes et sauter d’un seul coup des périodes, ne fût survenu que plus lentement. Peut-être dans le regret de celle qui n’est plus y a-t-il une espèce de suggestion qui finit par amener sur nos traits des similitudes que nous avions d’ailleurs en puissance...” (Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, édition “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” one volume [Paris: Gallimard, 1999], 1336-37).

ongoing relationship. The narrator falls asleep. Orpheus-like, he must cross Lethe in search of his Eurydice-grandmother:

I sought in vain for my grandmother's form when I had entered beneath the somber portals; yet I knew that she did exist still, if with a diminished vitality, as pale as that of memory... suddenly my breath failed me, I felt my heart turn to stone; I had just remembered that for weeks on end I had forgotten to write to my grandmother. What must she be thinking of me? "Oh God," I said to myself, "how wretched she must be in that little room which they have taken for her, no bigger than what one would give to an old servant, where she's all alone with the nurse they have put there to look after her, from which she cannot stir, for she's still slightly paralyzed and has always refused to get up! She must think I've forgotten her now that she's dead; how lonely she must be feeling, how deserted! ..."21

21 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, II 787-88.  
"Je cherchai en vain celle de ma grand'mère dès que j'eus abordé sous les porches sombres; je savais pourtant qu'elle existait encore, mais d'une vie diminuée, aussi pâle que celle du souvenir ... Tout d'un coup la respiration me manqua, je sentis mon coeur comme durci, je venais de me rappeler que depuis de longues semaines j'avais oublié d'écrire à ma grand'mère. Que devait-elle penser de moi ? « Mon Dieu, me disais-je, comme elle doit être malheureuse dans cette petite chambre qu'on a louée pour elle, aussi petite que pour une ancienne domestique, où elle est toute seule avec la garde qu'on a placée pour la soigner et où elle ne peut pas bouger, car elle est toujours un peu paralysée et n'a pas voulu une seule fois se lever. Elle doit croire que je l'oublie depuis qu'elle est morte ; comme elle doit se sentir seule et abandonnée ! ... »" (Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* 1330).

22 See Moorjani, "A Cryptanalysis of Proust's 'Les Intermittences du coeur,' (876-77). This excellent article first drew my attention to some of these connections.

23 John Pilling, "Beckett's Proust," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 1 (1976): 12n7. See also James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

24 Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable*, 7. Hereafter cited in the text.

25 C.f. Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1988), 118.

The little room in the dream, to which the narrator has cruelly forgotten to send his letters is, of course, a phantasmagoric image of his grandmother's crypt. Uncannily, it also recalls the narrator's boyhood room in Combray, where, seized by a similar dread and a similar separation anxiety, the narrator was sent to bed without a kiss from his mother. We might remember that in his narration of those events, the narrator likened his room to a crypt with all the exits sealed; he saw his bed transformed into a "tomb" and his nightshirt into a "shroud" (I 30).22 The spell was only broken once he conjured his mother's presence by writing her a letter. Similarly, the lonely grandmother in the dream finds some comfort when she is told the narrator is going to write a book.

It is noteworthy Beckett skips this dream, and not only because of its significance for *la recherche*. Nine months after the Proust essay was published, Beckett abandoned his post as a university lecturer, and with it, his aspirations to a career in criticism.23 He committed fully to another mode of writing.

\* \* \*

Beckett's novel *Molloy* begins, "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now."24 Is Molloy in Hades? In a dream? "The truth is I don't know much. For example my mother's death. Was she already dead when I came? Or did she only die later? I mean enough to bury. I don't know. Perhaps they haven't buried her yet. In any case I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place" (ibid.). Like Proust's bedroom in Combray, Molloy's mother's room is also a scene of writing, writing which summons another to the room: "There's this man who comes every week," Molloy claims. "He gives me money and takes away the pages. So many pages, so much money" (ibid.). In Proust's novel, the narrator communicates with his grandmother while she is still alive by rapping on the partition between their rooms. In *Molloy*, a different messaging system is used: "I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull," Molloy explains. "One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know" (18).25 Has Beckett transformed Proust's partition into bone? It's probable, as no less than three moments in Beckett's trilogy liken the panels of a room to the inner walls of a skull.26 Finally, because he is oozing waste products, Molloy suggests "uremia will

never be the death of me" (81). Is it coincidental that Proust's own grandmother as well as his mother actually died from uremia? Or that Beckett composed these lines of *Molloy* in his own mother's room in Foxrock, where she lay dying?<sup>27</sup>

In the end, all these little rooms, sealed off from one other except for the pages of writing that are able to enter and exit, are like the two "ways" Proust describes in Combray, the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way. "Unaware of each other's existence" and divorced absolutely as if sealed in "airtight compartments,"<sup>28</sup> the two ways nevertheless, through the warp and weft of Proust's narrative, find many ways to communicate.<sup>29</sup> So do Proust's and Beckett's texts.

Is this communication only an example of literary allusion? The difficulty with this notion is that it prescribes a unidirectional model of causation or influence that rests on an impoverished repetition, a repetition of the same, where what repeats can only be a lesser version, or degraded copy, of the original. There is no way to account for the shared logic in which both texts participate and which transforms even the one that is chronologically prior. More productive, then, is to read the two texts – *Molloy* and *la recherche du temps perdu* as constructing and drawing on a common problematic field, what Deleuze also terms a "complex theme": a multiplicity of ideas, questions, or fragmentary images – a whole problematic complex – in relation to which both works, distinct as they are, serve as "elements of response and cases of solution."<sup>30</sup>

The problem is not the work but what resonates in the work with the force of an imperative. Beckett's essay on Proust affords us a glimpse into the formation of this problem, but it is not reducible to it. Rather, the problem or problematic field is a virtual work, a third term that arises between the texts, out of the labor of Beckett's reading, and to which Proust submits willingly. Proust submits to such a degree, in fact, that we can say that Proust is also quite an astute reader of Beckett. The virtue of this argument is that it insists on the reality of the problem as a genetic element.<sup>31</sup> This genetic element is not nothing, but neither is it reducible to the solution, or work, to which it gives rise. In Deleuze's terms – which are taken from Proust, incidentally, describing the persistence of the past in the present – problems are "real without being actual, ideal without being abstract."<sup>32</sup>

The virtue of Proust on this particular point is that he shows us that reading entails a certain deciphering – a cryptanalysis, perhaps – of what comes back: of what resonates, comes back transformed, or comes back as it never was. The narrator's dream of his grandmother's crypt is a reading of the bedroom in Combray, but the bedroom in Combray is already a reading of the grandmother's crypt, because Proust's book is a hieroglyph-producing machine, as Deleuze calls it, a machine that reads itself.<sup>33</sup> Reading is always an act of reading the problems immanent to one's self, Proust writes – a groping around in that "inner book of unknown symbols,"<sup>34</sup> which, without a master key, we read – and re-read – as an act of creation.

26 See Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable*, 221, 350, 393.

27 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, 332.

28 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, I 147.

29 C.f. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, complete text, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), 127.

30 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 157.

31 C.f. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 139.

32 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, III 906; qtd. in Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 208.

33 See Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, Part II: "The Literary Machine."

34 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, III 9





## Notes on Contributors

**Amanda Beech** makes artworks, writes and collaborates on curatorial projects. In both the architecture of exhibition making and in discrete works she interrogates the material force of ontological claims, their tenability, their necessity and their affect. Her research looks to the possibilities of non-foundationalist, new realist critique asking what critique might be understood to be now in the context of neo-liberal democracy and in a politics of absolute contingency. She is Dean of the School of Critical Studies at CalArts.

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The main vectors in **Veza Bühlmann's** work revolve around the philosophy and history of semiotics and mathematics, and aim towards a theory of learning, symbolization and artifice. She holds a PhD in media philosophy, and is head of the laboratory for applied virtuality (since 2010) at CAAD ETH Zurich. Her work is driven by an interest in better understanding a probabilistic perspective on data, code and electricity as an altered setup for orientation in thinking about thinking.

**Michel Chion** is a composer of experimental music. He teaches at several institutions within France and currently holds the post of Associate Professor at the University of Paris III: Sorbonne Nouvelle where he is a theoretician and teacher of audio-visual relationships. After studying literature and music he began to work for the ORTF (French Radio and Television Organisation) Service de la recherche as assistant to Pierre Schaeffer in 1970. He was a member of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) between 1971 - 1976. His compositional pieces elaborate on schaefferian theories and methodologies which Schaeffer referred to as *musique concrète*. He has also written a number of books as well as essays expounding his theories of the interaction between sound and image within the medium of film. In particular, the book titled *L'audio-vision. Son et image au cinéma*, originally published in France in 1990, has been considered by the critics as the definitive book on the relations between sound and image, which are described as two different languages within the multimedia art form, discussing the argument from both technical-linguistic and aesthetic points of view, where before it was

discussed principally in terms of narrative implications.

**Alexander García Düttmann** is a philosopher with an interest in aesthetics and art, but also in moral and political philosophy. On more than one occasion, he has collaborated with artists. In 2004 the chamber opera *Liebeslied / My Suicides*, for which he wrote the libretto, and which featured music by Paul Clark and photographs by Rut Blees Luxemburg, opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. Currently he is professor of Philosophy and Visual Culture at Goldsmiths, University of London.

**Martin Hägglund** is a tenured Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Humanities at Yale University. He is also a Distinguished International Fellow of the London Graduate School and a member of the Harvard Society of Fellows, where he was a Junior Fellow (2009-2012). Hägglund is the author of *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Harvard University Press 2012), *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford University Press 2008), and *Kronofobi: Essäer om tid och ändlighet* (Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 2002). His work has been the subject of a conference at Cornell University, *The Challenge of Radical Atheism: Critical Responses*, a colloquium at Oxford University, and a special issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *Living On: Of Martin Hägglund*.

**Alexi Kukuljević** is an artist and writer. His artistic practice defies easy categorization and slips between disciplines, working across different media and drawing on diverse points of reference: literary, philosophical and artistic. He is also currently working on a book on forms of destructive subjectivity, tracing a theoretical line through such figures as the dandy, the suicide and the comman. Kukuljević is the co-founder of *Machete*, a publication based in Philadelphia, as well as member of a collective with the same name that seeks to engender in various formats (writing, workshops, lectures) critical points of antagonism with respect to contemporary culture.

**Robert Lehman** completed his PhD in English Literature at Cornell University. His writings on modernism and philosophy have appeared or are forthcoming in *Theory & Event*, *New Literary History*, *The Journal of Modern Literature*, *Angelaki*, *Criticism*, *Modernist Cultures*, *diacritics*, and *Modern Philology*. He's currently working on a book titled *The Impossibility of Being Modern: Time, Tradition, and Event in Modernist Literature and Philosophy*. In Fall 2012, he took up an appointment as Assistant Professor of English at Boston College.

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**Evan Calder Williams** is a writer. His texts, talks, and performances deal with horror, technique, ornament, capital, and negation. He is the author of *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* and *Roman Letters*. He is a Fulbright Fellow in Film Studies in Italy, where he is writing a dissertation on "anti-political" cinema in the 1970s. He writes for *Film Quarterly*, *Mute*, *The New Inquiry*, and *Machete*, and at *Socialism and/or Barbarism*. <http://socialismandorbarbarism.blogspot.com/>



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